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Governing Visions of the Real

The New Zealand National Film Unit,
Griersonian Documentary
and
State Publicity

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in Film, Television and Media Studies

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Abstract

This study traces how documentary film by the New Zealand National Film Unit (NFU) historically came to be calculated and employed as a governmental technique to cultivate “visions of the real” that were to advance economic conduct and democratic government by shaping subjectivity and directing agency towards a desired future. The NFU was established during World War II, and throughout the 1940s and 50s, the period under study in this thesis, it was organised as the film production wing of State publicity within the executive of State government. Throughout this period, NFU documentary film was marked by a teleological transcendence of the material surfaces the camera could record in specific locations. It variously arranged, interpreted and evaluated actuality, hence encoding a certain “vision” for popular audiences about what is and should be real. At the same time, the investments in and purposes of film production were rendered transparent and the films evaded controversy, heterogeneity, ambivalence and critique in favour of simplification, recognition, intuition and affect.

Such practices, it is argued, need to be discussed in reference to historical problematisations of the operation of knowledge and power in the conduct of modern democratic society. Such problematisations are traced back to Walter Lippmann and John Grierson. The latter developed a programme for democratic government through the use of documentary film that shaped the approach to film production taken by the NFU. By drawing on Michel Foucault’s concepts of the dispositive and governmentality, this thesis sets out to trace and discuss a shifting dispositive of “visions of the real”. This dispositive encompassed a heterogeneous ensemble of calculations, reports, policies, arrangements, techniques, strategies, practices that related to and “ordered” how New Zealand and its population came to be envisioned through NFU film. Specifically the projection of workers and Māori is discussed, since these groups became a focus of NFU film production.

This thesis concludes that NFU documentary film, in a departure from earlier State film production, set out to render the interpretative and “visionary” aspects of an embodied and subjective vision disposable and hence governable in order to produce a harmonious, co-operative, economic and docile population. In the process the vision cultivated through film became increasingly abstract, generalised, de-limited and normalised, while increasingly

being unable to distinguish between actuality and its strategic realisation and treatment for governmental purposes.

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For the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is only a fore-history of the one that really concerns him. And that is precisely why the appearance of repetition doesn't exist for him in history, because given their index as "fore-history", those moments in the course of history that matter most to him become moments of the present and change their character according to whether this present is defined as a catastrophe or triumph.

Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*

1. Introduction: Governing Visions of the Real

But, above all, it was important never to lose the ultimate vision of what is going to end up on the screen. The magical mix of sound and pictures, in all its totality, providing accessibility to an audience and securing their involvement. In the end, the trick of it is to persuade them to share your vision with them.¹

- Cecil Holmes, NFU director 1947–1949 -

The selectiveness of the camera gives him [the director] almost god-like powers. He can make his audience see only what he wants them to see – only what is significant and characteristic. By means of various technical devices he can heighten their perception or create emotional tensions. Even time and space become tractable and obedient in his hands.²

- Margaret Thomson, NFU director 1947–1949 -

Outline and Scope of Study

The New Zealand National Film Unit (NFU) was born during the war. Its establishment stems from a State of Emergency and film production was assigned with urgent socio- and psychopolitical functions in order to assist in furthering the wartime economy. The New Zealand State administration, together with Britain, had declared war on Nazi Germany in September 1939 and thereby entered World War II, and was engaged in the rearrangement of the political economy in terms of wartime needs. In 1941, under war emergency powers, the NFU was established in a Cabinet Minute, its general function being defined to “further the war effort”. Thus, film came to be employed to achieve a variety of objectives in differing ways. The will of the population to save metal, paper and petrol was to be furthered, national identification, and empathy advanced, and general discipline, morale and perceptions of mutual responsibility increased. Faith in victory had to be instilled, the might of “the enemy” downplayed, war-time industries and the army “man-powered”, pride in the army and the home front cultivated, dissidence and subversion minimised, sectional

¹ Cecil Holmes, *One Man's Way* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), 21.

² Margaret S. Thomson, "Importance of Direction in Film Production," *Southern Cross*, 24 October 1947.

interests co-ordinated and harmonised, and visions for the future produced. In short, the economic conduct of the population was to be advanced through the assistance of “visions of the real” that could be arranged and cultivated through “realist” film, which would thereby assist in the realisation of a desirable future through the subjectivity and agency of popular audiences.

After the war, film production by the NFU operated within the realm of what was referred to as civic education and public relations and the NFU continued to be organised within the executive of State government until it was dismantled in 1990. Throughout its existence, the specific purposes for film production and the ends that it was to serve continued to be of primary importance and provided for the legitimation and funding of film production as a “public service”. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, these purposes included informing, educating and shaping the population in reference to a variety of norms, desires and perceived necessities, such as increased and more efficient industrial and agricultural production, racial and national harmony, the co-operation of various sections and classes of society, the “adaption and adjustment” of Māori as well as improved education, hygiene, health and safety. Additional tasks involved the cultivation of appropriate national and individual self-perceptions and discipline, the promotion of a vision of New Zealand and its population as modern, progressive, equal, humanitarian, democratic and free, the standardisation of conduct, and the promotion of State enterprise and government along with industry, science and the labour force. Additionally, democratic principles and ideals were to be fostered in order to strengthen the population against “the Communist menace”, and New Zealand was to be promoted overseas to advance a specific movement of capital, people and commodities throughout the world.

At the same time, however, NFU films were and continue to be regarded as more or less authentic records of past events, providing insights into “how it was then”, the past reality of New Zealand. Nevertheless, sometimes unease has been expressed that it was “the State”, which controlled film production and for some the NFU was largely a “propaganda machine”, whose films were biased and of limited value. John O’Shea, one of New Zealand’s most prolific filmmakers and owner of Pacific Films, a company that made sponsored promotional films from the late 1940s, has claimed that the NFU, as well as private companies which made sponsored documentaries, were

half dishonest. The people who paid the money determined the shape of the message ... So it was a gradual corruption of any communication of an artistic kind. Even though communications from artists are moulded by the culture in which they live and the set of beliefs they have, nevertheless when you add a further bird and they must say certain things to please their sponsor, maybe what we have present is a commercial. A television commercial could well be the more honest communication because it doesn't fool around with you.³

Particularly the projection of Māori and Māoritanga through NFU films tends to sit uneasily with contemporary perceptions about the colonial history of Aotearoa/New Zealand and how Māori/Tangata Whenua became subject to State policies of assimilation and integration.⁴ Merata Mita, an acclaimed Māori filmmaker, has criticised the work of the NFU for its projection of “our nation as community, a fine multiracial, harmonious society” in the 1940s as “an unqualified success”.⁵

However, this questioning of the status of NFU films and their truth-value is not a new phenomenon. During the period under consideration in this thesis, there were repeatedly controversies regarding the use of the NFU for party-political propaganda. Additionally, government documents as well as some memoirs by NFU personnel show an ambivalent relationship between a desire for “truth” and a concern with socio- and psycho-political effects of film. In other words, there generally was at once a concern to remain more or less truthful and factual, while at the same time advancing certain ends.

Thus there was and indeed remains a certain ambivalence about to what extent NFU films can be regarded as providing authentic and reliable insights into past realities, particularly since NFU films were and continue to be seen as having served certain interests and purposes and were being made from certain perspectives. However, so far few attempts have been made to empirically sustain particular assumptions about NFU films and their status as authentic records of the past.

³ John O'Shea, interview by Jonathan Dennis, broadcast 29 April 1993, A0353, New Zealand Film Archive.

⁴ The term “Māori” is in itself a result of colonisation and the abstractions of modernity. It subsumes various individuals, whānau, hapū and iwi within a concept that was not applied to designate a coherent whole of indigenous people before colonisation. However, due to the lack of another suitable concept the term has been employed throughout the thesis, with the caution that it does not imply a coherent or singular identity.

⁵ Merata Mita, “The Soul and the Image,” in *Film in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Jonathan Dennis and Jan Bieringa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996), 44.

This indecision about the relation of NFU films to past events leads to an important question. How is it that one assigns NFU films with a certain truth value and authenticity, while there is also a certain doubt whether NFU films can generally be assigned with such a status? Nowadays particularly documentary film is often regarded as a genre that is precisely marked by its interweaving of factual and fictional aspects. This thesis, however, uses concepts developed by Michel Foucault to trace a historically specific dispositive and modes of “realisation” that resulted in films which were made in order to cultivate a vision of what is and should be real. From such a perspective it is important to note that before World War I, the authenticity of the filmic image was generally not discussed – it was simply assumed. As Martin Loiperdinger, Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk have argued, filmic authenticity historically became problematic only with the move from an assemblage of autonomous shots to a discursive arrangement in the form of functional shot sequences during World War I, in which images were often staged and used to evidence or illustrate implicit and/or explicit arguments.⁶ However, as is argued in detail in this thesis, in New Zealand State film production, the authenticity of the filmic image only became problematic *after* World War I and particularly with the establishment of the NFU in 1941 when film took on a propagandistic function for war purposes.

If one regards the authenticity of film images to be warrantable through a non-interventionist, undirected and disinterested “documentation” of actuality, then one can see the conception and practices of Griersonian documentary film, seemingly paradoxically, to be jointly responsible for an ambiguity and indecision of authenticity. While film production rested on the mechanical conventions of the camera and hence could not entirely “invent” the subjects it represented, the Griersonian documentary programme calculated a certain logistics and strategic approach that made it possible to variously appropriate, arrange and control actuality. Grierson’s programme at once legitimised and demanded a teleological transcendence of actuality in which filmmakers to varying degrees would deliberately intervene in, strategically interact with, model, “creatively treat” and optimise actual events towards a set of socio-political purposes. In this sense, it is argued throughout this thesis, Griersonian documentary set out less to document the material surfaces that the camera

⁶ Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, and Martin Loiperdinger, "Introduction," *Kintop. Anfaenge des Dokumentarischen Films* 4 (1995): 2.

could record than to produce monuments that would direct vision towards a desirable future.

Therefore, instead of discussing NFU documentaries a priori in terms of fact and fiction, or presupposing an ambivalence and contradiction of such notions inherent in the definition and practice of Griersonian documentary, this thesis accommodates for Grierson's documentary programme that neither set out to produce fiction nor to disinterestedly observe actuality, but outlined how a desirable future reality could be achieved. It is argued that it was precisely when the documentary film approach took hold in New Zealand that the camera began to be used less to "document" observable aspects of the historical world. Images were released from "a strict denotative literalism" and took on various layered functions as illustrations, symbols, evidence and to advance affect and identification, as well as to address, engage and govern the power of imagination and by extension the subjectivity and agency of popular audiences.⁷

Such an approach began to take hold in the realm of New Zealand State publicity during the 1920s, when film began to move beyond the provision of a series of views of recorded events towards the production of documentary film. That is, State film production shifted from a concern with the filmic preservation of events and people, and from focusing on a picturesque and attractive aggregation of scenic and industrial shots for the promotion of tourism and trade, towards propaganda, civic education and public relations. These new concerns implied a mode of production that was less focused on the observation and preservation of actualities, and more concerned with the realisation of "visions of the real", calculated in relation to their desired lasting impact on and within audiences. In other words, films were to be made to be able to take hold of and cultivate the visionary faculties of individuals, while at the same time claiming "the real", that is, in Grierson's programme, a transcendental, metaphysical, a priori given, general and universal totality that had to be rendered ascertainable through intuition – not reasoning – by interpreting, dramatising, simplifying, and optimising empirically observable material surfaces for popular audiences.

The phrase "visions of the real" is hence used throughout this thesis in order to point out that in Grierson's documentary programme films were a means to an end. Not the films themselves were important, but how they could strategically objectify and "order," that is

⁷ Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display: Re-Viewing Nonfiction Film and Video* (London: Wallflower, 2008), 5.

arrange and regulate, the vision of popular audiences. Documentary films would in the moment of screening engage bodily faculties of sight and hearing. Crucially, however, they would also take hold of and shape the imaginative and “visionary” aspect of how perceptions of what is and should be real are formed.⁸ Such a vision would subsequently govern how individuals make sense of the world and act upon their self and others. In other words, visions of the real imparted through film were to shape certain modes and patterns by which audiences would envision the world in “realistic” and productive ways. This, it is argued, was precisely Grierson’s definition and programme for documentary film. It had to advance the “progress” of nations and the “integration” of populations in specific ways, while demanding and rationalising a teleological transcendence of the knowledge that could be imparted to popular audiences through moving images. This legitimised and made “necessary” the use of certain formative techniques and the strategic disposition of visions of the real.

While NFU films were made in reference to certain projected ends, and their production was organised within the executive of State government, they were made in complex and differing ways, involved many different people with different interests, ideas, intentions and understandings of film; and the filmmakers drew upon a certain potential and conventions of representation immanent in the cinematographic apparatus. Additionally, the films were made for a variety of layered purposes, in a variety of ways and styles, by employing a range of strategies and techniques that at once relied upon and shaped certain conventions of filmic representation and aesthetics. Furthermore, they were made in reference to anticipated faculties and expectations of target audiences, desired effects, as well as demands for efficiency and requirements for public decency and non-controversy.

Therefore, the films should not be seen to have resulted from or to have been promoting a singular intention or logic of ideas. NFU films should not be regarded as the sole product of, or to be projecting an “ideology” in the service of, elites or the State.⁹ It is important to note that NFU film was to assist in the advancement of a “better” future for the *entire*

⁸ For a discussion of the emergence of a new conception and understanding of vision in the 19th century that focused on the subjective and visionary faculties of the body and its subsequent normative measurement and regulation, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

⁹ Cf. David John Hoskins, “John Grierson, the NZNFU and the Art of Propaganda” (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 2007).

population, and in some sense politicians as well as filmmakers were subject to the specific qualities of film and the vision it (re-)produced, and were not simply its masters.¹⁰ Furthermore, discussing NFU film in terms of ideology would not do justice to Grierson's specific programmatic demands for documentary film production, nor would it encompass the practices and routines of filmmaking by the NFU that were more heterogeneous than a focus on ideology would allow to trace. This said, however, there were mechanisms of direction, control, supervision and self-censorship in place which ensured that certain historical events and experiences would remain invisible, while others would be staged, heightened, homogenised, emphasised and continuously reiterated.

This thesis, then, focuses on a historical enquiry that traces how NFU documentary film came to be calculated and employed as a governmental technique in New Zealand during the 1940s and 50s. It discusses the "politics of the real" and modes of "realisation" of visions of the real that were clearly shaped by a Griersonian approach and programme to documentary film production and democratic government. Chapters three to five also discuss several significant documentary films made by the NFU, which are considered in reference to their historical context, with a focus on their governmental purposes and strategies. These films are not discussed in order to imply that they were representative of all the NFU films produced, however. The projection of workers and Māori is of particular concern, since they were frequently subjects of NFU films and thus given to be envisioned in specific ways.

This study participates in "critique" in the sense that it sheds light on certain aspects that were to remain implicit and invisible in the films themselves, but that historically related to, traversed and "ordered" the realisation of visions of the real. From this perspective, an attempt is made to describe how visions of the real were to shape and refer popular audiences in specific and strategic ways back to the political economy and the inherent knowledge/power relations from which these visions emerged. In other words, some of the ways in which visions of the real were to be strategically arranged to position subjectivity and agency are traced. However, in tracing how films shaped visions of the real, this study does not attempt to make general claims about empirical effects of films on audiences, or to

¹⁰ Cf. Margot Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters. A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976" (MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1995).

identify an ideal spectator or observer in the films or in the reception situation, but to focus on more heterogeneous and “greyer practices and discourses” in which subjectivity and agency were problematised and shaped, thus moving beyond the assumption that “an observer will always leave visible tracks, that is, will be identifiable in relation to images”.¹¹ The task is therefore not to speculate or generalise about empirical effects of films, or to regard an observer to be constituted through the reception of films, but to describe a historically specific apparatus – of which NFU films formed one important aspect – that set out to produce a specific kind of vision. The term “vision” in this study thus serves as a model to describe an *ideal* configuration of the apparatus that conditioned how popular audiences could envision the real through film, that is at once perceive *and* imagine what is real. This apparatus emerged from a re-configuration of filmic perception that involved a move from “view” to “vision” in film production, as discussed throughout the thesis.

The aim of this study has thus not been to write a realist or comprehensive history of the NFU, to provide a general or representative survey of NFU films, or to claim certain measurable or discernible effects of NFU films. Nor does this study claim to be a final and “authoritative” history of the NFU and Griersonian documentary, but rather has focused on the emergence of specific practices and discourses in the move from filmic views to visions in the New Zealand context. While important historical details have been included and some of the controversies regarding the NFU have been discussed, a detailed history of the NFU and the films it produced would still need to be written. In this sense, the aim has not been to interpret and recount “how it (really) was”, but rather to trace how the future was to be realised by making audiences at once subject to, and a subject of, filmic visions of the real. These visions could be particularly advanced through documentary films that, according to Grierson, were less to work upon or engage reason and consciousness directly, but would rather work upon visionary faculties by at once addressing and shaping the “subconscious”, which in his account patterned and shaped perceptions of the real and by extension the subjectivity and agency of popular audiences. In other words, the arrangement of vision was to aid in the realisation of a specific future brought about by active subjects that governed their selves and others in reference to what was envisioned to be real and what should be

¹¹ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, 150.

real. The ways in which the population lived could thereby be improved, normalised, homogenised and disciplined, and its self-regulation advanced.

This thesis adopts a research perspective that draws upon Foucault's concept of governmentality and makes use of his method of dispositive analysis by describing a heterogeneous and shifting governmental ensemble that traversed and ordered the organisation and practices of the NFU and the ways in which audiences were to envision the real through film. This thesis thereby contributes to and increases knowledge about the NFU and its film production from a "detached" historical perspective, and is intended to stimulate discourse about the implications and legacy of Griersonian documentary film and its programmatic approach, with reference to the New Zealand context.

The historical focus of this study is the 1940s and 50s, since that period was a formative time both for the NFU and a simultaneously "realist" and "visionary" documentary film aesthetic. During these decades, NFU films were popular and regularly shown in cinemas, town halls, schools, libraries, wharehousi and on marae throughout New Zealand. During this time the country had one of the highest cinema attendance rates in the world and many people were enthusiastic cineastes. Overseas distribution considerably expanded too. Furthermore, given there were only two other significant New Zealand film production companies, Neuline and Pacific Films, the NFU was clearly hegemonic in providing a vision of what defined and characterised New Zealand and its population and of what seemed normal, typical, ordinary and desirable. With the establishment of the NFU in 1941, the output and circulation of films within New Zealand increased considerably. Film came to deal with domestic and contemporary concerns, often addressing certain themes by making people the centre of attention. Film was regarded by many as the most powerful instrument by which the public and its visions, opinions and conduct could be shaped, and therefore it was of considerable interest to successive Labour and National governments to enable, control and direct NFU film production. After television broadcasting began in 1960, the NFU slowly lost its hegemony, cinema audiences diminished, and visions of the real were increasingly shaped in the private space of the home.

A few notes about the availability of NFU films and the presentation of this study are necessary at this point. Many NFU films have been made available online. Some are

accessible for online viewing through the New Zealand Film Archive and can be searched and accessed through the online catalogue at:

<http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/catalogue/advancedsearch.htm>

The whole Film Archive collection of NFU films can be watched at branches of the Film Archive in Wellington or Auckland. Furthermore, NFU films are available online through NZ On Screen:

<http://www.nzonscreen.com/collection/national-film-unit-collection>

Additionally, many NFU films have been made available online by Archives New Zealand:

http://www.ecasttv.co.nz/channel_detail.php?program_id=&channel_id=60

This study makes extensive use of quotations in places, with the intention of making visible some of what has been thought and written in the language of the time and place that is the focus of the thesis. Instead of interpreting, summarising or paraphrasing these thoughts to the extent that is common in academic literature, the focus is on providing the reader with insights into how writers of the time perceived and expressed certain issues and problems, as well as proposed solutions, particularly in relation to the “visionary” potential of realist film.

Due to the large amount of obvious spelling mistakes present in archival sources, silent corrections of these have been made. Grammatical errors have neither been corrected nor marked.

While the main chapters are laid out roughly chronologically, freedom has been exercised in moving beyond a strict chronological discussion of periods in order to discuss various aspects that could not otherwise be suitably addressed.

This chapter now turns to an outline of what has been written about the NFU thus far, before describing current debates on documentary film that explore its specific significance and epistemological premises in relation to other types of film. In order to get a sense of the historical emergence of documentary film as a governmental technique, the second chapter then discusses Grierson’s programme for documentary film and democratic citizenship.

Mapping Discourses on the National Film Unit

Relatively little has been published on the NFU and its film production. This is particularly surprising given that the NFU was New Zealand's single most important film production company that for nearly fifty years provided the country's population and overseas audiences with visions of what characterised and defined New Zealand and its population. So far, no attempts have been made to write a general history of the NFU and even publications that focus on limited aspects such as the institutional organisation or specific films it produced, are scarcely available and tend to remain anecdotal. This absence of film and media historiography is, for instance, detectable in the *Historical Dictionary of Australia and New Zealand Cinema*,¹² which does not even have an entry for the NFU. This state of affairs makes any historical inquiry into the NFU and its film production challenging. There are many unexplored archival resources as well as hundreds of films, which so far have not been the subject of academic research. Additionally, it has been reported that when the NFU moved to Avalon in Lower Hutt in 1978, the majority of government files held at the film studios at Miramar were destroyed.

A condensed review of what has been written about the NFU and its film production so far is provided below. The most extensive academic studies on the NFU have been conducted for unpublished Master's theses. Margot Fry's "A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976",¹³ mainly examined the institutional organisation and political control of the NFU and argued that it was subject to a variety of interests – filmmakers, politicians and administrators – who sought to advance their own agendas by making films for a variety of purposes. It contains valuable archival detail about the organisation of the NFU and some of its practices. Another Master's thesis dealing with the NFU is David Hoskins' "John Grierson, the NZNFU and the Art of Propaganda".¹⁴ This discusses the NFU in relation to its propagandistic function as a "tool of the State" as well as the "ideology" of Grierson, but provides relatively little historical detail or discussion of specific films.

¹² Albert Moran and Errol Vieth, *Historical Dictionary of Australia and New Zealand Cinema* (Oxford: Scarcecrow Press, 2005).

¹³ Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters. A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976."

¹⁴ Hoskins, "John Grierson, the NZNFU and the Art of Propaganda."

Two pamphlets, *The Tin Shed: The Origins of the National Film Unit* and *Film Making in New Zealand: A Brief Historical Survey*,¹⁵ both written and compiled by Jonathan Dennis and Clive Sowry, discuss the NFU, some of its personnel and a few major historical events. Furthermore, the NFU is discussed in *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*.¹⁶ Additionally, the NFU is briefly touched upon in Jack C. Ellis' and Forsyth Hardy's biographies of Grierson who visited New Zealand in 1940.¹⁷ Beyond these enquiries, published work on the NFU, its personnel, films and important events can be mostly found in the form of short articles and essays in a variety of magazines and journals.¹⁸ While interest in the NFU has been revived in the last few years, much of the information being published relies on accounts of filmmakers themselves and the tone remains often laudatory with little substantial research being done. Commonly, early NFU filmmakers continue to be regarded as "our film pioneers." Further, to date no publications are available that deal with the State publicity apparatus within which the NFU operated. While this study has made use of both the unpublished and published corpora on the NFU, it has largely relied on primary archival material held at Archives New Zealand, the New Zealand Film Archive, the National Library, the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Hocken Library and the John Grierson Archive, as well as interviews with former staff members of the NFU. Furthermore, approximately 240 New Zealand State film productions have been viewed for this study, dating until the early 1960s, as well as approximately 500 film synopses sighted at Archives New Zealand and the Film Archive.

¹⁵ Jonathan Dennis and Clive Sowry, *The Tin Shed: The Origins of the National Film Unit* (Wellington: New Zealand Film Archive, 1981); Clive Sowry and Jonathan Dennis, *Film Making in New Zealand: A Brief Historical Survey* (Wellington: New Zealand Film Archive, 1984).

¹⁶ Diane Pivac, Frank Stark, and Lawrence McDonald, eds. *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011): 104-132.

¹⁷ Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 137-38. Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 103-05.

¹⁸ These include, but are not limited to: Julie Benjamin, "Film Pioneer Stanhope Andrews," *OnFilm* 7(1990): 36; Mita, "The Soul and the Image," 36-56; Clive Sowry, "Cyril Morton," *Onfilm* October 1986 Vol.3, no. 6 (1986): 39; ———, "Morton, Cyril James 1903-1986," accessed 2 October 2009, http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/alt_essayBody.asp?essayID=4M64; Russell Campbell, "Plain hard hazardous work: Cecil Holmes at the NFU," *Illusions* 7 (1988): 9-13; Dean Parker, "Scoundrel Times at the Film Unit," *Illusions* 7 (1988): 4-8; Oxley Hughan, "The National Film Unit." *New Zealand's Heritage* 7, no. 93 (1973): 2577-82; Margaret Thompson, "Grierson and New Zealand," *Journal of the the Society of Film and Television Arts* 2, no. 4-5 (1972): 15-16; H.A. Lightman, "The New Zealand National Film Unit," *American Cinematographer* 60, March (1979); John O'Shea, *Documentary and National Identity* (Auckland: Centre for Film, Television and Media Studies, 1997).

What is Documentary Film? Mapping Documentary Film Theory

In contrast to the paucity of studies on the NFU, academic publications about documentary film have flourished since the 1970s with the institutionalisation of film and media studies at universities. Particularly in the last two decades there has been a deepening interest in theoretical and epistemological questions concerning documentary film.

Theoretical interest has tended to focus on the complex relations between filmic representations of reality and their historical referents, as well as on the formative and mediating aspects of documentary film. That is, interest has often centred on the question of how objective and factual documentary film is or can be, and how “secure” and “true” the knowledge that documentaries provide about the historical world is or can be. Such enquiry at least implicitly refers to the mechanical qualities and evidential possibilities of the camera and its indexical and iconic relationship with what it records, as well as to the ways in which documentary film establishes a narrative and is given a form, and thereby moves beyond an accumulation of recorded actualities.

However, the status of documentary film and its relation to the historical world are hard to define because its complex and shifting relations pertain to epistemological questions of what can be “truly” known, as well as how documentary film is practised, understood and defined. Since its self-conscious inception and rationalisation in the 1920s through the writings and work of Grierson, documentary film has been defined and evaluated in reference to its (supposedly) truthful and authentic representations of preceding actualities. However, at the same time, documentary film was to be the result of, in Grierson’s influential normative definition, a “creative treatment of actuality”, and claimed to deal with actuality, thus placing it in opposition to fiction film. Nevertheless, documentary was not only to be an accumulation of recorded events, but also a creatively dramatised and interpreted arrangement of actualities for specific governmental purposes. In short, Griersonian documentary film did not only claim veracity and fidelity, but would at the same time be employed as a socio- and psycho-political technique by which democratic government and economic conduct could be advanced.

This ambivalent definitional combination of an evidentiary and factual recording of actuality, and formative techniques employed in the creative arrangement of film, has provided for a taxonomic legacy that continues to frame discussions on documentary film. Brian Winston

has argued that “Grierson’s taxonomic triumph was to make his particular species of non-fiction film, *the non-fiction genre* while at the same time allowing the films to use significant fictionalizing technique of dramatisation”.¹⁹ This creative arrangement and recording of actualities and their formation into a narrative has led to much debate about the truth value of documentary film and the authenticity of the events and subjects it depicts, as well as its differences from fiction film.

While Grierson’s normative definition of documentary film and its rationale and programme are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, here a discussion of theoretical perspectives and accounts of documentary film published since the 1970s is provided. This discussion is intended as a condensed review of existing debates and provides a point of departure for the examination of the NFU and Griersonian documentary film in the following chapters.²⁰ Therefore it cannot claim to do justice to the plurality of academic enquiry and is not intended as an exhaustive account of documentary film theory.

A focus of academic publications on documentary film in the 1970s was its generic definition as a type of film which dealt with aspects of the historical world in specific ways, allowing it to be defined as distinct from other types of film.²¹ Furthermore, these enquiries provided rationales of documentary film’s social purpose and value. Early academic writing on documentary film was mainly concerned with the demarcation of a generic territory and a canon of essential films, filmmakers and traditions. The relationship between a filmic reality and the vision of what is real that documentary film imparted was of little concern to these studies. Although some writers, such as Richard Barsam, noted that documentary included an *interpretation* of facts, the ambivalent combination of creative interpretation and factual recording was little reflected upon. For instance, Roy Armes understood documentary film as “an uncovering of the real”, aiming “quite simply to show the world as it is. The artist’s prime concern is not to invent or to imagine, but to place people, objects, settings and

¹⁹ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 103. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ The following discussion is indebted to Eva Hohenberger's historical account of documentary film theory. Eva Hohenberger, "Dokumentarfilmtheorie. Ein historischer Überblick über Ansätze und Probleme [Documentary Film Theory: A Historical Survey of Approaches and Problems]," in *Bilder des Wirklichen. Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms*, ed. Eva Hohenberger (Berlin: Vorwerk, 1998), 8-34.

²¹ These include Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1973); Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Roy Armes, *Film and Reality: An Historical Survey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Lewis Jacobs, *The Documentary Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

experiences as directly as possible in front of the camera and to make the audience *see*".²² Therefore Armes positioned documentary film in opposition to an imitation (fiction film) and a questioning of the real (avant-garde film). Barsam stated: "My concentration has been on *what* the films say, not on *how* they say it, because, for the most part, the technique of a nonfiction film is less important than its content."²³ Hence, documentary film was generally regarded as clearly belonging to the realm of non-fiction, dealing with aspects of the historical world in ways which were not considered to require further theoretical reflection and examination.

The second identifiable strand of documentary film theory, which Eva Hohenberger calls *reflexive*, began to reassess aspects and problems of early enquiries and discussed formative techniques deployed in the production of documentary film. Reflexive approaches tended to focus less on *what* documentary film shows (its content) than on *how* it represents reality and addresses audiences.

In 1991 Bill Nichols published his seminal study of documentary film entitled *Representing Reality*.²⁴ He argued that documentary film "as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes."²⁵ According to Nichols, documentary film can nevertheless be defined as a type of film which differs from fiction film in complex and often ambiguous ways. To accommodate this complexity, he defined documentary film in a fourfold, relational way: as a community of practitioners, an institutional practice, a corpus of texts and a constituency of viewers. According to Nichols, these elements of a complex system of relations determine in differing ways how documentary film relates to the historical world. Nevertheless, a major focus of Nichol's definition rested on specific and distinctive relations between historical reality and its filmic representation – in short, on *representations of reality*.

²² Although Armes implicitly draws attention to the inherent ambivalence of his definition, he does not discuss it in any detail. The terms "artist," "to place" and "to make see" clearly relate to the formative and strategic aspects of filmmaking. Armes, *Film and Reality: An Historical Survey*, 10. Emphasis in original.

²³ Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History*, xviii. Emphasis added.

²⁴ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Other relevant publications include John Corner, *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986); ———, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); John Ellis, *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989).

²⁵ Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 12.

The first defining aspect, a “community of practitioners”, pertains to a group of filmmakers who share “a common, self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world” and thus tend to share a sense of a common purpose, face similar problems, and undertake similar practices.²⁶ The second aspect, “an institutional practice”, relates to institutionalised and thus regulated ways of producing documentary film, which to a certain degree predetermines the selection, order and dispersion of statements about the historical world and thus shapes its discursive formation. The third defining aspect, according to Nichols, is “a corpus of texts” which “take shape around an informing logic”,²⁷ and thus documentary film is seen to be largely based upon evidentiary editing to forward an argument about the world it depicts. According to Nichols, the structure of a documentary film and what is made perceptible is often controlled and motivated by the argument which is to be advanced about the historical world. Documentary film can “draw on disparate elements of the historical world for evidence”.²⁸ Nichols sees the fourth defining aspect of documentary film as “a constituency of viewers”. Therefore, he argues, “the distinguishing mark of documentary may be less intrinsic to the text than a function of the assumptions and expectations brought to the process of viewing the text”,²⁹ which relates to previous experiences and knowledge of audiences. Thus, according to Nichols, watching a documentary relies on habitualised, that is largely unconscious “procedural skills of comprehension and interpretation that will allow them [audiences] to make sense of a documentary”.³⁰

While Nichols admits that documentary film shares many editorial and discursive features with fiction film and thus calls documentary “a fiction (un)like any other”,³¹ he maintains a crucial distinction between them. In his view, documentary film makes “an argument about the historical world”,³² and this world cannot be fully constructed or invented as documentary film deals with “*material practices ... that are not entirely or totally discursive, even if their meanings and social value are*”.³³ Although Nichols notes that a clear-cut

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Ibid., 18.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 105.

³² Ibid., 111.

³³ Ibid., 109. Emphasis in original.

distinction between fiction and nonfiction based on its constructedness or a mechanically guaranteed indexicality between film material and profilmic event is impossible, he nevertheless maintains that a crucial defining aspect of documentary film is its relation to the material processes that the camera registers.

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction, as well as the notions of authenticity and evidence that may be seen to be warranted through the indexical relations of profilmic events and filmed material, has proven to be deceptive because, as Nichols himself notes, this indexicality is almost always given,³⁴ including in fiction and avant-garde films. Indexicality is warranted through the mechanics of the film camera, which registers light reflections of physical objects on the film emulsion.³⁵ The authenticity of the historical referent can usually not be evaluated by solely watching the film itself, as one needs additional extra-cinematic knowledge to be able to evaluate the veracity and fidelity of the event depicted. This process of evaluation crucially relates to what can legitimately count as true and the conventions on which such an evaluation is based. Furthermore, an impression of the authenticity of historical events, as well as the historical events themselves, can be effectively realised through their discursive construction, evident in so-called mockumentaries such as Peter Jackson's *Forgotten Silver* (1995) or *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Hence, the impression of authenticity can itself be a discursive effect, derived from a strategic *staging of (f)actualised* events and a discursive treatment of the material, rather than it being *necessarily* an intrinsic quality of the film material itself, which through its indexicality seems to warrant the historical authenticity of the events it depicts. Thus images shot with *film* cameras in the 1940s and 50s were able to provide evidence in the sense of "something has been there in front of the camera", but not that "this has or would have been so in the historical world as it seems on the screen".

Even if it is assumed that an event was so in the historical world, free from a (deliberate) interference of the camera and filmmakers, further questions that could be asked are: How has the event been recorded and represented? Under what circumstances and for what

³⁴ Exemptions are, for instance, scratch films or animated films.

³⁵ This process of registering light reflections on film emulsion which through an indexical link guarantees the former presence of things and thus provides possible evidence of historical events can nowadays be simulated to a considerable extent because of the digitalisation of the production process. The "having been there" of a thing in front of the camera can in this sense be a digitally created illusion. See Winston for a discussion of the impact of digitalisation on the concept of documentary film. Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations*, 259.

reasons and ends? What has been selected, what left out? The practice of staging and (re-) enacting events relates to the problem to evaluate the authenticity of the profilmic event itself, of its “having been so-ness”, which again poses several epistemological and ethical questions. Is, for instance, a re-enactment of historical situations truthful and authentic and does this re-enactment thus have evidential value (and if yes, to what degree and regarding which specific point of reference)? Or should re-enactments be rather evaluated as largely imagined, constructed and hence fictional events? How much can and/or should cameras and filmmakers intervene in, arrange and/or re-construct afilmic events for the camera? Geoffrey Dunn has claimed in reference to such questions that a main defining difference between fiction and documentary film is that the latter does not employ actors.³⁶ As staged re-enactments of historical events with (amateur) actors are a common feature of the body of films that are nowadays generically indexed as documentary film, this claim would by definition exclude a large body of films that are considered to belong to this genre, including early Griersonian documentaries.

Christof Decker has questioned the usefulness of Nichols’ approach, because, as he argues, Nichols still postulates a definable discreteness of a theory of documentary film in opposition to fiction film which is largely, though in no way entirely, based on a more or less discrete relation between documentary text and its historical referent. Thus Decker argues that “Nichols does not propose a naive theory of images [*Abbildtheorie*], but his opposition of fiction film dealing with social myths and documentary film dealing with the historicity of its material is constitutive for his approach”.³⁷ If one takes into account that from early on in film history events were strategically (f)actualised and arranged for the camera, such as in Lumiere’s *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895),³⁸ then ahistorical and generic definitions of documentary film (or other so-called non-fiction film) that *generically* and *a*

³⁶ Geoffrey Dunn, "Deconstructing Documentary: Theory and Practice in Documentary Film and Photography" (PhD Thesis, University of California, 2004), 22.

³⁷ Christof Decker, "Grenzgebiete filmischer Referentialität. Zur Konzeption des Dokumentarfilms bei Bill Nichols [Border Areas of Cinematic Referentiality. On the Conception of Documentary Film in the Work of Bill Nichols]," *montage a/v. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 3, no. 1 (1994): 70. Translation by the author.

³⁸ See Martin Loiperdinger and Bernd Elzer, "Lumiere's Arrival of the Train: Cinema's Founding Myth," *The Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (2004): 89-118.

priori try to preserve its difference from fiction film by listing *essential* traits and/or differences from fiction film may be of limited value.³⁹

The relation between documentary film and the past events it renders visible has proven to be complex and frequently blurs the boundaries of the established conceptual binaries between reality and fiction, objective and subjective, and documentary and fiction film. Thus, there is no consensus about the question what the more significant and thus defining features of a documentary film are or should be; its truthful and authentic relation to a filmic reality, or its abstractions and reconstructions of that reality and the “surplus values” it produces. These surplus values can, and in Grierson’s definition should, in turn create implicit “use values” for audiences and their behaviours and actions in the historical world after a film had been watched.

Another strand of theoretical enquiry tends to treat the concepts of “reality”, “truth” and “objectivity” in relation to documentary film as discursive constructs. From this point of view, documentary film crucially relies on formative techniques of signification and narration and the use of the cinematographic apparatus with its own technological conventions of representation (such as *perspectiva artificialis*, which is based on a mathematical model of linear perspective that establishes a single vanishing point and the impression of depth on a plane surface). This third strand of theoretical enquiry, following the characterisation of Hohenberger, can be called *deconstructive* as it focuses on a deconstruction of the notion of documentary film as an unmediated, objective and necessarily truthful representation of aspects of a vanished reality. Deconstructive approaches tend to reject the notion of documentary film as a distinct genre or body of films and point towards its relations and interdependencies with what is called fiction film. They tend to focus on discursive and pragmatic aspects of films and their reception, as well as on the textual and/or technical disposition of its spectators. Thus, the focus of inquiry is shifted from the relation of film to a preceding reality in its production, to the relation of film and spectators in the moment of reception and the effects that are created.

³⁹ Today, for instance, it is assumed that a majority of supposedly authentic footage from World War I, dealing with aspects of war activities is inauthentic. It is inauthentic in the sense that, for instance, battle scenes were frequently re-enacted and staged after the battles had ended and/or scenes that seemed to show authentic battles were shot on manoeuvres, without making such arrangements perceptible in the footage itself.

One effect is the creation of a perceptual impression of reality, induced through the reception of film, which provides subject-positions within the cinematographic apparatus from which audiences perceive the projections on the screen. They are further positioned and addressed as perceiving subjects through the narrative and aesthetic arrangement of films. This preoccupation with the positioning of a hypothetical spectator, derived from the technical disposition of films and their projection situation, draws on two essays by Jean-Louis Baudry.⁴⁰ His ideas have been re-evaluated in specific reference to documentary film by William Guynn.⁴¹

Early enquiries into spectatorship have been criticised for their tendency to totalise audiences through the hypothetical concept of the “spectator”, while abstracting from socio-cultural differences of audiences. Furthermore, they have been criticised for being ahistorical and for the tendency to treat all, or at least classical fiction film, as producing similar subject positions. Thus, this mode of inquiry does not allow focusing on the historical specifics and conditions in which films are made, circulated and received. Another major objection has been that the spectator is conceptualised as a rather passive entity that is overwhelmed and “duped” into a subject position from which the appearances on the screen are confused with afilmic reality.⁴²

Scholars who have been concerned with a deconstruction of documentary film include Michael Renov, Guynn and Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Minh-Ha has provided an influential polemic account of documentary film and criticised especially ethnographic film for its “totalizing quest for meaning” and has categorically asserted that “there is no such thing as documentary – whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques”.⁴³ Renov has argued that “at the level of the sign, it is *the differing historical status of the referent* that distinguishes documentary from its fictional

⁴⁰ Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metaphysical Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 299-318; ———, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286-98 .

⁴¹ William Guynn, *Toward a Reexamination of the Documentary Film: Theory and Text* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980); ———, *A Cinema of Nonfiction* (London: Associated University Press, 1990).

⁴² See, for instance, Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On* (London: Wallflower, 2007); Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴³ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 90.

counterpart, not the formal relations among signifier, signified, and referent".⁴⁴ In other words, for Renov it is social convention, not the indexical relation between image and referent that determines what counts as fictional or non-fictional. For Guynn, "The classic distinction between fiction and nonfiction in cinema is largely mythical", since films are, to varying degrees, structured through subjective intervention and a fictionalising narrative.⁴⁵ He has claimed that

There is nothing within discourse, written or filmic, which bears infallible witness to the 'truth' or 'falsehood' of a field of reference. We accept 'truth' on faith or judge it according to signs of truth we find in the text, but these signs can be – and in certain realist texts both fictional and documentary often are – simulated.⁴⁶

Therefore, from this perspective, it is through social convention and not through an intrinsic material quality by which documentary film comes into being as a mode of perception and socially shared practice. Hence, Winston and others have suggested, furthering Nichols' argument that the difference between fiction and nonfiction is "to be found in the mind of the audience".⁴⁷ A question now asked is what makes audiences perceive certain films to be rather fictional and thus without a truth-value and truth-claim and others as non-fictional and thus possessing truth-value in reference to what they depict. The cinematic impression of authenticity is not only an effect of the technology of the cinematographic apparatus, but also of the historically institutionalised and socially shared modes of representing and perceiving reality, which relate to the narrative organisation and arrangement of films as well as to the social conventions by which "truth" can be produced and is differentiated from fiction. Audiences bring certain expectations and assumptions to a screening and usually have learned how to perceive and understand different types of films and their representations, while filmmakers deploy historically changing conventions and techniques that sustain or subvert impressions of "the real". Additionally, films usually are generically indexed as either dealing with fictional or non-fictional content.

⁴⁴Michael Renov, "Introduction: The Truth about Non-Fiction," in *Theorizing Documentary* ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵Guynn, *Toward a Reexamination of the Documentary Film: Theory and Text*, 7.

⁴⁶———, *A Cinema of Nonfiction*, 15.

⁴⁷Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, 253.

From this perspective, the question is not *what* documentary essentially is or should be, but rather *when* and/or *how* a documentary is. Thus, for instance, Dirk Eitzen and Roger Odin regard documentary film as being defined by its *mode of reception* and not by essential textual traits and their distinctive indexical relation to historical reality.⁴⁸ Therefore the question is not whether documentary film can be objective and truthfully represent historical reality, but how it constitutes a filmic perceptual impression of reality through its discursive organisation and social indexing by which filmic reality comes to be socially shared and assigned with truth-value.

In light of the difficulties associated with defining documentary film and establishing its boundaries against other types of film, one may argue that it is advantageous not to discuss documentary film in (theoretical) abstraction and instead to trace its historical emergence, functions and operations in reference to specific contexts. The *generic* classification of documentary film is necessarily ahistorical and by now encompasses thousands, if not millions, of films and a period of more than one hundred years of filmmaking, and therefore cannot account for the different material and ideational practices, conditions and contexts in which documentary film has operated. *The* documentary film is itself an invented and by now institutionalised generic convention of consideration and not an a priori and essentially definable body of films, and from this perspective it is necessarily rather a “fuzzy” concept that does not have clearly definable boundaries.⁴⁹ This at times leads to certain confusion about what should count as documentary film, what defines it, and when it begins. Furthermore, the *naming* and generic *indexing* of films as either fictional or non-fictional, or as being at once fictional *and* non-fictional is itself significant, since it frames perceptions and expectations, while abstracting from the conditions, understandings and ways in which specific films were historically made and received.

⁴⁸ Dirk Eitzen, "When is a Documentary? Documentary as a Mode of Reception," *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 1 (1995): 81-102; Roger Odin, "For a Semio-Pragmatics of Film," in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 213-26; ———, "A Semio-Pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film," in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 227-35; ———, "Dokumentarischer Film - Dokumentarisierende Lektüre [Documentary Film - Documentarising Reading]," in *Sprung im Spiegel. Filmisches Wahrnehmen zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Christa Bluemlinger (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1990), 125-46.

⁴⁹ See Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2007); Carl R. Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, Cambridge Studies in Film (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Hohenberger has pointed out that academic reflection on documentary film has placed little attention on its political and pedagogic legacy and instead has focused on formal reflection, largely based on premises of semiotics. The economic, social and political aspects of documentary film have been largely neglected.⁵⁰ That is, theoretical and ahistorical preoccupations with documentary film frequently neglect the historical specificities of production, circulation and reception, as well as its functions and arrangements within the social sphere. For instance, the programme and practices of documentary film as promoted by Grierson are quite different from those that emerged in the 1960s with direct cinema that eschewed the deliberate arrangement of actuality in favour of disinterested observation, or *cinéma vérité*, which rather proclaimed a self-reflexive and participant approach to film production. These approaches imply, but do not a priori warrant, a different economy and practices of filmmaking than Griersonian documentary.

This thesis emphasises that Grierson's conception of documentary was crucially instrumental and inseparably related to his interest in film as a means for civic education, propaganda and public relations in order to advance a specific conception of democratic government and conduct. Therefore, in this study documentary films by the NFU are discussed from a historical perspective in relation to a heterogeneous ensemble of material and ideational practices and the political economy from which NFU films emerged and acted upon, instead of trying to generally and ahistorically define what documentary is or how it comes into being.

From the perspective advanced here, one does not find the beginnings of documentary film in films by Robert Flaherty – particularly *Moana* (1926) – or in Grierson assigning it with “documentary value” in the same year.⁵¹ If one traces the etymology of the term “document”, which stems from the Latin verb *docere*, to teach, one hits upon the strategic reasoning inherent in Grierson's programme.⁵² Documentary was to teach implicitly through the furnishing of specific visions of the real that were based on a strategic teleological transcendence of the material surfaces that the camera could record in specific locations. Therefore, it can be argued that the beginnings of documentary film can rather be found, as

⁵⁰ Hohenberger, "Dokumentarfilmtheorie. Ein historischer Überblick über Ansätze und Probleme [Documentary Film Theory: A Historical Survey of Approaches and Problems]," 18-19.

⁵¹ John Grierson, "Moana," *New York Sun*, 8 February 1926.

⁵² See Winston for a discussion of the etymology of the term “document”. Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, 11.

a material practice, in World War I. Martin Loiperdinger has argued, "It would be advisable to view the term 'documentary' historically and restrict it to Grierson's concept of 'creative treatment of actuality' ... Such a view also emphasizes the historical affinity between documentary and propaganda."⁵³ The origins of a Griersonian dramatisation of fact, according to Loiperdinger, can be found during World War I, when

War events filmed by the camera are increasingly presented as visual evidence for statements implicitly conveyed to the audience and often explicitly expressed in the intertitles. This was a new development. The early nonfiction films before the First World War were distinctly descriptive by comparison.⁵⁴

Loiperdinger has argued that *The Battle of the Somme* (1916) should be regarded as one of the first documentary films, since it linked "dramatization with the representation of fact" in the sense that it used dramatising intertitles, that parts of the film were clearly enacted for the camera and could not have been shot during the battle, and that the film was structured so as to lead to a climax.⁵⁵ Such dramatisation was used to further the British war effort. That is, it can be argued that during World War I film became subject to the calculations of governmental power by projecting images that were strategically arranged – by using enacted sequences and dramatisation – to provide for an optimised vision of the real that would advance the conduct of war. As Ian Aitken has argued,

This film was the product of a sophisticated propaganda strategy, the essence of which was that films should seem objective and 'true' ... *The Battle of the Somme* was designed to stimulate enthusiasm for the war effort, and this imperative conditioned its representation of reality.⁵⁶

The lasting effects of film consumption therefore became of particular importance. Filmic visions were implicitly assigned with socio-political functions and came to be arranged to realise the future through their impact on and within audiences. Thus, in the words of Philip

⁵³ Martin Loiperdinger, "World War I Propaganda Films and the Birth of the Documentary," in *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Nonfiction Film*, ed. Nico De Klerk and Daan Hertogs (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), 26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁶ Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London: Routledge, 1992), 158.

Rosen, audiences became “a terrain to be organized, a terrain of struggle” for the production of a desirable future yet to be realised.⁵⁷

Additionally to the practices employed during World War I, one can trace the emergence of a programme for documentary film in Grierson’s writings, in which he developed his conception of documentary film as a certain programmatic approach that draws upon the specific qualities and potential of the cinematographic apparatus in the service of the field of propaganda, civic education and public relations. Documentary film came to be rationalised by Grierson in order to function as a governmental technique, not for warfare, but for “peacefare”, the concerted arrangement of conduct and improvement of societies during times of peace. An implicit question for Grierson was: Given the complexities and constant changes of modern life, the failures and problems of liberal democracy, and the general ignorance of “the average citizen”, how do knowledge and power need to operate, how do they need to function and be arranged, in order to secure peace, order, discipline and progress – in short, economic conduct and democratic government of citizens in order to efficiently and concertedly improve society as a whole? This question and Grierson’s suggested solutions are discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to Grierson’s mentor Walter Lippmann.

In this discussion it is argued that the notion that documentary film functions primarily as a “discourse of sobriety” by addressing and engaging rational faculties,⁵⁸ ignores Grierson’s demands that it was not primarily to work upon reason and consciousness directly, but upon that which remained, in Grierson’s terminology, “subconscious”. Its value for propaganda and civic education was that it could effectively shape populations in desired directions without them being aware of it, by directing and working upon the order and patterns by which audiences envisioned what is and should be real. Grierson’s programme never demanded that documentary film should render an empirical truth visible, derived from

⁵⁷ Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 77.

⁵⁸ Nichols has argued that “Fiction attends to unconscious desires and latent meanings. It operates where the id lives. Documentary, on the other hand, attends to social issues of which we are consciously aware. It operates where the reality-attentive ego and superego live”. Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 4. Renov has criticised Nichols’ argument that documentary largely operates in the realm of consciousness and as a “discourse of sobriety”: “It would be unwise to assume that only fiction films appeal to the viewer’s Imaginary ... A view of documentary which assumes too great a sobriety for nonfiction discourse will fail to comprehend the sources of nonfiction’s deep-seated appeal”, Renov, "Introduction. The Truth about Non-Fiction," 3.

disinterested observation or an encounter of actualities, but to project an optimised and functional “real” that was marked by a teleological transcendence of actualities in order to have visionary effects. In this sense, it is advantageous to describe Griersonian documentary film by the NFU less in terms of an *object* that can be perceived, but as *processing an objective*; that is to make audiences at once *subject to* and a *subject of* visions of the real.

According to Nichols, “The subjectivity John Grierson exhorted the documentarist to support was one of informed citizenship – an active, well-informed engagement with pressing issues such that progressive, responsible change could be accomplished by governments.”⁵⁹ Such statements about Grierson’s intentions are common, but it is argued in the following chapter that they tend to ignore Grierson’s specific understanding of the potential of film and his specific programme for how popular audiences were to be “informed” for active citizenship. If one takes into account Grierson’s aversion towards controversial filmmaking and his demands for recognisability, simplification, dramatisation, and effect through affect, a different outlook on his programme emerges, as well as on the subjectivities that documentary and certain “imaginative” public media in general were to further.

Considerations of Research Perspective and Method – Dispositive Analysis and the Concept of Governmentality

This study draws upon a qualitative analysis of archival primary material; secondary resources that relate to the NFU and the political economy in which it operated; open-ended unstructured interviews that were conducted primarily with former staff members of the NFU; and academic literature relating to (Griersonian) documentary film. In relation to the overall objective of this thesis, which is to trace and describe how documentary film came to be calculated and employed as a socio- and psycho-political technique to shape the future of New Zealand’s population through visions of the real, Foucault’s dispositive analysis as well as his concept of governmentality were found to be useful conceptual tools for this study.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 178.

⁶⁰ For an elaboration of his methods see, for instance, Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 326-48; ———, “Questions of Method,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, et al. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 73-86; ———, “The Order of Discourse,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 48-78; Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault’s Methods* (London:

Foucault broadly understood the concept of governmentality to refer to the “conduct of conduct”,⁶¹ that is, a historically specific way of strategically thinking about and aiming at governing the conduct within the political economy of liberal democracies.⁶² It is also “tied up with the emergence of the notion of population as the object and end of government”.⁶³ With the emergence of the modern nation state and the scientific techniques of statistics, population censuses and demographics, it became possible to measure, quantify, calculate and govern “the population” of a specific territory, confined by the geographical, technological and ideological boundaries of the nation state. However, beyond the concept of “the population”, in this thesis another concept is of crucial importance that was employed in reference to the problem of government, that of “the average citizen”. In the historical context under discussion, democratic citizenship became subject to problematisation in the face of modern complexities, economic urgencies and the various claims that the subjectivity of “average” or “ordinary citizens” was marked by a lack of certain capabilities and knowledge. Hence, in this study, the concepts of “the population” and that of “the citizen” are indivisibly interwoven in that both were significant objects and ends in attempts to calculate and improve government and economic conduct in liberal democracy.⁶⁴

Referring to Foucault’s notion of a “politics of truth”, the perspective advanced here engages with the “politics of the real” and the modes of “realisation” by which filmic visions of the real were produced, circulated and received. Ulrich Broeckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke have asserted that

Sage, 1999); Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 341.

⁶² See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault.*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter M. Miller (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 102-03. See also Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology*, 174-78.

⁶³ Tony Bennett, "Culture and Governmentality," in *Foucault, Cultural Studies and Governmentality*, ed. Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 58.

⁶⁴ In reference to these concerns additional concepts were frequently employed to rationalise and render complex and heterogeneous social phenomena governable. First, there was the concept of “the masses” and correlative terminology which usually referred to undifferentiated groups of people, distinguished from the concepts of “elites” and “authorities.” Second, there was a figure of thought in which individuals and collectives were referred to in reductive, simplifying schemata, particularly in the singular, as expressed through various concepts such as “the Māori” or “the New Zealander”.

Studies of governmentality open up an epistemological-political field that Foucault defined as 'politics of truth.' In contrast to the critique of ideology, they do not describe ideas or theories in terms of a true-false distinction and imply no opposition between power and knowledge. Rather, they investigate the discursive operations, speakers' positions, and institutional mechanisms through which truth claims are produced, and which power effects are tied to these truths. Studies of governmentality trace the contours of this productive power, which produces specific (and always selective) knowledge and in this way generates definitions of problems and fields of governmental intervention in the first place.⁶⁵

In other words, the study of governmentality allows focusing on a complex disposition of knowledge/power relations from which filmic visions of the real emerged and acted upon, advancing a specific assemblage of subjectivity and agency. In this sense, in the words of Mitchell Dean, governmentality in this thesis is broadly understood

as any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seek to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.⁶⁶

The concept of governmentality is valuable in that it cautions against seeing filmic visions as the result of intentions of self-determined filmmakers or politicians, or as being determined by the interests, ideologies and policies of "the State", regarded as a unified "power-bloc" from which power emanates. It suggests that the State itself consists of and draws upon heterogeneous forces, practices and knowledge by which government is thought about and exercised. Furthermore, it permits viewing the production of visions of what is and should be real through NFU films as indivisible from historical power/knowledge relations and the political economy in operation. Hence filmmakers should not be regarded as "outside" of government, but took an important function in its advancement. They simultaneously drew

⁶⁵ Ulrich Broeckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, "From Foucault's Lectures at the College de France to Studies of Governmentality: An Introduction," in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*, ed. Ulrich Broeckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12.

⁶⁶ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999), 11.

upon and shaped techniques, conventions and practices of film-making which implied specific ways of governing subjects throughout the production and exhibition processes, particularly before the camera, but also in front of the screen. At the same time, however, they were subject to a shifting configuration of technical, political, moral and institutional possibilities and limitations and hence not simply self-determined agents.

Foucault's concept of governmentality closely relates to a conceptual shift in his thought in the late 1970s, when he moved from the analysis of the regularities and orders of discourse to a focus on what he termed "dispositive". He thereby widened and shifted his enquiries to more explicitly include shifting material practices, techniques and formations – that which remained unsaid and went beyond discourse. Foucault broadly defined the dispositive concept in an interview, where he stated:

What I am trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements ... Thirdly, I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of – shall we say – formation which has its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population ... The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194. In the original French version of the interview Foucault uses the term "dispositif", which has been translated into English as "apparatus". Throughout this thesis, these terms are used synonymously. However, the usage of the term "apparatus" should not be identified with its rather ahistorical conception in apparatus/spectatorship theory.

In other words, according to Foucault, a dispositive designates a formation, or arrangement, at a given historical moment that consists of discursive as well as non-discursive elements and practices which imply knowledge/power relations that simultaneously condition and are conditioned by dispositives.

Gilles Deleuze has taken up Foucault's concept and argued that dispositives "are machines which make one see and speak ... Each apparatus has its way of structuring light, the way in which it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and the invisible" according to its own strategic dispositions.⁶⁸ Thus a dispositive renders things and events perceptible in specific ways, while others remain invisible, according to the given historical situation and its immanent possibilities and limitations of what can and should be rendered perceptible.

Giorgio Agamben has stated in his discussion of the dispositive that the Latin term *dispositio* is etymologically related to the Greek term *oikonomia*, which designated the proper management of the home.⁶⁹ In his argument the dispositive concept signifies "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviours, gestures, and thoughts of human beings".⁷⁰ Individuals acquire subjectivities through interactions with dispositives since, according to Agamben, dispositives put forth their own *ideal* subject.

At the same time, however, it needs to be taken into account that dispositives do not simply predetermine the formation of subjects; they form and limit possibilities by which certain "positivity" is formed and thus shape how individuals can act, feel, think and relate to themselves and others. The process of subjectification crucially involves the government of the self in which individuals shape and conduct their selves in reference to what is envisioned to be true and real, as well as what is envisioned to be desirable, appropriate and normal. Hence,

To become a subject always means actualizing certain subject-positions and dispensing with others; it means being addressed in a certain way as a subject, understanding oneself as a subject, and working on oneself in alignment with

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "What is a dispositive?," in *Michel Foucault Philosopher*, ed. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 160.

⁶⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 8-10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

this self-understanding ... Subjects are not merely effects of the exercise of power, but also possess self-will and agency ... Processes of subjectification are always tied to a social a priori: subjects can only understand themselves and act within a historical field of possible experiences ... They generate themselves performatively, but their performances are bound into orders of knowledge, lines of force, and power relations. Thus subjectification designates a potential for action, but always a form of adherence as well – to ideas, and to manners of articulation and recognition. Subject-positions empower individuals, while subjecting them at the same time.⁷¹

From this perspective, the concept of governmentality is concerned with economic conduct and the political economy as far as the term “economy” designates the appropriate order and management of people, things and processes that are to be shaped and advanced in a variety of ways with a variety of desired outcomes, by drawing on certain knowledge, architectures, strategies and techniques.⁷²

In the context of this thesis, then, the concept of governmentality serves as a tool to trace and describe a heterogeneous and shifting dispositive of visions of the real that emerged in response to a historical urgency. In the New Zealand context, this historical urgency referred to the problem of integrating, managing, and improving New Zealand’s heterogeneous population and enabling a specifically active citizenship, as well as furthering a specific movement of people, capital and commodities throughout the world. More specifically, examining the dispositive of filmic visions of the real and their modes of “realisation” enables the tracing and describing of the ways by which various agents and agencies sought to govern and shape the population as well as overseas audiences by using realist documentary film. Governmentality relates to the institutional architecture of the NFU and the purposes and desired effects that were attached to film production, the thoughts, techniques, strategies and practices of filmmakers, administrators and politicians. Such an enquiry into governmentality also needs to address what was given to vision and how certain events and subjects were filmed, framed, arranged, directed, and brought into a

⁷¹ Broeckling, Krasmann, and Lemke, "From Foucault's Lectures at the College de France to Studies of Governmentality: An Introduction," 14.

⁷² For an elaboration of the concepts of “economy” and “governmentality” in Foucault’s work see, for instance, Michel Foucault, "Governmentality."

filmic form. Further, the specific kind of knowledge and vision that was imparted to audiences, and the subjectivities, power relations and agency this implied need to be discussed, as well as the knowledge that was built up about the population and audiences in order to anticipate and engage their faculties of comprehension and recognition, and to satisfy certain expectations and desires. In other words, the concept of governmentality enables the discussion of modes and calculations of governing within a heterogeneous and shifting system of relations, while focusing on how film was to advance the government and economic functioning of the nation.

Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 addresses and discusses Grierson's programme of documentary film in relation to its purpose and function for democratic government and economic conduct. It is argued that scholarly enquiry so far has rarely focused on the educational/propagandistic rationale of documentary as it pertains to liberal democracies and the ways in which Griersonian documentary would "educate" audiences, and the techniques and strategies that it was meant to employ in order to efficiently achieve certain projected effects and ends. This chapter first addresses Walter Lippmann's programme for democratic government to which Grierson's documentary programme referred. Lippmann's reasoning and recommendations for the exercise of knowledge and power in liberal democracies is outlined and then Grierson's programme for documentary film is discussed, including how it set out to advance economic conduct and self-discipline, as well as the calculations, techniques, strategies and logistics that were to be employed in order to further this end.

Chapter 3 addresses early film production under the auspices of the New Zealand State that began on a regular basis in 1922 with the establishment of the first New Zealand State Publicity Office. It describes how film production increasingly moved from the production of attractive views primarily aimed at overseas audiences, to the production of visions of the real for domestic audiences. Particularly with the declaration of war on Nazi Germany by the New Zealand State administration, filmmaking required increased control and direction in order to cultivate a specific will and vision within the general population that would lead to an active and uniform support of and participation in the war. Film was to function as a means of wartime propaganda in specific ways and therefore the strategic calculation of

affect became increasingly important, while film production strategically moved beyond a simple observation of actual events. Furthermore, this chapter discusses some of the conditions, important events and considerations that lead to the establishment of the NFU in 1941, and how it became institutionalised as the film production wing of State publicity within the executive branch of State government. Grierson's visit to New Zealand in 1940 is also discussed, along with the reasoning and strategic calculation that was attached to film production. Finally, wartime film production by the NFU is examined, with a particular focus on documentaries.

Chapter 4 focuses on the readjustment of film production from the demands of warfare to those of "peacefare" after the war had ended and addresses both the changes and continuities in its organisation. The NFU continued to be organised directly within the realm of executive government, while the rationale for film production shifted from propaganda to civic education. Bureaucratic control and accountability of the NFU was increased, which was to ensure that it functioned as an effective instrument for government policy and State publicity during peacetime. In addition, this chapter discusses the case of Cecil Holmes who, suspended from the NFU in 1949, challenged the limits of what could be shown and said in films produced under the auspices of the State. Furthermore, specific films are discussed in light of how they set out to educate the population of New Zealand. The chapter then considers some of the ways in which workers were provided with an aura of dignity and worth in order to advance their functioning within the political economy.

Chapter 5 considers the reorganisation and readjustment of the NFU and film production when National was voted into State government in late 1949. Under National, it is argued, film production moved further away from the initial "educational spirit" and the ideological undertones of film production that had prevailed at the NFU until the late 1940s, becoming conceived of as a public relations technique. Even more than before, film was to be a means for affirmation and positive suggestion, which related to an increasingly narrow definition of how NFU film production could be capitalised on by the State. Additionally, this chapter discusses promotional film production for overseas audiences, which became of increasing importance after State publicity was reorganised. Moreover, it describes the strategic projection of a vision of Māori, who were rendered visible as successfully modernising and

integrating, while nevertheless remaining maladjusted in certain respects, and who were also depicted as exotic features of New Zealand for overseas promotion.

Chapter 6 briefly summarises the main arguments made in the preceding chapters with a focus on the “politics of the real” of NFU documentary film. It is argued that Griersonian documentary film as made by the NFU, in distinction from earlier New Zealand film, not only provided a series of views to be looked at by audiences, but crucially set out to render the subjective, interpretative and “visionary” aspect of vision disposable and hence governable. How popular audiences envisioned what is and should be real became subject to the calculations of institutional power and thus certain perspectives, values, norms and desires were to be encoded into the films in order to achieve certain effects. The interpretative process of envisioning was thereby appropriated by the filmic documentary apparatus which strategically patterned and “ordered” a vision of what was real, true, normal and desirable. It is a vision that had been unanchored from an embodied observer and specific coordinates of time and space as well as become subject to the homogenising and normalising strategies of institutional power. Hence, vision became increasingly abstract and generalised, unable to distinguish between what is material and metaphysical, authentic and inauthentic, genuine and non-genuine. The thesis concludes that this is one of the important legacies of the Griersonian documentary programme, and one which continues to be important for the strategic cultivation of a vision of what is and what should be real.

2. The Griersonian Programme for Documentary Film and Democratic Government

Introduction

As argued in chapter 1, John Grierson's programme for documentary film needs to be considered in relation to its projected function in the shaping of appropriate democratic government and economic conduct within liberal representative democracies through the means of civic education, propaganda and public relations. Grierson himself was active in this field throughout his career, for instance as a promoter of the Empire at the Empire Marketing Board, as Film Advisor for the Imperial Relations Trust, or in his work for the General Post Office and the Shell corporation. The techniques of propaganda, civic education and public relations implied a calculated and strategic relationship between "communicants", in which the acts of mediation and the ways in which "the real" came to be envisioned were to be efficient and effective in relation to a set of more or less clearly defined purposes. What should be real was not to be arrived at through discourse and reflection – what was to become real was already known and needed to be realised by and within the addressee.¹ Attempts at shaping the population ideally needed to be "basically true", however, the purpose justified the means and if an invention or "creative treatment" was useful to augment affect and effect, this was regarded as legitimate, even desirable.²

By now, a large body of scholarly work has been published on Grierson, the British Documentary Movement, and the films it produced. However, relatively little attention has been given to the specific ways in which documentary film took on a political and pedagogic function within liberal democracy. While Grierson's speeches and writings may seem inconsistent, often uncertain or even contradictory,³ this may be partially due to the strategy of address that he employed. He reflected on his own role in a letter to Stephen Tallents:

¹ See the argument of Thymian Bussemer in relation to propaganda. Thymian Bussemer, *Propaganda. Konzepte und Theorien* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), 30-31.

² See, for instance, Grierson's remarks about the invention of news in the Hearst Press, which he regarded as legitimate "so long as the invention made a useful point". John Grierson, "The Shift of Power in Education," 4.19.17, John Grierson Archive.

³ See Ian Lockerbie, "Introduction," in *Eyes of Democracy*, ed. Ian Lockerbie (Stirling: The John Grierson Archive, 1990), 1-21.

To engage the interest of so many different forces towards a single end one has, I fear, to talk very various languages: of progressive education, political management, public relations, commercial film interests, art and whatnot. I try to believe it all really sums up, as I say, to one great public information force and something the democratic world cannot do without.⁴

Nevertheless, it is possible to trace certain patterns in Grierson's thought that point out how documentary would need to function and operate in order to shape the future. In reference to this concern, one should be careful when generally associating Grierson's programme with "the diffusion of social knowledge" from an "Enlightenment standpoint".⁵ It was a very specific kind of "enlightenment" that was at stake.

Brian Winston has recently categorically claimed that "The entire enterprise [of Griersonian documentary] was actually not about reception at all, much less education. It was about something else – it was about film."⁶ This statement appears to ignore Grierson's strategy of education/propaganda, two terms that he frequently used interchangeably. Winston's claim also fails to acknowledge the envisioned socio- and psycho-political functions of documentary that Grierson emphasised towards the late 1930s when he moved from a concern with means – documentary education – to ends, that is, how his approach to propaganda and education could improve democratic society.⁷ If the "entire enterprise" was not about education, how does Winston explain, for example, Grierson's frequent writings and speeches at the intersection of education and propaganda, such as the ones reprinted in *Grierson on Documentary*, or Grierson's only book project, entitled *Eyes of Democracy*?⁸ They certainly cannot be simply reduced to the objective of filmmaking.⁹ Winston seems focused on the notion that the objective of filmic education necessarily refers to the content of the films, a didactic structure and an explicit message. With his claim, Winston at once

⁴ John Grierson to Stephen Tallents, letter, 24 March 1940, 4.24.66, John Grierson Archive.

⁵ Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 249.

⁶ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary. Grierson and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 66.

⁷ See Lockerbie, "Introduction," 7-8.

⁸ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); ———, *Eyes of Democracy*. Edited by Ian Lockerbie. Stirling: The John Grierson Archive, 1990.

⁹ Cf. Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary. Grierson and Beyond*, 64-67.

does away with the governmental purpose of Griersonian documentary film production, and its role for civic education.

It needs to be taken into account that Grierson's programme was based less on the notion of a mediation or teaching of explicit, rational knowledge, but more on implicit, "subconscious" and affective knowledge. Rather than disseminating facts or critically reflecting upon certain issues in society, documentary should instead provide "positive" and productive imagery, focusing on the forms and patterns by which the vision of audiences could be ordered and set into motion.¹⁰ Winston is therefore right to claim that Griersonian documentary, at least in the New Zealand context, failed to produce films that critically engaged with and reflected upon social issues and "effectively precluded the opportunity for analysis exactly in favour of emotionalism and aesthetic pleasure". Winston concludes that such an endeavour implied a "running from social meaning".¹¹ If one takes a closer look at Grierson's thoughts on the educational potential of documentary, however, then one realises that documentary's projected function was little concerned with social meaning, in the sense of a rational or conscious knowledge conveyed through the content of films. As Grierson himself stated in *Eyes of Democracy*, "It is indeed not the [filmic] subject that matters, but the 'pattern of thought and feeling' with which it is associated."¹²

With this in mind, one may ask and discern how Grierson's documentary programme envisioned political subjects and citizenship in relation to the existing political economy. This chapter argues that such an examination shows that documentary film's function, within the New Zealand context, was to help realise a corporatist vision of New Zealand and to produce a harmonised, disciplined and docile population. The population would actively participate in the daily processes and conduct of society as economic agents, family members, members of a race, or responsible citizens of New Zealand. However, films were not to be made to "give a critical account of contemporary reality, nor cultivate the critical faculties of the spectator".¹³ They would not open up discourse towards audiences, nor function as a means to involve the general population in political decision making and the rational exercise of government.

¹⁰ See John Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 33.

¹¹ Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, 154.

¹² Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 78-79.

¹³ Ian Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 39.

These processes were, in the understanding of Grierson and his mentor Walter Lippmann, a task for a variety of suitably trained specialists, experts, administrators and the elected representatives of the population that were to govern based on “objective” scientific information and standards of procedure. Elites and experts possessed the necessary knowledge, skill and education which “John Citizen”¹⁴ tended to lack. Therefore, documentary did not need to analyse existing conditions of the political economy – and Grierson rejected more explicitly political, controversial and critical content in documentaries – but instead alter, arrange and augment the ways by which subjectivities could be shaped through the cultivation of specific patterns of envisioning, thus acting upon the future through the agency of the self. This would lead to increased appropriate self-regulation of individuals and thus it would be possible for authority in society to be maintained while its forms were “progressively” altered.¹⁵

Grierson’s political allegiances and thought have been subject to debate and he has been characterised as a neo-conservative “authoritarian with totalitarian tendencies”.¹⁶ On the other hand, he has been interpreted as a social democrat who wanted a “participant healthy harmonious social structure”, which implied “an extension of democracy” through “an inspirational and imaginative approach to public relations”.¹⁷ Rather than discussing Grierson’s thought in terms of political ascriptions, or by pointing out its contradictions and flaws, this chapter examines Grierson’s documentary programme by focusing on the techniques and strategies that were to be employed for the improvement of economic conduct and democratic government, and on how they were legitimised.

¹⁴ Grierson sometimes used this term to refer to the “ordinary” or “average” citizen. See, for instance, John Grierson, “Propaganda and Education,” in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 149.

¹⁵ Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 57.

¹⁶ Peter Morris, “Re-Thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson,” in *History On/And/In Film*, ed. Tom O’Regan and Brian Shoesmith (Perth: History and Film Association of Australia, 1987), 30.

¹⁷ Lockerbie, “Introduction,” 13-14.

Walter Lippmann and “Stereotyped Vision”

Regarding Grierson’s programme for documentary film and the use of public media in general, it is important to first trace one of the defining influences on his formulation of the social(ising) purpose and agency of documentary film, Walter Lippmann. As Grierson frequently claimed,

The idea of documentary in its present form came originally not from the film people at all, but from the Political Science school in Chicago University round about the early twenties. It came because some of us noted Mr. Lippmann’s argument closely and set ourselves to study what, constructively, we could do to fill the gap in educational practice which he demonstrated.¹⁸

While studying the impact of public media in the shaping of public opinion at the University of Chicago in the 1920s, Grierson had become acquainted with Lippmann’s diagnosis of the problems of modern liberal democracy and how these could be solved. In *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* Lippmann had argued that the “average citizen” was ill-equipped for the realities of large, complex democratic nation-states, particularly since s/he was biased and therefore usually could not develop sufficiently informed and accurate opinions based on reasoned and comprehensive factual knowledge. For Lippmann, leaders and experts on the other hand were “in actual contact with some crucial aspect of that larger environment” and hence better qualified to direct society.¹⁹

Drawing upon psychology and psychoanalysis, Lippmann argued that the vision of what is real was shaped through a “pseudo-environment” that allowed one to make sense of the world. The crucial problem of citizens in democratic government was, in the words of Michael Curtis, that

People take as facts not what is, but what they perceive to be facts, a counterfeit of reality or a ‘pseudo-environment’. Distortion arises not only from emotional factors and ego needs, but also from stereotypes, the images we have of people

¹⁸ Grierson, “Propaganda and Education,” 150-51.

¹⁹ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 226.

and things. For the most part, 'we do not first see, and then define – we define first and then see'.²⁰

Hence, what counted for Lippmann and subsequently Grierson in reference to the strategic exercise of power through public media was not so much what *is*, but how the world is *perceived* to be, how it is envisioned through, in Lippmann's words, "the pictures inside our heads" that encode a "stereotyped vision".²¹ Such a vision tended to be the result of a false classification and abstraction from assumedly simply given facts. In other words, visions of the real were not based on objective observation and rational reflection so much as biased perception, which was subjective, and tended to distort and falsify an external objectively measurable world. Through preconceived stereotypes, images, symbols and moral codes this pseudo-environment largely predetermined the interpretation of sense data, and therefore how the world was imagined to be. Reason and actions were based on and resulted from such a stereotyped vision which was a crucial precondition for the active shaping of reality through the agency of the envisioning subject. Therefore, Lippmann argued that one solution to the problems of democratic government lay in having everyone

act more and more on a realistic picture of the invisible world, and that we shall develop more and more men who are expert in keeping these pictures realistic. Outside the rather narrow range of our own possible attention, *social control depends upon devised standards of living* and methods of audit by which the acts of public officials and industrial directors are measured ... We can steadily increase our real control over these acts by insisting that all of them shall be plainly recorded, and their results objectively measured.²²

State government and industry needed to be accountable and base their decisions and exercise of power on the knowledge provided by a variety of experts, including statisticians, accountants, engineers, managers, auditors and scientists who employed scientific methods in the gathering of objectively measured information upon which decisions about the direction society should take could then be based. At the same time, "the theory of the omniscient citizen" for democratic government had to be abandoned, while

²⁰ Michael Curtis in *Ibid.*, Introduction, xvi.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

²² *Ibid.*, 314. Emphasis added.

independent intelligence agencies and information services were to be established, allowing for the production of scientific knowledge and “the coordination of decision by comparable record and analysis”.²³ These could also monitor and provide objective information for public media:

For the troubles of the press, like the troubles of representative government, be it territorial or functional, like the troubles of industry, be it capitalist, cooperative, or communist, go back to a common source: to the failure of self-governing people to transcend their casual experience and their prejudice.²⁴

The solution to this problem could be found in “inventing, creating, and organizing a machinery of knowledge” that provided “insiders” with scientific information that could produce a “reliable picture of the world” that then needed to be condensed and arranged into easily assimilable forms of mediation for “outsiders”.²⁵ “Public opinion” could then be shaped by taking hold of the non-conscious framework (the “pseudo-environment”) according to which people envisioned the world and governed their selves and others into the future. Photography had particular powers in this respect, since, according to Lippmann,

Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination to-day, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable. Any description in words, or even any inert picture, requires an effort of memory before a picture exists in the mind. But on the screen the whole process of observing, describing, reporting, and then imagining, has been accomplished for you.²⁶

That is, pictures provided an impression of the real in easily assimilable ways and seemed to be free from human interference and interest; and they were already an interpretation of reality. Later, in *Public Opinion*, Lippmann related the power of photographs to the processes of identification and empathy:

²³ Ibid., 364.

²⁴ Ibid., 364-65.

²⁵ Ibid., 365.

²⁶ Ibid., 92.

Pictures have always been the surest way of conveying an ideal, and next in order, words that call up pictures in memory. But the idea conveyed is not fully our own until we have identified ourselves with some aspect of the picture. The identification, or what Vernon Lee has called empathy, may be almost infinitely subtle and symbolic. The mimicry may be performed without our being aware of it.²⁷

Economic conduct could thus be advanced through continuous publicity that should not however strive to “objectively” inform all citizens. Instead, popular representation had to rely on clear demarcations and evaluations of content. According to Lippmann, “The audience must have something to do, and the contemplation of the true, the good and the beautiful is not something to do. In order not to sit inertly in the presence of the picture ... *the audience must be exercised by the image.*”²⁸ The task of publicity as a means for appropriate education for citizenship should be to provide the general population “with its own usable canons of judgement”,²⁹ and therefore it was crucial to at once appeal to and shape non-conscious processes of vision and its inherent values, moral codes, classifications and identifications. As Lippmann wrote in *The Phantom Public*, “Since the general opinions of large numbers of persons are almost certain to be a vague and confusing medley, action cannot be taken until these opinions have been factored down, canalized, compressed and made uniform.” This process relied on the “making of the general will out of a multitude of general wishes”, which

consists essentially in the use of symbols which assemble the emotions after they have been detached from their ideas. Because feelings are much less specific than ideas, and yet more poignant, the leader is able to make a homogeneous will out of a heterogeneous mass of desires. *The process, therefore, by which general opinions are brought to cooperation consists of an intensification of feeling and a degradation of significance.* Before a mass of general opinions can eventuate in executive action, the choice is narrowed down to a few alternatives. The victorious alternative is executed not by the mass but by individuals in control of its energy ... For great masses of people, though each of them may

²⁷ Ibid., 162-63.

²⁸ Ibid., 163. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1925), 151.

have more or less distinct views, must when they act converge to an identical result. And *the more complex the collection of men the more ambiguous must be the unity and the simpler the common ideas.*³⁰

Lippmann's ideas about the exercise of knowledge and power in democratic society were based on a belief in the "scientific method" and the objective measurability and governability of the world through a variety of experts, technicians and administrators that were to act not on behalf of vested interests, but produced, processed and based their actions on scientific and objective knowledge. Hence, it was possible to separate subjectivity and power from knowledge. Thus power was not to be centred in a group of static and permanent authorities, but would be distributed and decentralised across specific fields of experts. In addition, knowledge and power were to function through using, appealing to and shaping certain stereotypes, symbols, imagery and the processes of identification and empathy for "the rank and file".³¹ Thereby a certain uniformity of will could be achieved and citizens would be enabled to question specific opinions of experts and authorities and bring to light potential vested interests, resulting in victory for the best and most accurate ideas and opinions. Hence, the function of public discourse was reduced to controlling vested interests and to advance a "uniformity of will", and would not function as a space for political decision making processes and deliberation.

Much of Lippmann's programme can be found in Grierson's writings and speeches, although often less succinctly expressed and often framed in idealistic and Christian terminology rather than in the language of scientific rationalism. Nevertheless, their demands for the use and function of popular media are in effect very similar – they were to improve the conduct of democratic society in specific ways. Their writings share a belief in the inadequacy of the general population in relation to the problems faced by liberal democratic governments. Grierson's programme thus set out to "fill the gap in educational practice" that Lippmann had diagnosed.

³⁰ Ibid., 47-48. Emphasis added.

³¹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 234.

Techniques and Strategies of Documentary Film and Public Media

Right from the beginning of Grierson's self-conscious inception of a programme for documentary film, documentary was projected to be functional and effective, able to "command, and cumulatively command" whole populations. Therefore Grierson thought that "the 'hang-over' effect of a film is everything".³² It had to serve certain ends by disciplining populations in the active realisation of "the common good" of society and humanity at large, as well as the "necessities" of modernity. Hence, Grierson's notion of art related to its purposive function as a democratic "weapon" that provided direction and vision for a better future yet to be realised:

If you must know the truth of art, think not of art itself but of will-power. Will-power, we know, is the strong stuff in the hearts of men that makes them fight. Will-power is the hope and the vision and the faith that makes them think that something is worth fighting for ... In a society like ours ... art is not a mirror but a hammer. *It is a weapon in our hands to see and to say what is right and good and beautiful and hammer it out as the mold and pattern of men's actions.*³³

In order to point out the strategies and techniques that Grierson believed should be employed in the production of documentary film and in public media in general, it is necessary to provide an examination of his programmatic writings and speeches with particular reference to the late 1930s and the 1940s. In these, he increasingly focused on questions of democratic civic education, propaganda and public relations and the role that "mass media" in general – and documentary film in particular – could and should play for that purpose. That is, he came to promote a general and "total" approach to public education through public media. Such a shift in focus is expressed in Basil Wright's claim from 1947 that documentary film is "not this or that type of film, but simply a method of approach to public information".³⁴

In *First Principles of Documentary*, originally published in *Cinema Quarterly* between 1932 and 1934, Grierson distinguished documentary from other types of film in that it took actual events in the life-world as its reference, as opposed to fiction film which, according to

³² Grierson, "The E.M.B. Film Unit," 48.

³³ Grierson, quoted in Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 7. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Basil Wright, "Documentary Today," *The Penguin Film Review*, no. 2 (1947).

Grierson, invented and staged what was represented.³⁵ He further argued that the newsreel, the magazine item, travelogues and lecture films were formally limited and should therefore not be called documentaries. Given that they only described and/or stated their themes, they lacked what he suggested were the defining techniques for documentary film: to reveal, to dramatise, to interpret the subject matter taken from the actual and empirically observable world and recorded on location (as opposed to a studio setting).³⁶

Furthermore, Grierson made a distinction between what he called “romantic documentary” and “realist documentary”. He dismissed the former, which he saw as sentimental and escapist, evading social responsibility by avoiding dealing with the perceived urgencies and problems of the modern world. Such films, according to Grierson, lacked a teleological character, as they did not apply ends to their observation; they did not persuade in the name of a predetermined intention that took the perceived urgencies and problems of the present as their reference, and instead employed an aesthetic form that served its own ends. Grierson wrote later that “documentary was from the beginning ... an anti-aesthetic movement”. Nevertheless, it “had always the good sense to use the aesthetes ... We [the Documentary Film Movement] were concerned not with the category of ‘purposiveness without purpose’ but with that other category beyond which used to be called teleological.”³⁷

Another concept that Grierson used in order to legitimise and promote realist documentary was the metaphysical notion of “the real”, which he distinguished from the term “actual”.³⁸ According to Ian Aitken, by “the real” Grierson did not refer to the material or physical per se, but to “a complex of generative historical forces (both concrete and abstract), and a universal morality”.³⁹ It was a notion that Grierson, according to Aitken, largely derived from the philosophical strand of Absolute Idealism and in particular the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Aitken states that

³⁵ Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary," 35-46.

³⁶ However, Grierson did not adhere to his own demands as his own film *Drifters* (1929) demonstrates. In it, he made use of studio reconstructions and further “creative” techniques. See, for instance, Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Non-Fiction Film and Television* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 37.

³⁷ Grierson, "The Documentary Idea: 1942," 112.

³⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Grierson’s notions of “the actual” and “the real” and the influence of idealist philosophy on his thought see Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, 60-64 and 184-95; ———, *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, 35-44.

³⁹ Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, 60.

Absolute Idealists argued that 'ultimate reality' was neither empirical nor material, but essentially spiritual in nature. They argued that there was only one ultimately real thing: the Absolute, and that phenomenal reality was a contradictory and fragmentary representation of the Absolute ... Individual perfection lay in coming to an understanding of the underlying unity, which existed beyond the empirical.⁴⁰

This monist and metaphysical totality had to be revealed by means of interpretation, since "The only reality which counts in the end is the interpretation which is profound."⁴¹ The "actual" referred to the material surface aspects of the empirically observable material world, which could be recorded by the camera. Through a creative and dramatising interpretation of actuality, it would be possible to reveal the unity and generative forces of society. This a priori totality could not be grasped by the rational intellect, but by intuition, and had to be revealed by interpretative techniques that provided for the "long-term persuasive power of aesthetic forms as distinguished from the short-term effect of mere publicity and propaganda".⁴² Grierson thereby politicised the aesthetics and form of film as a means to shape conduct beyond the content and explicit message of films in order to "realise" a supposedly given metaphysical and universal telos towards which societies moved.

However, while documentary film had to go beyond the accumulation of facts, it ideally had to remain somehow faithful to the actual. Through editing, single shots could be selected and arranged into a filmic form, and hence be made to reveal the given but invisible universal "truth". This "truth" needed to be made cinematically perceptible for popular audiences by creative, formative editing techniques that interpreted its material in relation to the metaphysical determinant of social existence:

You do not point a camera at the world and call it 'documentary'. You tell a story to illuminate a theme by images, much in the way that poetry works. Imagery

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁴¹ Grierson, quoted in Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, 76.

⁴² Grierson, "Documentary: A World Perspective," 205.

and movement. And remember, there is no such thing as truth until you have made it into a form. *Truth is an interpretation, a perception.*⁴³

Hence, Grierson demanded that documentary film – as well as other “imaginative media” – should “clarify, synthesize, simplify, popularize and be spiritual”.⁴⁴

Grierson outlined further techniques that would advance documentary’s telos. In his programme it is not only, as Winston has argued, “the fictionalising quality of narrative – ‘dramatic form’ – that is the distinguishing mark of documentary” in relation to other so-called non-fiction films.⁴⁵ Grierson also demanded that documentary “must master its material on the spot, and come in intimacy to ordering it”.⁴⁶ In other words, it was not just a question of dramatised narrative and form, but the shooting on location itself had to be “mastered” and “ordered” through an “intimate” approach. Thereby, a teleological organisation of film material could be facilitated from the beginning of film making, not only when shots were edited into a discursive arrangement. In this sense, teleological ordering had to begin before shots were arranged in order to produce a dramatic film, and this ordering had to be done “in intimacy”, that is, by having a certain strategic relationship in operation between filmmakers, the camera and the subjects to be filmed which decreased “distance” and increased affection, trust and rapport.

Furthermore, documentary film had to make positive and affirmative representations of social processes in order “to impart to people a positive desire to expand the scope of their activities” and to “inspire their total psychological participation”.⁴⁷ Therefore, focusing merely on narrative structure and dramatising techniques employed in the production of documentary film does not provide a sufficient description of Grierson’s documentary programme. The whole process of documentary film production had to be controlled and mastered right from the beginning, in order for the films to be directed towards a positive “revelation of the real” in a functional and directive way.

Another strategy of documentary film for Grierson was to promote certain universal humanitarian values. He frequently associated documentary film production with the

⁴³ Grierson, quoted in Gary Evans, *John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Films* (Montréal: XYZ Pub., 2005), 32. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Grierson, quoted in *ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁵ Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, 103.

⁴⁶ Grierson, “First Principles of Documentary,” 38.

⁴⁷ Grierson, quoted in Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence*, 183.

Christian task of striving for “revelation, to inspire faith. Cinema is our pulpit”.⁴⁸ On another occasion he said that he would “sooner have an educational system based on the Church and on Christian virtues than a national educational system that prefers knowledge to faith”.⁴⁹ Education had to be reformed so that it would become synonymous with propaganda, the propagation of faith. Rather than seeking “to guide the spectator into an understanding, cum acceptance, of the status quo”,⁵⁰ Grierson’s programme sought to promote progressive change of the status quo through reform so that society would move towards its own destiny. However, what were mainly to be “re-formed” were popular film audiences. While popular audiences and society at large had to be re-formed; artists, including documentary filmmakers, had to work within what he had termed “the general sanction” that imposed

a clear limit on the creative artist working within the public service, for, obviously, the degree of general sanction does not easily allow of forthright discussions on such highly controversial problems as, say, America’s record with the Negroes in the South, or Britain’s record with the Indians in the East. The creative worker must not, however, simply denounce this limitation and dissociate himself from government service. If he is a practical operator and a practical reformer he will take the situation for what it is and do his utmost within the limitations set, and this is one of the disciplines which the creative artist must learn in this particular period of society.⁵¹

What Grierson in effect demanded was that artists working within the public service had to “operate under self-censorship”,⁵² thereby avoiding potential controversy. Documentary filmmakers had to discipline their conduct with regard to the institutionally given possibilities and limitations of representation and projection. Hence, the documentary programme was to serve and facilitate an abstract and general notion of “the common good” as well as universal values and morals by transcending existing power relations within society, while filmmakers and other artists had to remain within the given institutional

⁴⁸ Grierson, quoted in Evans, *John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Films*, 36.

⁴⁹ Grierson, quoted in *ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁰ Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, 99. Cf. also Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Non-Fiction Film and Television*, 35.

⁵¹ Grierson, “The Challenge of Peace,” 172.

⁵² Grierson, quoted in Evans, *John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Films*, 92.

arrangement of what could and could not be envisioned through film. The techniques employed in documentary film derived their legitimacy and teleological purpose from an a priori transcendental and metaphysical ideal totality, while remaining and operating within specific historical power relations. The question then arises of how such a documentary programme is related to Grierson's conception of civic education, propaganda and democratic government.

Civic Education becomes Propaganda

In this section, Grierson's notions of propaganda and civic education are discussed, as well as their projected function within democratic societies. It needs to be emphasised that Grierson did not always see these distinct areas as one and the same, as some of Grierson's statements seem to imply: "Simply put, *propaganda is education*".⁵³ A closer look at Grierson's programmatic outlines shows that these concepts became synonymous as his programme evolved, becoming interchangeable once what he regarded as an "outdated" concept of education, based on the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment, was given up. According to Grierson, propaganda had to be reinterpreted in reference to the problems and necessities of complex modern democratic societies, where it was to become synonymous with education: "It is possible to appreciate that even the once-haunted concept of propaganda may have a democratic interpretation, and that its democratic interpretation makes propaganda and education one."⁵⁴ Propaganda was even more necessary for democratic societies than totalitarian and authoritarian states since the

individual trained in a liberal regime demands automatically that he be *persuaded* to his sacrifice. It may sound exasperating but he demands as of right – of human right – that he come in only of his own free will. All this points to the fact that instead of propaganda being less necessary in a democracy, it is more necessary. In the authoritarian state you have powers of compulsion and powers of repression, physical and mental, which in part at least take the place of persuasion. Not so in a democracy. It is your democrat who most needs and demands guidance from his leaders. It is the democratic leader who must give it.

⁵³ Grierson, quoted in *ibid.*, 35. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴ Grierson, "Propaganda and Education," 155.

If only for the sake of quick decision and common action, it is democracy for which propaganda is the more urgent necessity.⁵⁵

Grierson argued in *Education and Total Effort* in 1941 that the Enlightenment conception of education, which held as its ideal the rational and informed citizen, needed to be superseded by a new form of civic education that “enlightened” the population in different ways. In other words, in Grierson’s view,

[The] false assumption is the mystical democratic assumption that the citizen can be so taught to understand what is going on about him that he and his fellows in the mass can, through the electoral and parliamentary process, give an educated and rational guidance to the conduct of the state ... We say quite precisely that education has set itself an impossible task and therefore a wrong task ... If the so-called voice of the people – for all the efforts of education – does not know what it is talking about, what is the citizens’ actual state in the welter of events that surround him?⁵⁶

Therefore, democratic government needed a body of authorities, an institutional order and scientific procedures by which the future course of society could be directed along progressive lines in a representative democratic society. Grierson insisted that

The elites should act on behalf of the citizens, whose views they are obliged to reflect. If governments and industry have taken over the essence of the educational process in the name of propaganda, to stay honest, they have a moral obligation to share this power with professional educators and constitutional authorities.⁵⁷

Formal and constitutional power was to be shared between State governments, the industry, professional educators and constitutional authorities, not with the “ordinary citizen”. S/he was to be represented by an ensemble of authorities that did not have to follow the views and wishes of citizens, but to reflect and direct them. However, at the same time, government was to be internalised and exercised *within* citizens through the production of a “free will”. In other words, the calculation and rational exercise of

⁵⁵ Grierson, "The Nature of Propaganda," 108-09. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ Grierson, "Education and Total Effort," 134.

⁵⁷ Grierson, quoted in Evans, *John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Films*, 75-76.

government was to remain external, exercised through the co-ordinated efforts of an ensemble of experts and authorities that drew upon and fostered scientific procedures and universal values, while at the same time government, in the form of appropriate self-discipline and conduct, was to be internalised within the general population through its visions of the real.

Civic education was thus a strategy by which “men are fitted to serve their generation and bring it into the terms of order”⁵⁸ and democratic government was to function through

the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured. Since the needs of the State come first, understanding of these needs comes first in education. If the operation of controls is necessary for war or peace, understanding of these controls is a necessary part of education. Since co-operative and active citizenship have become more important to the State than amateur judgements on matters beyond the general citizen’s sphere of understanding, education must in part abandon the classroom and debating society and operate in terms of co-operative and active citizenship ... Education has to give far more direct leadership and far less opportunity for the promiscuous exercise of mental and emotional interests.⁵⁹

Although “the machinery” could be misused by individuals working within the State administration, the institutional order and regulations of the State were beyond doubt and critique since “the State itself was the highest level of social organization” that had to be “protected from radical change”.⁶⁰ As Aitken observed, for Grierson

corporate institutions, and, in particular, the State, were of greater intrinsic value than smaller, unassimilated and unassociated institutions. These ideas amounted to a *corporatist conception of society*, in which individual and social phenomena were perceived as being integrated, at different levels, within the social totality.⁶¹

Further, since the role of the State in the management and advancement of the population had profoundly increased, it needed information services to “explain its specific schemes of

⁵⁸ Grierson, "Education and the New Order," 122.

⁵⁹ Grierson, "Education and Total Effort," 139.

⁶⁰ Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, 36-37.

⁶¹ Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, 189. Emphasis added.

social control and management” and the means for “the constructive ‘education’ of public opinion”.⁶² Thus, “the disciplinary forms of the State” could be internalised and become “an essential way to ‘self’ expression”.⁶³

The following excerpt from Grierson’s paper *The Nature of Propaganda* (1942) provides a condensed overview of what Grierson meant by propaganda and how it could become synonymous with civic education:

Education has always seemed to us to ask too much from people ... We believe that education has concentrated so much on people knowing things that it has not sufficiently taught them to feel things. It has given them facts but has not sufficiently given them faith ... We believe that education ... has left men out in the bush without an emotional roadmap to guide them ... If you recall the origin of the word propaganda, you will remember that it was first associated with the defence of a faith and a concept of civilization. Propaganda first appeared in the description of the Catholic office – *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* – which was to preach and maintain the faith. Man does not live by bread alone, nor the citizen by mind alone. He is a man with vanities to be appealed to, a native pride to be encouraged ... So we may usefully add a new dramatic factor to public education – an uplifting factor which associates knowledge with pride and private effort with a sense of public purpose. We can, by propaganda, widen the horizons of the schoolroom and give to every individual, each in his place and work, a living conception of the community which he has the privilege to serve. We can take this imagination beyond the boundaries of his community to discover the destiny of his country. We can light up his life with a sense of active citizenship. *We can give him a sense of greater reality in the present and a vision for the future.* And, so doing, we can make the life of the citizen more ardent and satisfactory to himself. We can, in short, give him a *leadership of the imagination* which our democratic education has so far lacked. We can do it by radio and film

⁶² Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 51.

and a half a dozen other imaginative media; but mostly, I hope, we shall do it by encouraging men to work and fight and serve in common for the public good.⁶⁴

What first becomes apparent in this excerpt is that Grierson's programme favoured a concept of popular civic education that preferred faith and belief to rational knowledge and critical reflection. Second, a specific form of active citizenship was to be encouraged that served "the public good". Third, citizens should be "activated" by giving them "a leadership" of faith, vision, imagination and pride; in short, an "emotional roadmap". Fourth, not only documentary should serve this educational end, but a complex ensemble of "radio and film and a half a dozen other imaginative media". Fifth, such education should provide the citizen with a "vision for the future" that relates to "the destiny of his country". What was crucial for Grierson's education/propaganda programme was that it would not take hold of the consciousness of the population directly, nor did he want it to serve ideology or politics in a narrower sense.⁶⁵ Documentary would not operate in the service of one particular ideology or political party. It had to serve a vision that went beyond particularistic interests in order to have "the community operating as a single, integrated and unified force".⁶⁶ Thus, documentary film had to work upon basic, non-rational wants and desires that were regarded universal. Grierson argued,

The masses may be confused in their minds, but they are not confused in their feelings ... It is on this we can count and it is on this we can work. We can work, too, on the fact that all men everywhere of every colour and creed are alike in the essentials of their interest. If we educators would only get off the sky and down to earth, we would realize that the people everywhere are not full of differences, but full of similarities, and, in fact, have the same basic wants and desires.⁶⁷

He wanted, as he argued repeatedly, to arrange the "modes", "patterns", "manners", "ways", "attitudes", "habits" and "roadmaps" by which "people everywhere" could organise and associate their knowledge and take action in the world for "the common good", based on a vision that was necessary for the achievement of this end.

⁶⁴ Grierson, "The Nature of Propaganda," 109-10. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵ See Grierson in the Preface to Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 12.

⁶⁶ Grierson, "Propaganda and Education," 144.

⁶⁷ Grierson, "The Library in an International World," 161.

This had to be achieved by a technique that not only favoured positive, functional representations, but also had to be subtle and focus on ordinary things as opposed to the extraordinary and spectacular appeal of propaganda in totalitarian states. Therefore, democratic education/propaganda and thus documentary film had to be “concerned with a multitude of ordinary things”, because

The very secret of them is their ordinariness. We are led inevitably to the conclusion that if such simple human elements are to be made the basis of loyalty, then we must learn to make a drama and a poetry from the simple ... The spectacular appeal, the organized uplifting emotion which the totalitarian system provided in its education could, I believe, be matched and could be matched tomorrow if the writers and the poets and the picture men among us would seize upon the more intimate and human terms of our society. Our searchlight of democracy will in the end turn out to be a quiet soft light under which little things are rounded in velvet and look big ... I have tried to suggest that the wildfire we need will not, by the very nature of democracy, be that spectacular answer to the authoritarian challenge which people today are asking for. Our searchlight in democracy, I have suggested, will be a quiet and intimate light.⁶⁸

Grierson favoured an approach to democratic government and economic conduct that operated through a specific conception of civic education/propaganda, which shaped vision through what he termed “the subconscious”. This was an important strategy because in Grierson’s words, “in the art of propaganda many deep considerations have to be taken into account. Short-range results are not necessarily long-range successes. Conscious effects may not necessarily engage the deeper loyalties of the subconscious.”⁶⁹ In this sense, the field of civic education/propaganda had to deal with

the intangibles that affect the imaginations of men and determine their will. It is no longer a problem of known areas of knowledge simply and directly communicated. *It is a question of the images that direct men’s vision and determine their loyalties, and we are concerned not only with the conscious*

⁶⁸ Grierson, "Searchlight on Democracy," 95-96.

⁶⁹ Grierson, "The Nature of Propaganda," 106.

*process of the mind but with the subconscious ones which insensibly govern the pattern of men's attention and the manner of their action.*⁷⁰

The concept of the “subconscious” here signifies an “insensible” disposition of subjectivity and agency and is in some sense similar to Lippmann’s notion of the “pseudo-environment”. Through the arrangement of the subconscious, knowledge would be assimilated and incorporated into specific subconscious patterns and these would determine how individuals and collectives envisioned and governed their selves and others. Documentary film that governed subjectivity through the subconscious could shape and distribute a standardised, homogenised and normalised “sharing of experience” by the population.

It can be argued that Grierson’s conception of civic education, one that was truly synonymous with propaganda, aimed at producing an internalised government of the self through the provision of normalised and optimised visions by focusing on the ordinary. It was a way to govern by a set of techniques that preceded rational consciousness and would remain imperceptible to the “ordinary citizen”. Consciousness itself would be governed by the subconscious modes and patterns of vision. Hence, Griersonian education was not about “the facts that we teach, nor of the techniques with which we teach them, but of the images and patterns on belief in which these facts are framed”.⁷¹

Through such an approach it was also possible to circumvent the potential problem of such education/propaganda being perceived as ideologically motivated “manipulation”. Such a perception was to be avoided, particularly in reference to “government information services” that had been set up in many countries and were used to cultivate “a new understanding by the people ... It is in the logic of the situation that you cannot ask governments to co-ordinate or manage without giving them the right to explain or otherwise seek and secure the co-operation of the citizen.” According to Grierson, such government information services were frequently challenged, “But they appear to be challenged only when there is suspicion of the administration seeking partisan advantage.”⁷²

However, as Grierson claimed, not only did recipients remain largely unaware of the impact of imaginative media, but media producers were often themselves unaware of their

⁷⁰ Grierson, "The Challenge of Peace," 176. Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Ibid., 177.

⁷² Ibid., 169-70.

functions and the effects of their work, while they took on a political function by formulating a system of experience through their work.⁷³

Not all of these men [working in public media] have been conscious propagandists, but all have had a propagandist effect by reason of the fact that they have used dramatic or inspirational methods. They have formulated story or pictorial or dramatic shapes. They have evaluated the good and the bad, the heroic and the unheroic, the exciting and the unexciting, the desirable and the undesirable. They have observed the things that interested people; they have researched into the patterns of report that commanded men's understanding, attention and desire ... They have, in fact, *provided a system of evaluation for men's daily experience* where such a system was lacking. They have consequently created loyalties and formed the pattern of men's thought and action.⁷⁴

Grierson recognised that popular audiences tended to oppose discernible attempts to shape their subjectivity and techniques of coercion were deemed undesirable. He envisioned power to operate less within and through public discourse. Education as a mode of power would "express itself not as thought or debate but as the positive action within the community".⁷⁵ It was the "machinery of expression" and its inherent ordering principles, which would model subjectivity through the formation and dissemination of functional, non-conscious knowledge. This "machinery" partially gained its force through the authority of the camera as well as of documentary film to seemingly provide authentic and unbiased visions of the historical world. In Grierson's words, a "system of information", of *dramatic* information, "is more than just a way of conveying thought or policy. It is the machinery of expression itself ... You say it, and therefore you are it; and without saying it you have not its reality."⁷⁶

Paul Rotha has concisely summarised the perceived possibilities of (documentary) film which presents "an illusion of real life" while the vision of audiences is worked upon:

⁷³ Grierson, in Preface to Rotha, *Documentary Film*, 12.

⁷⁴ Grierson, "Propaganda and Education," 148. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ Grierson, "Education and the New Order," 129.

⁷⁶ Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 127; See also Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography*, 103.

The particular powers of the film to meet propagandist and cultural requirements are almost too obvious to specify. In brief, the film possesses:

1. An introduction to the public only shared by the radio.
2. Simple powers of explanation and portrayal; and a capacity for drawing conclusions which, if presented with a technique that takes full advantage of psychological values, is capable of persuasive qualities without equal.
3. The virtue of repeated mechanical performance to vast audiences, not once, but countless times, in many places, today, tomorrow and, if the artistry is good enough, ten years hence.
4. The power of mass suggestion; a power possessed only by the theatre, the church and the spectacle of tattoo.

Thus the film is a weapon that can model the minds of multitudes in any given direction, without those multitudes being aware of what is happening. It can create bias against which reason is useless. It can temporarily transcend the limitations of class and culture. It can persuade and be understood by the illiterate as well as by the educated, because it works through the combined medium of sight and sound, which is common to most people.⁷⁷

Hence, the potential of documentary film – as well as other imaginative media – was seen to be paramount for the fulfilment of educational/propagandistic purposes. The possibility of mass distribution and “repeated mechanical performance” could transcend former spatial and temporal limitations of representation. Film held the potential for a teleological organisation and interpretation of the subject matter. Additionally, it could have an imperceptible impact on audiences by creating bias that bypassed reason. Documentary film had the potential for universal address that transcended cultural, ethnic and class differences. Furthermore, it could provide an impression of impartial mimesis.

⁷⁷ Paul Rotha, "Films and the Labour Party," in *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, ed. Ian Aitken (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 172-73.

However, Grierson's programme for propaganda/civic education was not "the denial of the democratic principle of education" but "the necessary instrument for its practical fulfilment" that served a specific conception of democracy, as well as "ordinary humanism":⁷⁸

Yet I believe that democratic education and democratic propaganda are an easy matter and indeed far easier than the authoritarian type, if these principles I have laid down are grasped. It will be done not by searchlight but in the quiet light of ordinary humanism. Speaking intimately and quietly about real things and real people will be more spectacular in the end than spectacle itself.⁷⁹

Thus rather than a spectacular appeal, it would be the "ordinary and normal" that formed the terrain of governmental strategies for documentary film and other media. Documentary could constantly re-form the general population and a "permanent renewal" of society could thereby be achieved.⁸⁰ Concerning this end, civic education was to become "total" through (1) a comprehensive use of all public media for educational purposes; (2) a constant repetition of significant symbols and tropes that seemed ordinary and normal as well as truthful and realistic; (3) making civic education a continuous practice in everyday life; and (4) normalising and homogenising the vision, subjectivity and agency of the general population on a subconscious level. By following this programme a better future could be realised – for everyone.

⁷⁸ Grierson, "Education and Total Effort," 139.

⁷⁹ Grierson, "Searchlight on Democracy," 99-100.

⁸⁰ Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 57.

3. Propaganda

Introduction

This chapter discusses some of the circumstances, events and considerations that led to the establishment of the National Film Unit (NFU) in 1941. The NFU incorporated the Motion Picture Section of the Government Motion Picture, Photographic and Advertising Studios, and its original brief was the furtherance of the war effort through the medium of film. However, the NFU did not emerge out of a vacuum. Film had been used for State publicity purposes from the early 1920s, with a focus on tourism and trade and to lesser extent on preserving aspects of pre-colonial Māoritanga on film. After the first Labour government was elected into power in 1935, there was increased interest in using film not only to project a favourable image of New Zealand overseas, but also as an educational and propaganda medium within the confines of the liberal democratic nation-state of New Zealand.¹

Up to that point, State film production in New Zealand had concentrated on the production of actualities, scenics and industrials, primarily for overseas audiences, and had focused very little on contemporary affairs. In line with developments in other countries, particularly in Britain through the work of John Grierson and the British Documentary Movement, the Labour Government wanted to make extended use of film which came to be regarded as a device that could further responsible citizenship and at the same time advance certain party-political ideals. Labour was interested in the advancement of national integration and the improvement of the population with reference to progressive, democratic and universal humanitarian ideals, as well the perceived necessities of the modern political economy. However, the NFU did not become established until the country was at war and therefore operated under the imperative for wartime propaganda – the concern for civic education became prevalent again after the war had ended. As was the case with Grierson's programme for documentary, the concepts of "propaganda" and "education" were frequently used interchangeably in government documents.

¹ New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy, the sovereign and head of state being Queen Elizabeth II, who represents the legal-constitutional institution of the Crown. However, the exercise of government is generally institutionalised, functioning and understood in terms of a liberal representative democracy and is therefore referred to as such throughout this thesis.

In order to analyse the changing arrangements, procedures and rationales of film production which were institutionalised with the establishment of the NFU, it is necessary to discuss early New Zealand film produced under the auspices of the State. The shift from the production of actualities, scenics and industrials to the conception and production of documentary film, as envisioned by Grierson, is examined, as well as the Labour Party's attempts to integrate the media of radio and film into a general and centralised educational and publicity force under State control and guidance. The general propaganda strategy, which was to focus on "positive" and productive publicity during wartime, is also outlined. A key event was Grierson's visit to New Zealand in early 1940, and his outlining of how film production could effectively promote the Nation and the Empire. The Government did not directly implement Grierson's report and his recommendations for film production in New Zealand. Rather, it was the lobbying of Stanhope Andrews – especially his report on film and democratic education and his film *Country Lads* (1941) – which finally led to state wartime film production. Therefore it is crucial to examine Andrews' normative ideas and programme for film production which were clearly aligned to, and influenced by, Grierson's documentary programme.

From Attractive Views to Visions of the Real – Early New Zealand State Film Production

The relatively little research undertaken into New Zealand's early film history has been limited to cursory outlines and summaries focusing on the major developments, the films produced, and the people and institutions involved. Few details are known about the discussions, rationales and calculations that led to the government's involvement in film production which in turn led, according to various accounts, to New Zealand becoming one of the first countries in the world to employ film for specific purposes beyond entertainment, scientific research or the recording and conservation of events or people on film.² These purposes were mostly the promotion of tourism, investment, trade and immigration but film was also sometimes used as an ethnographic tool to preserve certain aspects of Māoritanga (Māori culture) and customs on film. Up until the 1920s it was widely

² See, for instance, "Functions of the Imperial Relations Trust," TO 1, 194 49/11/1 Part 1, Archives New Zealand.

believed that the Māori “race” and Māoritanga were disappearing due to the impact and assumed superiority of modernity and Western civilisation.

The first public film projection in New Zealand took place on 13 October 1896 at the Auckland Opera House. The titles of films screened included “Fire Rescue Scene”, “Comical Barbershop Scene”, “The Chinese Laundry” and “Annabelle’s Butterfly Dance”. These short films aroused the awe of audiences, as they had around the world. The following day the *New Zealand Herald* reported, “Everything moved as though in life; in fact, it was life reproduced. So natural was it that the moving figures on the screen were cheered.”³ A few weeks later, the first public screening in Wellington took place, after which a reporter wrote in the *Evening Post*:

Not since the days of the phonograph have the wonder, admiration and curiosity of the public been so thoroughly awakened by this new candidate for the world’s favour producing every motion of real life with marvellous fidelity. Enough has been written to give a fair idea what the cinematographe is, and of what infinite possibilities it is capable. Indeed the extent of these possibilities can hardly be suggested. Anything and everything that moves and lives can be seized in action and reproduced at will ... Nothing is beyond the scope and power of the cinematographe.⁴

These first screenings heralded the arrival of the new technology of the cinematograph which seemed to reproduce “real life with marvellous fidelity”. Yet already, as expressed in the quote above, there were hints of the tensions contained in Grierson’s programme of documentary film in which a “will”, through “creative treatment”, was to transcend the possibilities of the camera to capture “real life with marvellous fidelity”, making it subject to a telos of social progress.

Although it can be claimed that “will” was crucially involved right from the beginning of filmmaking, given that scenes had to be selected, cameras had to be positioned, frames and focal points to be set, and that filmmakers undoubtedly to various degrees shaped and arranged what was recorded, this thesis argues that a new kind of filmmaking, documentary

³ Quoted in Jonathan Dennis, “Introduction,” in *A Century of Film in New Zealand: Papers from the Conference ‘Cinema, Film and Society’ Wellington October 1996*, ed. Margot Fry (Wellington: Victoria University, 1996), 4.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*

film, emerged in New Zealand in the 1920s and gained force throughout the 1930s. The dispositive of film production in place prior to this period shifted in a variety of ways and was finally institutionalised with the establishment of the NFU. It moved from a largely descriptive function, providing attractive views about selected aspects of New Zealand to the strategy of “making audiences envision”, shaping visions of the real, thus advancing the projection and government of the self and others into the future. In this transition, it was no longer sufficient for film to provide a series of views and to simply describe what could be seen.

Thus, throughout the 1920s and 30s, film production moved beyond an assemblage of views that provided visual pleasures and attractions for audiences to the arrangement of functional shot sequences in which images became embedded in a dramatic and/or argumentative arrangement.⁵ Film took on a rhetorical and discursive function, which was imbued with governmental purposes. However, this shift was neither linear nor total and the difference between “views” and documentary “vision” was rather fluid and a matter of degree, shifting gradually from being descriptive to interpretive while successively incorporating new techniques and strategies.⁶

The first official State involvement in film was the Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in June 1901. The Limelight Department of the Melbourne Salvation Army was commissioned to film this event and the Salvation Army continued to be contracted by the New Zealand government to film various other events.⁷ In 1907, James McDonald began to shoot actualities and scenic attractions as a part-time activity for the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts. The following year, he became the first official New Zealand government photographer and cinematographer.⁸ The occasional filming of scenic attractions was later taken over by photographers of the Agriculture Department, while McDonald continued to make various short films. Besides shooting actualities and scenics

⁵ For a discussion of the move from “views” to documentary film see Tom Gunning, “Before Documentary: Early Nonfiction Films and the ‘View’ Aesthetic,” in *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Nonfiction Film*, ed. Nico De Klerk and Daan Hertogs (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), 9-24.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 22.

⁷ See Chris Pugsley, “The Magic of Moving Pictures: Film Making 1895-1918,” in *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*, edited by Diane Pivac, Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 32-36.

⁸ For further information see Jonathan Dennis, “McDonald, James Ingram 1865 - 1935,” accessed 23 May 2009, http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/alt_essayBody.asp?essayID=3M5.

during his stint at the Dominion Museum in Wellington, McDonald also began recording ethnographic footage of Māori life and customs.⁹ In 1912, he shot footage that depicted Tutange of Patea demonstrating pre-colonial combat techniques for the camera. The shots, in ethnographic fashion, included close-ups of Patea's face and attire and a strategic positioning of his body for the camera, resembling anthropometric efforts to exactly record the physical shapes of human "races". It can be argued that this footage constitutes one of the first ethnographic films shot in New Zealand.¹⁰ Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, McDonald continued his efforts to record Māori life, the most extensive project being an expedition up the Whanganui River in 1921 together with Elsdon Best (ethnographer at the Dominion museum), Peter Buck and Johannes Carl Andersen.

When New Zealand entered World War I in 1914, the government decided that it was important to obtain footage from the war abroad and commissioned a camera operator from the French company Pathé Frères to obtain footage of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Europe. His name was Henry A. Sanders, who accompanied the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in France to shoot still as well as some moving images. Later during the war another cameraman, Tommy Scales, shot film footage of New Zealand soldiers in the United Kingdom. Towards the end of the war, Charlie Barton was also sent overseas but by the time he arrived, fighting had ceased. Surviving footage shot by Sanders includes *Work of the New Zealand Medical Corps* (1917), *Seeing Sights of Paris before Football Match* (1918) and *Arrival of New Zealand Troops at Cologne* (1919), all of them providing a chronologically ordered series of views of actual events. As far as is known, New Zealand did not produce propaganda films during World War I,¹¹ and the surviving footage shot by Sanders neither shows battle scenes nor contains uplifting messages or dramatised sequences that can be discerned to have been arranged to further directly or indirectly the war effort by New Zealand and the British Empire. The films were actualities and functioned as an attraction in their own right, without concern for the establishment of a self-contained narrative or

⁹ Actualities include *American Fleet at Auckland* (1908) and *World's Sculling Competition on Wanganui River* (1909), while scenics include *New Zealand's Thermal Wonderland* (1910).

¹⁰ Dennis has argued that the first ethnographic film was shot by McDonald in 1918, but the footage of Tutange of Patea clearly qualifies as ethnographic, since pre-colonial Māori customs are demonstrated and shots included which imply a concern to record physical traits (particularly of the face) and pre-colonial Māori attire.

¹¹ Recent research indicates that fragments of film footage shot by Scales has been preserved by the Pathé Archive in Britain. These fragments could not be sighted for this study. See Chris Pugsley, "The Magic of Moving Pictures: Film Making 1895-1918," In *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*, edited by Diane Pivac, Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 48-50.

arrangement designed to have socio- and psycho-political effects on audiences. Therefore, in the New Zealand context, it is likely that Griersonian documentary film did not emerge during World War I, unlike Europe which saw the production of propaganda films like the *Battle of the Somme*.¹²

In 1921, after the war, the government formed the Publicity Office (PO) as part of the Department of Internal Affairs, and in May 1922 the former took over the Government Photographic and Cinematographic Section, which had been established within the Department of Agriculture. The two government photographers, who only occasionally shot film footage, were joined in January 1923 by Cyril Morton, who was employed as the first official cinematographer. From this date films produced under government auspices grew in number and production became more frequent.

In 1925, after two years of production, *Glorious New Zealand* – the most ambitious State film project to date – was released. It was shot by Bert Bridgman who around this time had joined the PO. The surviving fragments of the film suggest it was mainly a scenic, directed at overseas audiences. However, it also included intertitles that celebrated New Zealand's European pioneers and the progress they had supposedly achieved. Opening titles at the beginning of the film state, "Looking at this little nation within the Empire – and outpost as it is, in the Rim of the World, one can hardly realise that its wonderful progress represents but eighty-five years of toil and enterprise." A few seconds further, it is claimed that the results of progress were "a glowing tribute to those hardy pioneers who laid the foundations of our prosperity". Another intertitle states: "In no other country in the World is found such varied and wonderful scenery", thereby ushering in a series of shots focussing on scenic attractions, long-distance static and panning shots of scenery offering up, according to another intertitle, "a never ending panorama of scenic gems". A brief shot of unidentified Polynesian people follows, and then tourists are seen arriving on a boat at Auckland Harbour. Various shots of potential interest to tourists, such as ferries and trains follow, along with a string of locales and views of New Zealand landscapes. The images are interwoven with intertitles that describe and sometimes interpret the images.

The staple output of the PO continued to be scenics produced for tourism promotion. However, another focus of film production became industrial productions that dealt with

¹² See Loiperdinger, "World War I Propaganda Films and the Birth of the Documentary."

the production of commodities. Titles include *The Breakfast Egg* (1926), *Tall Timber: The Timber Industry of New Zealand* (1927) or *Strawberry Time: In New Zealand's Winterless North* (1927). These films depicted industrial production in chronological sequence and remained largely observational and anchored at specific locations, providing knowledge primarily through the images.

In summary, three kinds of films predominated. Scenics provided a variety of views of New Zealand scenery or actual events (such as tourists leaving ferries), tied together by the geographical and ideological boundaries of the nation or certain locations therein, often expressed in the titles of the films. Industrials showed the production of commodities in chronological progression from growing to harvesting, packaging and marketing, while actualities showed views of specific singular historic events. In other words, the arrangement of such films closely related to the progression of moving images that depicted *specific* events at *specific* locations, while techniques used to create a certain stance in audiences remained rudimentary in comparison with later documentary film production. Furthermore, sound was not yet available and thus such films did not have an off-commentary that would transcend, interpret, describe, contrast or juxtapose the different events depicted and provide them with a logical coherence.

In this sense, although such films were primarily made to promote New Zealand scenery, industry and produce, in their organisation and representations they went comparatively little beyond the representational and evidential possibilities of the camera. While film titles and intertitles were used to orient audiences and frame the process of reception of such films, these tended to be largely descriptive, with the exception of common qualifiers used in tourism productions such as “glorious”, “beautiful”, “wonderful” or “romantic” or brief celebratory references to modernity and progress and occasional humorous and entertaining intertitles. However, staged and dramatised sequences were starting to appear. For example the beginning and ending of *The Breakfast Egg* shows a father and his sons at a breakfast table relishing and promoting the quality of New Zealand eggs.

Overall however, films up until this point were not marked by a treatment and arrangement that significantly transcended a series of picturesque views or the chronological unfolding of specific local events. Although undoubtedly having a promotional function, they were less arranged through the imposition of a preconceived, more or less discernible argument for

which images were employed to illustrate and support an argument. Nevertheless, films from the 1920s had already begun to move beyond the conventions and technical possibilities of early actualities towards Griersonian documentary techniques, and a dramatisation and interpretation of actuality began to be used within the context of New Zealand State film production with reference to the promotion of commodities, industries and tourism.

Furthermore, there was still little concern about the calculation of impressions and the “visionary” possibilities of film, that is, film was not yet subjected to a programmatic approach that rationalised the strategies and techniques necessary to produce desired effects and “impressions” with reference to governmental purposes. Grierson’s documentary programme had not yet been realised. In this sense, the process of reception of early films, particularly actualities, and the relation of their content to extra-filmic contexts and meanings rested to a large extent with the knowledge and visionary faculties of audiences. In the words of Philip Rosen, actualities “seem to give the filmmaker radically fewer textual means to direct the spectator’s comprehension of the real being transmitted” whereas in documentary film “the reader is defined as the rhetorical aim” of projections of the real.¹³

Until the late 1920s, the studios of the PO were housed in the basement of the Parliament buildings, but they were moved to the ABC building in Wellington’s Lambton Quay after a fire. After another fire, the government arranged with A. A. P. Mackenzie, who had run a small photographic business, to facilitate film production and to process the films made for government departments. In 1926, a newly established Publicity Board began to coordinate the PO and it was significantly expanded – its annual budget swelling from £1,600 to £30,000. In 1927 Mackenzie formed Filmcraft Limited and built a film studio and laboratory in Miramar, which was completed in 1928 and became the only permanent film studio in the country. This meant that film production could now make use of a shooting stage built in the studio, which allowed for the staging and increased optimisation of scenes, particularly those that were technically difficult or impossible to shoot otherwise. Particular lighting conditions, contrast, movement and the timing of events could be increasingly controlled while any undesired or disrupting influences on filming could be minimised. Film material

¹³ Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," 76-77.

shot in the studio was edited together with actuality footage shot on location, making it difficult or even impossible to distinguish between actuality and studio footage.

In 1930 Filmcraft bought sound-recording equipment and sound was introduced to New Zealand film production. It thus became possible to shoot non-synchronous location sound and to use non-location sound and music to provide continuity and to heighten and increase the affective impact of the films on audiences. Furthermore, sound allowed for the structuring of spoken arguments for which images could serve as illustrative and evidentiary material. From now on, films frequently employed an omniscient commentary that has been described as the “voice of God”; articulated by a speaker who usually remains invisible. Thus the commentary could transcend and interpret the imagery from a seemingly all-knowing perspective, frequently asserting knowledge of the emotions, thoughts and desires of characters on the screen, evaluating images and providing logical coherence for the heterogeneous visible events.¹⁴ This implied a shift from the use of the camera as a recording device of events located within specific contexts and co-ordinates of space and time, to the transcending of the material world and the specific contexts in which filming took place, particularly through the arrangement of a filmic perspective that advanced an argument, implicitly and/or explicitly. Thus film footage increasingly functioned less to provide attractive views of specific local events and the observable material world in general and more as evidence and illustrations of certain arguments, perspectives and values projected and encoded into films.

By the late 1920s stock footage was frequently recycled in various films, usually with little regard to its specific geographical origin. *Highway: Roving the Urewera, New Zealand* (1930) showed the construction of a highway in the remote Te Urewera district. As common in other films around that time, Māori are evoked through an intertitle in implicit opposition to the concepts of civilisation and progress: “In this last frontier of civilisation, the Maoris yet practice the arts of other days”, while two Māori women are shown flax weaving in pre-colonial costume. However, this scene was actually shot at the model pa in Whakarewarewa near Rotorua and had been used two years before in a film entitled *Maori at Rotorua* (1928). It was recycled again in 1934 for *Romantic New Zealand – The Land of the “Long White*

¹⁴ This mode of documentary, in which images largely have an evidential and illustrative function and are subsumed under a commentary that advances the narrative, is usually referred to as “expository mode”. See Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 34-38.

Cloud". In *Highway: Roving the Urewera, New Zealand* this scene suggested harmonious ethnic relations and drew upon a discourse of exoticism about Māori that was regarded as valuable for the promotion of tourism.

The global Depression of the early 1930s saw administrative changes and staff cuts at the PO, and lessened the demand for film production and processing. Due to the impending insolvency of Filmcraft, the staff was radically cut from forty to four. Filmmaking came largely to a halt for six years, although Morton was able to continue to sporadically produce films.¹⁵

After Labour was elected into government in 1935, however, the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts leased the Filmcraft studios in Miramar and film production again increased. In 1938, the Department bought the entire studios, mainly to produce a film celebrating the Treaty of Waitangi which had come to be recognised as the nation's founding document. The studios in Miramar were renamed the Government Motion Picture, Photographic and Advertising Studios, incorporating not only film production and processing, but also still photography and other publicity techniques, such as the production of posters and pamphlets.

One of the major film productions during the 1930s was the aforementioned *Romantic New Zealand – The Land of the "Long White Cloud"* (1934). A successor to *Glorious New Zealand* (1925), it is a forty-seven-minute sound film, mostly compiled from earlier stock footage and was aimed at both domestic and overseas audiences. The film depicted the country's four main cities as well as typical tourist destinations, including a Whakarewarewa sequence with "Maori at Work and Play". However, in a departure from *Glorious New Zealand*, the first six minutes of the film consist of re-enactments and illustrations of historical events that open with a staged sequence that symbolises the first arrival of Māori. In a scene shot in the studio, two Māori in a waka are shown arriving at the shores of "Ao-tea-roa", which is shown in bold letters superimposed upon the images. Audiences are then told about Abel Tasman's and James Cook's arrivals, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi – in which Māori seemingly unambiguously consented to cede their sovereignty to the British Crown – and how "axe and saw blazed the trail of civilisation". New Zealand then became "a fully established outpost of the Great British Empire". Various illustrations and re-enactments are

¹⁵ Sowry, "Morton, Cyril James 1903-1986".

employed to bring the commentary's assertions visually "alive". The film then seemingly arbitrarily moves from one location to the next, loosely bound by the general theme of the film – "romantic New Zealand". While it gestures towards modernity with its inclusion of images of cities, ships, airplanes, the film emphasises "romantic" scenic attractions and leisure-time activities as well as displays and demonstrations of pre-colonial Māori life filmed at the model pa in Whakarewarewa. One sequence employs an off-commentary, voiced by a Māori woman, explaining some of the Māori customs that were on display. Along with *Kamate: Among New Zealand's Maori People* (1934), this was one of the first films in which a Māori was given a voice in a State publicity film production. Significantly, in both films the voice took the function of a tourist guide who introduced various activities displayed at the model pa.

Romantic New Zealand was promoted as a

screen epic, in sound, colour, and pictorial excellence ... that every New Zealander should see, for it contains the best of the magnificent scenery for which the country has earned world-wide fame. Replete with extraordinary interest and providing a feast of superlative beauty. Not a mere panoramic production of photographic views, but a delightful presentation of cameo gems of New Zealand Life and Scenery full of Beauty and Romance.¹⁶

Hence the film was an attempt to move away from "a mere panoramic production of photographic views" to a "delightful presentation" of "romantic" New Zealand, while including re-enactments and illustrations of historical events. It evoked both an eternal and timeless romanticism and a historical past of nation-building by British settlers who had achieved, as the commentary claims, the "wonderful transition from savagery to civilisation that represents less than a century of progress". Although the film includes brief references to contemporary New Zealand life, it remains focused on aspects valuable for promoting the country overseas. The camera largely functions in the role of a traveller, providing a series of views of New Zealand scenery, wildlife and attractions that are accompanied by a continuous off-screen commentary.

¹⁶ "Romantic New Zealand," The New Zealand Film Archive, accessed 4 November 2008, http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/index.php?option=com_events&task=view_detail&agid=950&year=2008&month=07&day=03&Itemid=54.

In 1938, production of the New Zealand Centennial film *One Hundred Crowded Years* (1940) began, which was the most ambitious film project yet undertaken under the auspices of the State. Martin Blythe has argued that *One Hundred Crowded Years* marked “the end of an era” and pointed “to a transition from the imperial romances ... to the national romance asserting independence”.¹⁷ However, the film marked more than the end of the imperial era and a move towards filmic nationalism. It also marked a decisive shift towards documentary film and it can be seen as one of the first fully-fledged documentary films in the Griersonian sense, since it made extensive use of re-enactments, dramatisation and symbolism and had a socio-political purpose. The second half of *One Hundred Crowded Years* focused on the contemporary and modern, making people a centre of its attention, and addressed what was perceived as a contemporary social problem within the nation. During his visit to New Zealand in early 1940, Grierson even advised on the production of the film, although by this stage it was nearing completion.

Michael Forlong, the assistant producer and script writer of the film, later recalled:

The film was never intended to be a feature film, although it contained dramatised sequences. It was a long documentary – documentary in the true sense of the word – not an industrial or scenic or propaganda film but a factual account ... I was not limited by any sort of supervision but, of course, as the Government was paying it was assumed that we would present a positive view of New Zealand, and I don't think it ever occurred to us to do anything else. Whatever political beliefs we may have had, we were all enthusiastic New Zealanders and we certainly tried very hard to be objective about the Maoris.¹⁸

One Hundred Crowded Years went further than *Romantic New Zealand*, not only transcending the representational and evidential conventions of the camera and employing re-enactments, but also including a set of discernible socio-political functions. It was made for the centennial celebrations of New Zealand and as such it provided memories and a vision of New Zealand's colonial past, focusing on its “march towards nationhood” and the “heroic” deeds of early European settlers in the establishment of a “progressive” nation. It

¹⁷ Martin Blythe, *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 73.

¹⁸ Forlong, quoted in John Stuart Reynolds, “Going Far? John O'Shea's *Runaway* in the Context of His Attempt to Establish a Feature Film Industry in New Zealand” (PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2002), 45-46.

was hoped that the film would “*inspire a belief in and hope for the future*”.¹⁹ Furthermore, the film had an explicitly educational function, making an appeal to advance Māori “adaption and adjustment”. In other words, the film was not concerned with timeless and eternal aspects, but with the historical past and contemporary domestic concerns, in opposition to earlier film productions. It made the supposed historical origins and major events that had shaped the nation visible, and therefore had an “educational” value for New Zealand’s population during the commemoration of one hundred years of European settlement, as the country moved from the status of a dominion towards nationhood. The narrative is framed around the concepts of progress, modernity and civilisation using images as illustrative and supporting material to advance the general argument, rather than providing a series of views or depicting the progression of specific actual events. In this sense, *One Hundred Crowded Years* marked a significant step in New Zealand film production towards documentary film as envisioned and propagated by Grierson as a deliberate teleological transcendence of actuality in the service of “social progress”.

Significantly, *One Hundred Crowded Years* was one of the first films that credited the position and function of a director. Earlier productions such as *Glorious New Zealand* or *Romantic New Zealand* were largely the work of camera operators who later assembled a series of views on the editing bench, frequently making use of stock footage. In contrast, *One Hundred Crowded Years* was meticulously scripted and shot sequences prepared before shooting commenced. Approximately the first half of the film, which reconstructs historical events, was entirely staged, establishing a self-contained narrative that worked more through continuity editing and the progression of images and sound than through intertitles and commentary. The narrative recounts the nation’s progress from savagery to civilisation using images of Māori to symbolise a threat to and “outside” of civilisation. By the second half of the film, which focuses on contemporary New Zealand, images of Māori are employed to demonstrate an integrated, harmonious and civilised nation to which Māori were generally, but not sufficiently, adjusting. In this sense, the film made use of techniques by which it was possible not only to record people and events with the camera, but also to “bring them alive” in new contexts and arguments to be advanced.

¹⁹ “Notes on Centennial Film,” TO 1 158 28/27/3, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

An intention of the filmmakers and State officials involved in the production of *One Hundred Crowded Years* was to produce a film that would be “a sincere and exact representation of the various important aspects of New Zealand’s history as far as it relates to European colonization”.²⁰ This aspiration towards a “sincere and exact representation” was frequently expressed throughout and after the production of the film, and much work went into the research of historical facts and details. It was noted that “this film was to be a sincere record of the pioneers” and therefore “considerable trouble was taken in checking every historical detail, and we hope that it will not bear any accusation that some semi-fictional films have earned that it is a distortion of history”.²¹ However, today this film can be seen as one of the most controversial films that were produced under the auspices of the State, with respect to the ways in which historical facts were arranged and generalised into a coherent narrative framed around the concepts of civilisation, progress and modernity, while crucially relying on and exploiting preconceptions about New Zealand’s institutionalised “Other”, Māori.

The film begins with a reconstruction of several important historic events that were regarded to have decisively shaped New Zealand’s present. Its opening shots show a book in which can be read: “Dedication. To New Zealand’s pioneers who came forth from *Britain’s ordered ways* to the wildness of an *untouched land*”.²² Right from the beginning, the dominant perspective of the film is thereby implicitly pointed out; New Zealand’s pioneers came from “Britain’s ordered ways” which by definition excludes Māori and who by implication did not “touch” the land (“wildness of an untouched land”). Throughout the first part of the film Māori consistently functioned as the binary Other to the concepts of civilisation and progress brought about by colonisation. Thus, Māori were rendered visible within a historiographical framework based on an evolutionary model of linear progress from “savagery” to “modern civilisation”, attained through the successful colonisation of Aotearoa.

A significant act depicted in the film is the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The scene works to reinforce the vision of an unambiguous and free treaty that was followed by a legitimate and humanitarian colonisation; a treaty which respected Māori as equal partners and as

²⁰ L. J. Schmitt, General Manager of the Tourist and Publicity Department, to Connelly, letter, 31 March 1939, TO 1 158 28/27/3, Archives New Zealand.

²¹ “Notes on Centennial Film,” TO 1 158 28/27/3, Archives New Zealand.

²² All emphases in film quotes that follow were made by the writer of this study.

British citizens. Crucial details and contradictions of the Treaty as well as its context are absent. In later scenes, which deal with the New Zealand Wars, Māori are represented as irrational, savage aggressors who seemingly without any reason attack peaceful and hard-working settlers. Reid Perkins has pointed out that “no attempt is made to set these events within any sort of social or political context, let alone acknowledge any kind of Māori perspective on them. Instead they are reduced to the status of just one more natural hazard to be coped with by the intrepid enterprise of the pioneers.”²³ The narration of the past is free from contradictions and ambiguities. After the Treaty sequence scenes of settlers arriving at the shores of New Zealand follow, including a first encounter with Māori and the hardships and deeds of a prototypical settler couple in taming the “wilderness”. This is then followed by the beginning of the New Zealand Wars and the gold rush in the 1880s.

Strangely, midway through the film breaks with its romanticised colonial narrative and focuses on a socio-economic and cultural report of the present state of the nation.²⁴ The mode of presentation changes from re-enactments of historical events to a series of shots that have an evidentiary documentary function outlining an argument. Whereas the first part of the film employs feature film conventions of continuity and story development, the second part largely consists of non-continuous shots. These function as visual evidence and provide fidelity for the commentary which in turn provides logical cohesion for the images. The commentator’s expositions frequently transcend what the images depict and some scenes were obviously arranged for the camera.

As it continues, the film provides a condensed and generalised “sociological overview” of the state of agriculture, industry, education, science, health and social welfare services. In one sequence, the narrator sums up the triumph of progress and civilisation, embodied by modern New Zealand:

We would have been more than human to have made no mistakes during this stupendous task of rushing forward a country from *savagery* to *civilisation* in one hundred crowded years. We have built and equipped *modern cities* where before

²³ Reid Perkins, "Imag(in)ing our Past: Colonial New Zealand on Film from The Birth of New Zealand to The Piano. Part I," *Illusions* 25(1996): 9.

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion, see Blythe, *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television*, 73-77.

there was *nothing, say perhaps a few huts of leaves and rushes* ... With airports and aircraft we have brought *20th century speed* to a *stone-age land*, telescoping centuries together in a few short years.

Here again Māori are evoked in implicit binary opposition to “civilisation” (vs. “savagery”), “modern cities” (vs. “nothing, say perhaps a few huts of leaves and rushes”) and “20th century speed” (vs. “stone-age land”).

A few minutes later Māori are introduced through the commentary as a part of contemporary modern New Zealand in the following way: “Another of New Zealand’s problems has special reference to our Māori people.” The problem is the adaption to the “ways of life brought by Europeans”, while pictures of physically passive Māori are shown in close takes. Then the audience gets to see an unnamed, externally fully “Europeanised” Māori authority that sits in an office and directly addresses the camera. What the audience does not get to know is that his name was Kingi Te Ahoaho Tāhiwi and that he worked for the Native Affairs Department as a translator and interpreter. It is likely that this was just the third time that a Māori was given a voice in a State publicity film. Here the voice of an Europeanised looking and sounding erudite authority employs a moralistic tone to advance the “adaption and adjustment” of Māori to what was claimed to be imperative. He states:

The impact of Western civilisation a hundred years ago caused drastic and imperative adjustment in the economic life of the Māori people, and in consequence, a transitional period had to be endured. My forbears discarded some of their tribal customs. In this period, differences and disputes arose. Happily, those days are past and our two races now live together in harmony.

Again, any contextualisation, differentiation or further details remain absent, and he continues:

Further, in *some matters* we must retain our individuality; our carving and weaving, our music and dances. These are an expression of something deep within us. But music and dancing and art are not enough for this *modern world*. We need also such things as our Native Land Development Scheme and the adaptation of *modern farming* to the community *instincts* of the Māori.

The above expresses what was becoming official state policy regarding the perceived “Māori problem”, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Throughout most of the film, Māori function in opposition to New Zealand’s alleged national foundations and are introduced into the narration of modern New Zealand as a problem. Hence, *One Hundred Crowded Years* assigned Māori a place in modern New Zealand that was at once insignificant (in relation to its foundations) and partially deviant (in relation to its hegemonic norms and values). It evaluated Māori culture according to “Western” concepts, values and standards.

One Hundred Crowded Years has been interpreted by Perkins as “one long panegyric glorifying Civilisation’s conquest of Nature, as represented by the indigenous landscape and its inhabitants”.²⁵ It incorporated what Blythe has identified as a move away from the timeless romanticism of the colony in the late 1930s, towards a focus on contemporary and historical time within the nation-state. Additionally, the film consistently focused on people to express and visualise certain themes and major historical events.

Until the late 1930s, State film production had operated under a policy that called for people to be left out of films so that they would not look dated due to changes in fashion.²⁶ This policy shifted from the late 1930s, particularly after the establishment of the NFU, which frequently made people a centre of its films. Characters on the screen frequently stood in for or were signified as part of a larger whole, were employed to advance identification and empathy, and also could provide “a human face” for more anonymous and abstract processes, institutions and living conditions.

Particularly after the Labour Party had been voted into government, films were increasingly preoccupied not only with people and contemporary concerns but also with modern progress, technology and education in various ways. For instance, *New Zealand Marches On* (1938) promoted mechanisation as a means for increased efficiency and less physically demanding work, the images of the film serving, as the commentary claims, as a “notable proof” that “New Zealand marches on”. Other films were designed to instruct audiences, such as *Spinning Wheels* (1938), which employed staged scenes, statistics and illustrations to

²⁵ Perkins, “Imag(in)ing our Past. Colonial New Zealand on Film from The Birth of New Zealand to The Piano. Part I”: 8-9.

²⁶ Cyril Morton, “Film Pioneers,” AAPG W3837 6025 16/a, Archives New Zealand.

convince audiences of the worth and necessity of law and order with reference to appropriate conduct on the street. The film begins by pointing out certain “scientific laws” which “are not man-made. They are laws which are definite and absolute. They are immutable.” Then it is claimed that the most familiar laws are those of the State. These “cover almost every theme of human activity. Many of them are concerned with the protection of persons and property.” Reference is then made to proper conduct on roads and the need for the observation of rules. “Breaches of traffic rules ... often carry their own punishment and the offender may well deserve the pain and suffering which results from his failure to observe the rules.” “Good” and “bad” behaviours are then contrasted while the off-screen commentary as well as an on-screen character evaluate the actions portrayed and give detailed instructions for appropriate behaviour. This was one of the first instructional films which later became a staple of the NFU and is another film in which film images were partially staged and took on a function within filmic discourse that set out to improve the behaviour of audiences.

Labour and the Means of Public Discourse

With the declaration of war against Nazi Germany on 3 September 1939, the Government deduced there was no need for tourist and overseas publicity films, and it was decided that the film section of the Government Motion Picture, Photographic and Advertising Studios at Miramar should end its film production. The staff at Miramar was drastically reduced and Morton was the only cinematographer to remain, charged with taking care of and maintaining the equipment at the studios until film production would resume.²⁷

However, before the war film had already been recognised within governmental, educational and particularly progressive Leftist circles as a powerful medium for domestic educational and propaganda purposes. This was undoubtedly influenced by the work of Grierson and the British Documentary Movement, which was well known by educational film advocates in New Zealand. Furthermore, Labour saw the need for a strong State and central economic planning to counter the perceived threat of large private sectional and capital interests. Film was widely regarded as the most powerful public medium which on the one

²⁷ Cyril Morton, “The Formation of the National Film Unit,” 1985, D3845, New Zealand Film Archive.

hand could provide a means for the government to create understanding and support for its policies, and on the other, could be valuable in a more general sense in fostering appropriate conduct and knowledge within the population. Within the Labour government, high-ranking officials like Walter Nash, John Thomas Paul and Peter Fraser promoted and advanced the use of film. Film and radio were of special importance to Labour, since the commercial press was considered to be largely conservative and thus contrary to Labour's ideals and policies in the governing of the nation.

One of the measures to counter this perceived bias in information and news reporting was the passing of the Broadcasting Act in 1936, which brought broadcasting under tighter State regulation and control. Prime Minister Joseph Savage took over the portfolio of Broadcasting and in December 1936 James Shelley, Professor of Education at Canterbury College, became Director of Broadcasting. When taking his post he claimed:

I regard radio as *the great modern instrument for securing a real cohesion of the citizens* of the community, based on mutual understanding and sympathetic tolerance ... *It will form an instrument for real democracy*, based on a sympathetic understanding of all points of view, considered in the quiet environment of the fireside.²⁸

Although Shelley frequently repeated his allusions to broadcasting as a democratic instrument, there was no effort made that "all points of view" could and should be aired unconditionally – neither under Labour nor later under a National government. In July 1949, *The Listener* published a letter by Sir Thomas Hunter from the Council for Adult Education in which he criticised Shelley for having an idealistic understanding of broadcasting, pointing out what he perceived to be the totalitarian character of the one-way broadcasting apparatus under State control:

Surely he [Shelley] overlooked the fact that the Greek people met its speakers face to face and could express its approval or dissent ... Broadcasting is not

²⁸ Shelley, quoted in Patrick Day, *The Radio Years: A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), 220. Emphasis added.

democratic in nature and ... until all shades of opinion may be heard on the air the totalitarian character of our broadcasting system will remain.²⁹

After the passing of the Broadcasting Act in 1936, the State not only controlled the licensing of radios, airwaves and radio-stations, but broadcasting was, with increasingly fewer exceptions, run and administered within government departments. Private stations were bought and brought under State control and by 1937, 16 radio stations were directly operated within the executive of the State. The programmes of the few remaining privately operated radio stations were "subject to ministerial scrutiny".³⁰ While the Broadcasting Amendment Act of 1934 had in theory allowed the broadcasting of matters that were deemed to be of controversial nature, this was again amended in the Broadcasting Act of 1936. This Act gave Prime Minister Savage as the Minister of the National Broadcasting Service (NBS) the power to prohibit any programme of any station conditionally or absolutely and the broadcasting of controversial material was again prohibited.³¹ In addition to this "negative" function, in September 1937 the NBS began to broadcast an Official News Service, which was produced in the newly established Information Section of the Prime Minister's Department and sent to the NBS to be broadcast as received without alteration or omission. The Official News Service continued for 25 years until 1962, and "for broadcasting it meant that those twenty-five years the involvement in news was limited to the reading of bulletins prepared in another government department".³² The government used the airwaves for the distribution of information gathered and assembled in government departments, and was thus able to considerably control and shape public discourse through radio broadcasting. In 1947, following criticisms of Labour's broadcasting policy, controversial broadcasts were permitted in a limited sense. According to Patrick Day, speakers were carefully chosen and the topics to be debated had to be approved by the Prime Minister, while his selections and decisions were not made public. Thus, as Day has

²⁹ Hunter, quoted in *ibid.*, 290. Technically, radio transmission allowed for two-way communication, while State broadcasting operated one-way. One measure within this one-way stream of information was to begin radio broadcasting of debates in the House of Representatives that allowed the public to listen to the deliberations of their political representatives. This was another measure introduced under Labour to circumvent the perceived bias of the news press.

³⁰ Cooper Marshall, "New Zealand Broadcastig Service, 1936-62," in *An Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, ed. A. H. McLintock (Wellington: Government Printer, 1966).

³¹ Day, *The Radio Years: A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*, 235.

³² *Ibid.*, 234.

argued, “the changes introduced were in response to criticism of the government’s policy but were not a fundamental change of that policy”.³³

The second medium that under Labour was to be closer controlled, and made extended use of, was factual film. Commercial feature film, and in particular the machinery of Hollywood, tended to be seen with suspicion in progressive Leftist circles in that it was, in the words of Stanhope Andrews, the first producer at the NFU, used “solely as dope to dull the monotony of our respectable lives”,³⁴ cementing “the status quo” rather than facilitating progressive reform. In resonance with Grierson and the British documentary film movement, the Labour Government preferred realist factual film that “creatively” focused on contemporary issues, seeing it as valuable for warfare as well as “peacefare”.

By the late 1930s, there was considerable debate within the government and educational groups about how film could and should be used less to further economic growth in a more limited sense and more to provide the population with appropriate visions as citizens of a progressive social welfare state. Although Labour was generally suspicious of large-scale capitalist enterprise, it still relied on the privately owned cinema circuits and distribution channels in order to get films screened in cinemas. New Zealand’s cinemas were mainly controlled by two privately-owned chains, Kerridge-Odeon and Amalgamated. After the war, 50% of Kerridge-Odeon was sold to the British J. Arthur Rank Organisation and 50% of Amalgamated came to be owned by the American Fox Film Corporation.

In response to the calls to use film as an educational and propagandistic medium, and to the need to secure support from the privately owned film industry, plans were developed for an extension of film distribution and screening. In 1937, a Motion Picture Film Industry Committee was set up that would further the exhibition of “high quality films” from Europe, “which combine cultural and educational features without detracting from the entertainment appeal”. The Committee’s brief included suggesting practical ways to increase the use of educational film in schools, to “explore the feasibility” of providing for

³³ Ibid., 290.

³⁴ Stanhope Andrews to John Grierson, letter, 4.30.10, John Grierson Archive.

greater State control of the film industry in “the national interest”, and “any other matter” which could further the exhibition of film that would “improve the culture of the people”.³⁵

A report prepared by the Committee on “Culture in Film” in 1938 examined the use of film in various European countries. It described in detail the institutional setup, control and furtherance of the use of film in Nazi Germany. As Simon Sigley has argued:

This Nazi model held some appeal for the committee as it seemed to perfectly match the New Zealand government’s heavy-handed desire to ‘advance the culture of the people’ ... The German method of ‘encouragement’ of culture films was seen as the most effective for ‘the peaceful penetration of culture’.³⁶

In the same year, the Census and Statistics Department began to prepare statistics on cinema attendances, box office receipts and film hire, as well as other potentially useful information.³⁷ This allowed the monitoring of the film industry and of the tastes of the population through the preparation and analysis of statistics within a government agency.

In 1938, further plans were made for how New Zealand’s picture industry could provide “active and helpful cooperation” in the distribution and screening of educational films. On 21 December 1938, J. H. Mason wrote a letter to Walter Nash,³⁸ at that time Minister of Finance, stating that the support of Sir Benjamin Fuller in this matter was guaranteed. Mason was the manager of New Zealand Theatre Management and controlled about 64 cinemas that were owned by Fuller (in 1946 they were sold to Kerridge-Odeon). He told Nash, “It should be simple to arrange for screening in most of the remaining theatres to give almost complete coverage.” He ensured that such an enterprise would have “immeasurable value” in “*creating the proper public attitude in New Zealand*” as well as “effectively publicising New Zealand Product abroad”.

A letter to Peter Fraser dated 18 August 1939 further illustrates how film and other public media were considered to be useful for State educational and propagandistic purposes.³⁹ The letter’s author claimed to be well acquainted with government officials and people in

³⁵ Minutes of the Committee meeting, quoted in Simon Sigley, “Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929-1972” (PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2003), 202.

³⁶ Ibid., 205.

³⁷ Ibid., 203.

³⁸ J. H. Mason to Walter Nash, letter, 21 December 1938, 3.15.6, John Grierson Archive. Emphasis added.

³⁹ To Peter Fraser, letter, 18 August 1939, 3.15.64, John Grierson Archive.

the film industry and made complaints that “there is no general knowledge of the Government’s ideals. There is no system of propaganda with any real degree of effectiveness.” The letter proposed that the Labour government should take hold of the three main media of “propaganda” (radio, film and the “printed word”) and aim for their “complete co-ordination”. It mentioned that Mason would be willing to “capitalise, set up, and run a film making unit” which could be run “under State inspection” in order to further concerted propaganda. However, these plans to have a private film unit set up for general government propaganda purposes were never realised. Film production was, in the final decision, too important and potentially powerful to be left to private, sectional interests.

Although the NFU was formally established in 1941, after New Zealand had entered the war, the interest in and perceived value of educational and propaganda film production did not stem from wartime needs, but from a general interest by the Labour government and progressive educationalists to shift and advance specific purposes of film production. One of the measures taken in early 1939 in order to increase film production was the invitation of Grierson to visit New Zealand. Arrangements were made through the New Zealand Public Relations Council in London for Grierson to visit and advise on film production for governmental purposes.

“Show me the Face of a New Zealander” – John Grierson in New Zealand

After his trip was postponed for a few months, Grierson finally visited New Zealand in February and March 1940 and stayed for about four weeks. At the time of his visit, he had already been appointed Canadian Government Film Commissioner and worked as Film Advisor for the Imperial Relations Trust. The Trust was established in 1937 when an anonymous donor gave £250,000 “for the purpose of endowing any object best calculated to strengthen the ties that bind together the Dominions and the United Kingdom”.⁴⁰ It was decided to use parts of the money to establish travelling studentships as well as to support the production and distribution of “educational and documentary films” within the Empire

⁴⁰ “Functions of the Imperial Relations Trust,” 1939, TO 1 194 49/11/1 Part 1, Archives New Zealand.

to further the aims of the Trust. It was considered “that the ‘educational’ or ‘realist’ type of film had exceptional possibilities in this connection”.⁴¹

Grierson visited New Zealand and subsequently Australia for two purposes. First, he was invited by the New Zealand government to report and advise on film production and distribution. The second reason for Grierson’s visit related to his position as Film Advisor for the Imperial Relations Trust, which had commissioned him to report on the state of film-making in New Zealand and how educational film production and distribution could be improved to further the objectives of the Empire and its centre, Britain. During his visit, Grierson met with many high-ranking government officials as well as educationalists and people interested in film and its production, and he spent considerable time with Stanhope Andrews. Furthermore, he gave several interviews and public speeches, prepared an extensive report on the direction film production and distribution in New Zealand should take, and wrote an article published in *National Education* entitled “Dramatic Interpretation”.⁴² In this article, he pointed out the building blocks of his programme for civic education through public media. He mentioned Lippmann’s analysis of the problem of liberal democracies and proposed a solution through using media that provided a “direct basis of judgement” by dramatising and interpreting actuality. The aim was to create “teleological patterns out of the modern world” that were not based on rational analysis but on imaginative interpretation.

After Grierson had acquainted himself with New Zealand life, he wrote a memo to Fraser concerning what he thought were the special problems of “National Information Services”.⁴³ He pointed out that on the one hand there was a “large amount of discussion of the more domestic details of political affairs. On the other hand, one is equally impressed by the small amount of appreciation of national and Governmental effort as a whole.” He saw the danger in “too great concentration on domestic political detail, whether by the public or by the Government”, since it

gives rise to an atmosphere of bickering and criticism. An unnecessary gap is created between the Government – involved in its laborious tasks of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² John Grierson, “Dramatic Interpretation,” *National Education* 12, no. 233 (1940): 98. Emphasis added.

⁴³ John Grierson to Peter Fraser, “Problems in National Information Services,” memo, 10 March 1940, 4.5.4, John Grierson Archive. Emphasis added.

administration – and a public which is out of appreciative touch with the long term purposes involved ... That is to say, the fire of appreciation and understanding is apt to go out with a bang, unless special steps are taken to keep it in.

There is, Grierson claimed, a “national educational problem” that is

of urgent importance to democratic progressive Governments. Social democratic Governments have not in the past appeared to learn the secret of maintaining confidence once they have got it. *The problem involves new techniques of national education and a bold planning of effects.* In that sense, a vital, penetrating, and even dramatic public information system would seem to be an essential pillar of democratic Government, and worth the deepest consideration.

Grierson suggested the production of a variety of films, including instructionals, newsreels, lecture films and documentary films that could provide a focus and direction for the course of national and international development and understanding along the lines of democratic government and ideals. Therefore, filmic projections had to be tightly integrated into a general national and governmental perspective whose aims and values were to be implicitly and subtly projected through film, and adjusted and suited to specific audiences.

In his report for the New Zealand government Grierson pointed out several “principal categories” of film production which the government should pursue.⁴⁴ First, it should produce departmental films, including films for the instruction of departmental personnel, films for specific educational services operated by departments, and films that would improve the public relations and status of departments. Second, national films for a range of purposes should be produced, including films to promote the tourist trade, the marketing of commodities, teaching films for schools, films that promote good citizenship, films to project New Zealand overseas, and films that contribute a dramatic or human background to war information. He claimed that New Zealand had made a good start in films for tourism and publicity purposes, films for agricultural education and public relations films. However, according to Grierson, “the principal gap is in the lack of films for the promotion of good

⁴⁴ John Grierson, “Report on Film Production and Distribution in New Zealand, 1940, AAOJ 7811 W5077 24, Archives New Zealand. Emphases in original.

citizenship and for the building of New Zealand's reputation overseas". He claimed that "prestige films" were most important in "the creation of a favourable predisposition towards a country" as well as within national limits, and could act as a "background" to more specialised films. The role of a centralised national information service was seen to be crucial, since "the principal function of an information service is to develop a creative policy in which the two complementary aspects – background and foreground films – are harmonised". These would secure the combination of a "deeper appeal to the imagination ... with matters of specific instruction". Film was particularly suited for this end in that it, like the radio, had a wide reach on a continuous basis, but was more powerful because film "is in itself a physical, imaginative and exciting medium, capable of drama, illumination and inspiration".

Grierson then emphasised in his report the need for "directive production" by which films could be tailor-made for information purposes by the government. He also wrote about the distribution of films as well as how audiences could be reached effectively. He pointed out that "the primitive view of propaganda" – which saw the public as an undifferentiated mass – was "now superseded by the view that there is possibly no such thing as the 'public at large'". The public could be subdivided according to the ways, moods and special interests in which it congregates, culminating in the following "principal audiences": first, theatrical audiences, including audiences for newsreels, for short films of light, meretricious and more considered appeal, and audiences for long-story films. Second, non-theatrical audiences, including school audiences, adult audiences concerned with specific educational pursuits, adult audiences with specific problems of their pursuits (e.g. farmers or engineers), and groups meeting regarding social or public concerns (e.g. Women's Institutes, Rotary Clubs, Child Welfare Groups). Essential for this set-up of film distribution was, according to Grierson, a "planned policy" that was to be co-ordinated by "a central body", both of which he thought New Zealand still lacked.

In his report Grierson outlined a complex strategy of governing through film, which should not solely aim to take hold of the "public at large" in an undifferentiated manner. In this way he promoted to differentiate the population into smaller targetable "special interest groups", while at the same time urging the production of films that would function to homogenise and harmonise visions about New Zealand and its population. Grierson

suggested producing specific films for specific but differing and layered purposes in line with a meticulously planned and finely graded central strategy and policy. This would ensure that educational film was finely attuned to the identified needs of the State as well as its intended target audiences and the knowledge, expectations, interests and capabilities they brought with them.

Grierson then outlined the envisioned institutional organisation of film production and distribution. For this, he recommended establishing a central co-ordinating body (the "National Film Council") with an executive officer (the "National Film Controller") who would mediate between departments and the film studios. This would ensure that film production was not hampered by sectional interests or too much interference from people with limited knowledge of film production. The Council should be "attached to the Prime Minister's Department for obvious reasons. It must from the beginning be regarded as representing all Departments and as representing a national view point on films."

In a memo,⁴⁵ Grierson recommended that the Council should consist of two Ministers (Frank Langstone, the Minister of Tourism and Publicity, and D. G. Sullivan, the Minister of Industries and Commerce) and six to eight members that would represent the Public Service as well as "important outside educational and social interests". He recommended four senior officers from the Public Service plus Sir Thomas Hunter from the Council of Adult Education, Janet Fraser (the wife of Peter Fraser), who would represent women's interests, and stated as a possibility that a representative of Māori interests might also be included.

Grierson's recommendations show that he did not envision an autonomous film unit. He pointed out that in political terms such an institution would need to be directly attached to the Prime Minister's Department in order to secure a coherent and harmonised national viewpoint. He proposed that filmmakers have a certain creative leeway, limited and regulated through the general policy and identified needs for publicity and determined by and controlled through the Council in close coordination with acting Prime Minister Fraser.⁴⁶ In this sense, a certain creative leeway was seen as desirable although filmmakers would still be required to further the objectives of a general policy of publicity. Thereby too much

⁴⁵ John Grierson to Peter Fraser and Frank Langstone, memo, 4.5.5, John Grierson Archive.

⁴⁶ See also Hoskins, "John Grierson, the NZNFU and the Art of Propaganda," 79.

interference by administrators and politicians, who lacked knowledge of the art of effective filmmaking, could be avoided.

In a memo to Sir Harry Batterbee of the Imperial Relations Trust,⁴⁷ Grierson detailed the additional need for an Advisory Film Committee of the Council of Adult Education that would have an Executive Officer. This committee would represent the “consumer groups” and “co-ordinate and develop the non-Theatrical circulation of films in New Zealand, by articulating demand and acting as a clearing house for supply. It will be the representative of all the Educational and Civic group interests in New Zealand.” Grierson stated that Andrews was likely to become the Executive Officer assuming, as he expressed it in another letter, “the job of his life”.⁴⁸ From these suggestions, it can be further deduced that Grierson wanted a small, carefully chosen elite to be in control of film policy, while “Educational and Civic group interests” were delegated to the role of “consumers”. Their representatives would be concerned with the distribution, not the production of film, would channel and mediate demand, and assure that educational films would be made available for their intended target audiences.

After Grierson had left New Zealand, he wrote a letter to Stephen Tallents concerning the New Zealand government film service and “how the local needs have been exploited to the general end”.⁴⁹ He concluded, “We may look on New Zealand as officially concerned to further our plans”, that is to establish an information service that would advance particular national needs while also advancing “a common Empire end” by furthering “an atmosphere of constructive national responsibility” in New Zealand.

In a letter to Thomas Baird Grierson again reflected on the tasks and strategy of filmic education and propaganda and pointed out that,⁵⁰ in reference to Britain,

The Ministry [of Information] should avoid the serious errors of propaganda theory which ‘The Lion has Wings’ demonstrated. I need only emphasise the fact that propaganda of this kind creates a secondary wave of reaction which in many quarters is one of resentment at the ‘over-statement’, or ‘unfairness’. In other words a film which attempts so much must see to it that it attempts something

⁴⁷ John Grierson to Harry Batterbee, memo, 15 March 1940, 4.5.6, John Grierson Archive.

⁴⁸ John Grierson to Hunter, letter, 10 March 1940, 4.24.25, John Grierson Archive.

⁴⁹ John Grierson to Stephen Tallents, letter, 24 March 1940, 4.24.66, John Grierson Archive.

⁵⁰ John Grierson to Thomas Baird, letter, 26 March 1940, 4.24.71, John Grierson Archive.

approaching the truth. Numbers of people outside England are not so gulled by one-way information services ... I could say a lot about that and particularly how nonsensical the language of our propaganda sometimes is.

With reference to British newsreels, he pointed out that the need "is something desperately simple like a weighty shot of a well-known street, or cathedral or town, or a scene particularly English. In other words a dash of deepening reference." Grierson seems to have assumed what Tom Gunning has suggested in reference to the "educational" potential of film in general:

It may be that films convey and instruct best when they least seem to be doing so. Many attitudes conveyed by films, or any cultural product, about gender, race, class, sexuality, or religious and moral values are conceived less as conscious messages than conveyed as common assumptions.⁵¹

In a letter to D. G. Sullivan,⁵² the Minister of Industries and Commerce, Grierson again referred to the need for a coherent and effective central strategy of film production. Therefore, films had to be "(a) equal in production values to any overseas product; (b) rich in entertainment values; (c) *devised to mask their propaganda or educational values*; (d) planned to form a continuous series". In other words, films should be of an internationally comparable production standard; bind audiences' attention and fulfil expectations and desires through "entertainment values"; and have an educational impact, which would remain implicit and unconscious on the side of audiences. Such an endeavour should be continuous and film production should be run "on business lines", that is, it should be efficient, effective and accountable.

After Grierson had left New Zealand, he arranged for a payment by the Imperial Relations Trust of £1,250 to assist the development of New Zealand film production and the distribution of films throughout the Empire. He was convinced that his visit to New Zealand had been thoroughly successful and that his detailed recommendations would be put into operation.⁵³ However, most details of Grierson's recommendations regarding the institutional organisation of a film production unit and film distribution were not directly

⁵¹ Tom Gunning, "Making Sense of Film," accessed 10 January 2010, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/film.pdf>.

⁵² John Grierson to D. G. Sullivan, letter, 17 November 1939, 4.23.41, John Grierson Archive. Emphasis added.

⁵³ John Grierson to Miss Jackson, letter, 24 March 1940, 4.24.67, John Grierson Archive.

implemented. Grierson's plans to set up a National Film Council were not brought to fruition, nor were his plans to have an Advisory Film Committee established that would act as a clearing house for film supply and arrange for non-theatrical distribution of film. The government organised film production on even more tightly controllable and centralised terms than Grierson had envisioned.

The reasons why it took more than a year before the NFU was formally established have remained untraceable and there is very little to be found in official government documents or in Grierson's correspondence. Savage, the Prime Minister, died in office on 27 March 1940, only a few weeks after Grierson had left New Zealand for Australia, and the State administration was busy preparing for war. Since the plans made for film production did not explicitly relate to the war – Grierson hardly mentions the war in his report or in other correspondence – it is likely that film production was not regarded as important enough in comparison with other more urgent tasks. While specific details of Grierson's recommendations were not directly implemented, however, much of his general outlines and demands for film production and distribution were successively taken up and incorporated into the institutional organisation and practices of the NFU. Further, as Jonathan Dennis has claimed, "the spirit of his [Grierson's] recommendations is put into effect by Stanhope Andrews when the NFU is established the next year".⁵⁴

"Propagandists with Good Consciences" – Stanhope Andrews and the Politics of Realism

While Grierson had foreseen that Andrews would become Executive Officer of the Advisory Film Committee, he was instead appointed as Producer, the senior position at the NFU. In the New Zealand context, it can be argued that the governmental strategy of Griersonian documentary film became fully established and institutionalised with the setting up of the NFU, and particularly with the outlining of a programme and purposes that were attached to film production. In New Zealand, it was Andrews who took on Grierson's role as an advocate and promoter of realist film. His programme for film production as a means for democratic education and propaganda was in various respects close to Grierson's. Although Andrews' writings do not show the rhetorical power and scope of theoretical reflection of Grierson's,

⁵⁴ Jonathan Dennis, "A Time Line," in *Film in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Jonathan Dennis and Jan Bieringa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996), 219.

he frequently took up his mentor's notions and imperatives concerning the use of public media, seeking to apply them to a New Zealand context. For Andrews, as for Grierson, civic education and propaganda were closely related and film was the most suitable medium for the furtherance of specific visions of the population. In this section Andrews' writings are discussed with reference to the strategic use of public media – particularly film – for democratic education and propaganda.

Andrews had qualifications and experience in the areas of education, journalism, publicity and film criticism and was a long-standing member of the Labour Party. He was trained as a teacher and had worked as assistant to the acting-editor of the *School Journal*, as well as for the *New Zealand Education Gazette*. Before he became Producer at the NFU, he had been employed for more than five years as Assistant Secretary of the New Zealand Educational Institute, New Zealand's largest education trade union, and acted as editor for *National Education*, the official journal of the Institute. Furthermore, throughout the 1930s, he wrote film critiques for the *Dominion*, a Wellington based daily newspaper, and in March 1939 he began to write essays on film for the journal *Tomorrow*.⁵⁵ Andrews had a long-standing interest in film as well as in the theory and techniques of education, and he was the only staff member of the NFU during the 1940s and 50s who more substantially reflected upon and published on the relationship of propaganda, education and film for democratic purposes. Not only did Andrews closely identify with the work of the British Documentary Movement and its propagandistic and educational "spirit", but other members of the staff at the NFU did too. In 1942, Oxley Hughan, NFU director, wrote an article for *Spike*, in which he took up Paul Rotha's notion that education and propaganda were closely related:

Whether we like it or not propaganda is a recognized part not only of modern warfare but of State administration at all times. Or as Rotha puts it 'Illumination and propaganda are closely related. Propaganda, also in the long term range sense is very near to education, and may be wisely interpreted as a task of development. In fact so closely are the two related that in most cases it would be difficult to define where instruction begins and propaganda ends'. A rough

⁵⁵ See Benjamin, "Film Pioneer Stanhope Andrews," 36.

yardstick would classify the good propaganda as informative and the bad as misleading.⁵⁶

Beyond such assertions only very few publications can be traced that engaged with questions of film and its social(ising) impact during the 1940s and 50s. The only book on film published in New Zealand during this period was Gordon Mirams' *Speaking Candidly* (1945), which discussed film and its influence in New Zealand. Mirams thought that the Hollywood films screened in New Zealand had a particularly strong influence on audiences, normalised certain behaviours, and tended to cement "the status quo". He regarded the "subtle ... influence which the screen exerts upon our attitudes of mind" as being of particular significance in the shaping of audiences. This was an influence

which we do not so much absorb consciously through our eyes and ears as unknowingly through our emotional pores ... It is through the cumulative effect of such small impressions as these that the cinema exerts its greatest power both on the individual and on the mass-mind.⁵⁷

Towards the end of the book, Mirams discussed newsreels and documentary film. For him the qualifying mark of documentary was that "it dramatised an idea or theme" by drawing on factual material, and telling "its usually simple story in terms of human beings and human interests".⁵⁸ Documentaries therefore tended to be less objective recordings of actuality and were "propagandist in trend", which justified the NFU being controlled within the State administration, although this was not without problems.⁵⁹ As discussed below, Andrews also regarded the control of film production within the State administration as desirable.

One of Andrews' main functions as Producer at the NFU was to mediate between the State administration and filmmakers. He exercised considerable guidance and control over the filmic visions that the NFU produced during the 1940s, and one of his tasks was to approve and supervise all production processes. Throughout the war, Andrews was in regular close contact with John T. Paul, the Director of State Publicity, and Fraser, which allowed for a steady negotiation and adjustment of the films that would be produced. His publications,

⁵⁶ Hughan, Oxley. "Made in New Zealand," *Spike: Annual Magazine of the Victoria University Students' Association* 41, no. 70 (1942), 5-6.

⁵⁷ Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand* (Hamilton: Paul's, 1945), 35-36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

reports and correspondence form the most important legacies that enable the tracing of the governmental function of film in and for New Zealand's democracy. Andrews however did not explicitly reject the Enlightenment ideals of education and the ideal of the rational citizen, and took a less elitist perspective on the perceived problems of democratic government than Grierson. His writings nevertheless show a close relation to Grierson's programme on the instrumental use of film for an imperceptible and subtle shaping of a uniform "free will" of the general population through strategically affecting and shaping visions of the real.

When discussing Andrews' writings, one needs to bear in mind that he did not outline a consistent theory or philosophy of realist film. Additionally, he never published at length and in detail on questions of education and propaganda. His writings are spread out over several reports, published articles and correspondence, and, at places, his arguments are ambiguous and inconsistent. However, as with Grierson's writings, it is possible to detect certain patterns of thought and it is useful to regard Andrews' writings as strategic attempts to at once calculate, legitimise and promote a set of practices in relation to film and democratic education.

Andrews was aware of the potentially controversial nature of film production that claimed to represent the real truthfully, while at the same time operating within the executive of State government. However, Andrews, like Grierson, envisioned the State as the best guarantor of unity and utilitarian progress on a national scale. It should therefore enable, direct and control film production, and the urgencies of the day seemed to make a more concerted and deliberate use of film necessary and justified. For Andrews, State guidance and control was particularly important, since as soon as film began to move beyond the representation of a

photogenic surface to the fundamentals of social and economic change ... it becomes interpretative, i.e., propagandist. However studiously bias is avoided in this kind of film-construction, the finished job will influence its audiences towards change or towards the *status quo*. This is the inescapable dilemma of all information services, as it is also the absolute justification for placing those of national scope, as ours is, under the control of the people's representatives. It is a power too great to be left to private individuals, and a national function of far

too much importance to be neglected. As propagandists with good consciences, we can say from experience that audiences have ... everything to gain from the long-range planning and organisation which Government sponsorship makes possible.⁶⁰

While Grierson also promoted the sponsorship of film production through private industry, this was not the case with Andrews. In his writings, he repeatedly pointed out the need to have factual realist film production solely controlled and guided through the State, and more specifically from within the Prime Minister's Department.

Andrews, similarly to Grierson, expressed in his writings a general belief in the value and desirability of "progressive" democratic government as exercised through the institutions of the modern liberal nation-state. For both, the project of reform lay in the improvement of self-discipline, unity and economic conduct by advancing perceptions of mutual responsibility and increased harmonious co-operation on a national scale and beyond. To contribute to this process film had to promote certain knowledge, empathy, trust and understanding, while abstracting from existing social, economic, political struggles and the various historical experiences of asymmetrical power relations within the nation. The role Andrews envisaged for film is evident in an article shortly after the NFU had been established, in which he claimed that films were now produced at Miramar "for the people by the people".⁶¹ In another article, published in *The Listener* in the same year, entitled "Propagandists with Good Consciences", Andrews claimed with reference to the NFU that "The aim from the start had been to give straight information without propagandist dressing up."⁶² While such assertions may relate to Andrews' idealising and at times contradictory thought, at the same time they undoubtedly had a strategic function, whether intentionally or unintentionally, which is discussed in more detail below.

In November 1940, Andrews published an article entitled "Films for Democracy" as a means of promoting the production of educational and propagandistic film within the realm of State

⁶⁰ Stanhope Andrews, "Propagandists with Good Consciences: National Film Unit's First Year," *The New Zealand Listener* 7, no. 174 (1942), 5. Emphasis in original.

⁶¹ Stanhope Andrews, "A Dream Come True: New Zealand Films for the People, by the People," *The New Zealand Listener* 5, no. 122 (1941), 6-7.

⁶² Andrews, "Propagandists with Good Consciences: National Film Unit's First Year," 5.

government.⁶³ The article reflected on the nature of democracy at work and the function that film could and should have. He saw film as a craft that could build up “a living body of knowledge and understanding”, which should be practised “by everyone all the time. Amongst the most important of the techniques of democracy is that of co-operation ... human relationships of trust and intuitive understanding of the other fellow’s powers and skill are essential.” Andrews went on to refer to the argument frequently made by Grierson and Lippmann that provided a rationale for the need to make strategic and concerted use of public media:

Our modern communities are so large and sprawling that the person-to-person contacts are impossible ... Some restoration of that person-to-person contact is essential to democracy if it is to work at full pressure all the time. It cannot be done directly as it used to be, and still is in the small democracies of communities and groups. But it can be done with the aid of the modern machinery of communication if it is used imaginatively. Above all it can be done by the use of films, firstly because, apart from the frankly commercial entertainment shows, people have less cause than in the case of other media of public communication to suspect the films of selfish axe-grinding; and secondly because films honestly made can present the other fellow’s appearance and habits and work in a form even more easily assimilable than by personal contact.

Besides suggesting that “the modern machinery of communication” could act to restore person-to-person contact, or at least the impression of such contact, Andrews pointed to the two crucial qualities that made film superior to other techniques of public communication, two points, which Grierson had also raised. First, film did not *appear* to be biased and, second, it allowed for an easy assimilation of knowledge.

In another article from 1940,⁶⁴ published shortly after Grierson had left New Zealand, Andrews reflected on the specific qualities of film that he saw as “conveying impressions, a sort of mental shorthand that neither the radio nor the press can rival in immediate effect ...

⁶³ Stanhope Andrews, "Films for Democracy," *Film Letter* 1, no. 1 (1940), 2.

⁶⁴ Stanhope Andrews, "Presenting the World to the World," *National Education* 22, no. 233 (1940), 89-91. Emphasis added.

Since *the understanding conveyed by good dramatic film is largely on the emotional level, it puts its story across immediately, and in one piece.*"

He then claimed that film demanded a new way of thinking and that through its dramatic and emotional quality it had an immense educational potential, which could simplify the task of education and intensify its effectiveness. The task for democratic education through film lay in an interpretation of the contemporary modern world through dramatisation. Democracy "demands knowledge as a basis of free individual judgement" and more things "than the individual has the time or the energy to assimilate except through this new 'flat perspective' on the screen". Watching film would provide specific, largely non-rational knowledge that interpreted the modern world and hence formed a suitable basis of judgement for popular audiences.

Another important paper that Andrews produced in order to promote the use of film under the auspices of the State was a report he and educationalist Frank Combs prepared for Fraser a few weeks after Grierson had left New Zealand. Andrews later claimed about this report that "PF [Peter Fraser] threw away Grierson's report. It was my report that persuaded PF to set up the Unit."⁶⁵ Entitled *National Publicity and Adult Education in War Time. Practical Suggestions for Integrating New Zealand's War Effort through Radio, Films, Press, etc on a Democratic Basis*,⁶⁶ Andrews' report laid out his vision of how to arrange for a concerted and co-ordinated direction of New Zealand's population during wartime through the strategic use of public media. It also attempted to give this co-ordination a democratic legitimisation distinct from the use of public media in authoritarian regimes.

In this report, as in other writings, the ambiguous and potentially contradictory need to centrally govern, guide and improve the conduct of the population in reference to a set of norms, desires and perceived necessities, while retaining individual "freedom" and the ideals of "democracy", is clearly visible. The report begins with the words:

This memorandum was written as an answer to the suggestion that the democratic ways of life must be given up in order to participate in the war. It was

⁶⁵ Stanhope Andrews, Hand Written Note, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶⁶ Stanhope Andrews, "National Publicity and Adult Education in War Time. Practical Suggestions for Integrating New Zealand's War Effort through Radio, Films, Press, etc on a Democratic Basis," 20 May 1940, MS 0982-501, Hocken Library. Emphases in original.

written in the belief that the very opposite is the truth; that the war effort can and should strengthen and consolidate democracy here and now. The general aim is to consolidate public opinion and public effort on a basis of the fullest possible knowledge and understanding of this country internally and in relation to the rest of the world.

Since concerted “public effort” was necessary, “public opinion” would need to be arranged and shaped through public media to advance this effort. A few pages on, he expressed this aim as the need

of integrating the national purpose while still retaining the democratic benefits of open discussion, of access to the fullest information about national affairs, and of free co-operative efforts without coercion. National integration on the plane of feelings and understanding – a deep and widespread understanding of our politics, our economics and our culture – is a prime requisite for purposive and continuing action on a national scale ... While the emotional drive of the people is being co-ordinated and consolidated on a basis of knowledge and co-operation it must also be led into productive channels. Knowledge and practice must co-exist.

Andrews’ emphasised “free co-operative efforts without coercion”, a point that Grierson had also raised, which differentiated democratic and authoritarian government. Nevertheless, “free co-operation” was only practical as long as it was effective in relation to the mobilisation for the conduct of war. If productive and positive means failed, coercion remained a possible necessity, although not desirable:

A minor problem that cannot be ignored is the existence of dissident groups, at present in a hopeless minority. The operation of a really concerted national effort along the lines indicated above would in a large part solve this problem, for it seems to be a fact that the main body of support for such groups comes from a number of people of unsettled conviction, confused by the complexities of life in wartime ... Given a place in a national plan of action, fortified by opportunities for discussion and acquisition of new knowledge, a good many of these would probably be attracted into the main stream of feeling. There still remain some of firm convictions, who should be dealt with as occasion warrants and public safety

demands, by the properly appointed authorities. There is waste in all human activities, a fact which should be recognised and should not be permitted to divert feeling and enthusiasm from more constructive channels.

Towards the end of his report, Andrews again drew attention to the possibility that his programme for democratic education and propaganda through public media could be regarded as authoritarian and therefore as contradicting democratic ideals:

The scheme outlined here might, to outward appearance, be operated in an authoritarian manner. In actual fact it will not be effective for its democratic purpose unless in every detail it is operated on a co-operative basis – co-operation not only of the people responsible for certain aspects of its conduct, but also of the whole community.

That is, authoritarianism could be avoided if people could be made to co-operate through their “free will” and a vision of freedom and democracy that seemed to be worth fighting and dying for.

In his report, Andrews also set out his “thesis” and further elaborated on the techniques and strategies necessary to achieve desired effects. Here, more than before, he explicitly focused on implicit knowledge, that is knowledge that is neither rational nor conscious. A main technique was the evocation of affect to create national coherence and unity:

The emotions of human beings are still pretty much what they have always been. People still love a show; if it is well done and without self-consciousness they can still be swayed by oratory; waving flags, swinging columns of men, blaring bands, still get under their skins. Despite the cynicism they like these things and can be moved to action by them, provided that both onlookers and ‘stage managers’ can think of the occasion as one on which they can legitimately let their feelings get the upper hand. The restraint of the last proviso is real enough in the case of the average crowd, though it could be overcome with a little effort.

Andrews’ argument draws close to Grierson’s notion of the subconscious which produces effect mainly through affect, a process that relied on the absence of “self-consciousness”. At the same time, as Andrews argued, one had to be careful not to arouse “the blind power of mass feeling”, since it would threaten “the liberty of the individual conscience which is one

of the fundamental tenets of democracy". Feelings of the "average crowd" had to be aroused, but at the same time they needed to be carefully controlled and channelled into desirable directions in order not to risk uncontrollable irrational behaviour that would undermine the tenets of democratic government. However, national unity and improved conduct should not be achieved through a top-down implementation, since "such forced unity" would not have

the power of the organic unity which grows out of a common purpose. The more effective and much more lasting method is to communicate the raw stuff of unity to the citizen as an individual and as a member of his social group, allowing the cohesive forces of shared knowledge to create organic unity. The problem, in short, is an educational one.

In order to solve this problem, education should focus on "the integration of the feelings and knowledge of the individual with that of the whole community". To make the projection of these relationships effective, "a prime necessity" was

the building up of a solid pride in the achievements and the beauties of New Zealand, bringing alive our factories, farms and towns as well as our mountains, our 'family' beaches as well as our expensive tourist resorts, our military prowess as well as our democratic way of life. Because these things are good or pleasant, or above all, because they are our own, they will relate themselves subtly to the war effort.

Although film was the medium most suited for the task of the "integration of national life", the aim was to use

every means of public communication, including radio, press and films, with special emphasis on films as being most capable of producing considerable effect in the shortest possible time. Every medium of intercommunication should be pressed into the service of creating a nationally acceptable image of ourselves at work and at play, an image based on the good, real things that are worth preserving and worth fighting for.

Another change in outlook and approach, this time focused on the necessities during times of peace, was expressed in a report in 1945,⁶⁷ in which Andrews referred again to the need for a general policy and philosophy of film production, which should point up “from every angle the dignity and worth of the individual, the intimate realities of democracy, and the fellowship of mankind in its practical aspects”. He proposed the NFU should make films “which could not be made in fascist and authoritarian countries”. He claimed that “the great bulk” of film footage was “unexciting” and it was rather “the treatment” which “resulted in completed films of distinction, and of a unique humanitarian standard. Always it had been the attitude rather than the material which has contributed so much to the marked public appreciation of National Film Unit films.”

In this sense, filmmakers had to know in advance the general direction a film should take, and which strategies and techniques would allow the transformation of “unexciting material” into an effective vision. Like Grierson, Andrews claimed that the strategic calculation of filmic effect had to precede the recording of actuality. As he claimed in *How to be a Magician*:⁶⁸

The professional [filmmaker] ... has not only to secure the simple fundamentals of recognisability; he must keep on keeping his audience interested, whether he does it by clever cutting, or beautiful photography, or educational value or a combination of these and other qualities. *The professional in short, must know in advance what he is to achieve and how.*

Increased technical efficiency would lead to “increased subtlety of expression”, but most important for film production was to advance “understanding, breadth of view and clarity of objective”.

In other words, film had to be based on an ensemble of strategic knowledge and techniques that filmmakers and the controlling agencies of film production brought into play. As was the case for Grierson, it was less the observation or encounter of actuality that was of potential educational value, but its filmic projection, direction and disposition towards the future that was to be realised. Andrews went on to reflect on NFU film production during wartime and claimed that “nothing short of the usually impossible personal contacts can add so much to

⁶⁷ Stanhope Andrews, “Report on Reorganisation and Expansion of Activities of the New Zealand National Film Unit,” 28 February 1945, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶⁸ Stanhope Andrews, “How to be a Magician,” *Spike. Annual Magazine of the Victoria University Students' Association* 44, no. 73 (1945), 29-31. Emphasis added.

mutual understanding as vivid, honest films". This notion of "honesty", a concept repeatedly expressed by Andrews, related less to the ethics of a disinterested observation or encounter of actuality and its filmic representation than to a priori attitudes and values that were to be encoded into film in order to convey what was already known to be universally "true", "good", "desirable" and "necessary" *before* a film was made.

Andrews additionally claimed in *How to be a Magician* that one of the reasons why the NFU film was popular with New Zealand audiences was because of its "evident sincerity and a tendency towards understatement". Furthermore,

Foresight and the clear voice are essential if the respect of audiences is to be won and kept. But whose voice? ... The voice is that of the audience which, though usually dumb and often ignorant, is nearly always intelligent. If the film producer or his sponsor step too far out in front, John Citizen will haul them back; if they get into reserve they will also be brought up to current ideas with a jolt. The film worker ... must be forever reaching out at the limits of what he can say in the most explosive medium of communication yet invented, and yet staying all the time just inside those limits. Because the commercial entertainment cinema is rightly concerned primarily with entertainment, it must deal in topics of universal interest and universal acceptance. Ranged up against this kind of fare, a short film which dealt as trenchantly with some matter of social import as a good pamphlet might, would cause a riot.

In other words, filmic visions, in order to be suitably effective, had to remain within the given conditions of possibility, which related to the expectations, capabilities and knowledge of popular audiences. The films would work by structuring a "voice" that audiences would identify with and take up as their own. At the same time, filmmakers needed to go to the limits of possibility in order to be able to shift subtly the limits of these conditions of possibility. They could thereby avoid "riot" and unrest while fostering reform by providing audiences with a "voice" that could and would be taken up as their own.

In order to achieve the necessary effects, it was of crucial importance that the NFU appeared to be autonomous and free from undue political direction, since, as Andrews wrote in a letter to Paul, "nothing will kill the effectiveness of our films with our public more quickly

than suspicion that we are being directed into any one channel".⁶⁹ While the NFU had to make certain direct appeal films that explicitly asked audiences to change their conduct, the NFU badge, according to Andrews, was deliberately left off these films. Then the NFU would not be associated with such direct appeals, since such films "fail of their immediate purpose, and worse still, make audiences suspicious that they are being 'got at' in our ordinary films. In the long view, I think such films do a great deal of harm to our main propaganda line."⁷⁰

In *How to be a Magician* Andrews also claimed that because of three factors "no film workers have ever had more professional freedom anywhere". The first two factors were the common sense of the government's sponsoring of film production and the complexities of film construction, while

the third and most important reason for lack of interference from on top is the fact that positive subjects requiring elucidation so far outnumber the available hours of screen time that the film worker has no time to get himself into trouble by being over-much critical of the other fellow's doings. This in some ivory-tower quarters is regarded as the height of cynical rationalisation, in most film units as sheer practical common sense. There are other better fields for the practice of direct criticism; *films, some of us feel, are best used for positive suggestion*. The word propaganda has fallen into ill favour of late, and 'education' or 'publicity' have taken its place. The change reflects the current attitude of production staffs all around the world ... It is this *functional viewpoint* which makes the good documentary groups what they are.⁷¹

In short, Andrews, like Grierson, did not favour using film to animate political discourse, provide a space for controversy or deliberation, or to advance critical faculties of audiences. Nor was film to be used for overt propaganda and direct appeal, but rather for "positive suggestion" through providing a "functional viewpoint". Therefore, a focus of their thought was on the question of how to produce films that would be effective while avoiding overt propaganda, exaggeration and sensationalism – characteristics that would likely undermine the perception of an authentic and unbiased representation of the real.

⁶⁹ Stanhope Andrews to John Thomas Paul, letter, 1 October 1943, MS 0982-164, Hocken Library.

⁷⁰ Stanhope Andrews to John Thomas Paul, confidential letter, 23 July 1942, MS 0982-660, Hocken Library.

⁷¹ Andrews, "How to be a Magician," 31. Emphasis added.

Andrews also was, like Grierson, against films that exhibited an “arty-tarty flavour”,⁷² which implied that art was performed for its own sake, without a clear social purpose and utility. In an article written in 1948 Andrews claimed that art – understood as the combination of skill and imagination – was fundamental for “all successful conscious attempts to communicate with one’s fellow beings”.⁷³ It produced a distinct “quality of perception and illumination”. In this sense, the art that was of importance in film production was not only the art of directing actuality and employing a certain aesthetic, but also the art of producing a certain illuminating experience, a vision, within audiences. Andrews claimed that motion picture production was the greatest of all arts because “its appeal is immediate and universal”. Film production “demands the utmost of individual creative effort and yet requires that effort to be exercised in a community of craftsmanship and talents, thus suiting itself to the facts and realities of this day and age in the making, in the perception, in the effect”. In other words, production, filmic perception and desired “illuminating” effects would need to be integrated into the calculations, procedures and planning of film to give “effective cinematic pattern to the problems of the community”. The “discipline of purpose” was crucial for film production, since “the material of documentary is crude and intractable, usually sicklied [sic] o’er with the pale cast of commonplace and thereby demanding prodigious effort to present it freshly at the level of revelation and renewed comprehension”. Additionally, Andrews claimed:

If there is art and filmic beauty in some of our films it is not in the exquisite photography of *Rhythm and Movement* but in the work of miners and the ragged march of the elements in Sid Brookes’ six-year old *Coal from Westland*; or in the sudden nostalgic illumination of the apparently commonplace in Margaret Thomson’s more recent *Railway Worker*. *These films were made to do a job; the raw material is gathered and disciplined into a dramatic pattern* of which the impact is on a much different level from that engendered by the incidental beauty of individual shots. Beauty, in the applied art of documentary film, is a function of purpose and reality and it ill becomes any of us to forget it.

⁷² Stanhope Andrews, “Miramar Studios: Documentaries Need not be Dull,” *Screen Parade* 1, no. 7 (1945), 13.

⁷³ Stanhope Andrews, “Shadow Catching: Some Thoughts on Documentary Films in New Zealand,” *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, no. 4 (1948), 139-42. Emphasis added.

In this sense, art and aesthetics were, for Andrews as for Grierson, to be functional, assisting in the improvement and reform of audiences and by extension in the creation of a reality yet to be realised.

There were a variety of changes evident in NFU film production in comparison to earlier State film production, in which, according to Andrews, the “presentation relied heavily, if not exclusively, on attractive photographic quality, the simplest of cutting and, when sound came, upon lightness and verbal fun from the soundtrack”.⁷⁴ Additionally, film would now focus less on seemingly eternal aspects, particularly landscapes and scenery and timeless depictions of Māoritanga, and more on contemporary affairs of the nation, with a focus on human relationships and “human interest” stories. Such a strategic representation was one of the major aspects that needed to be emphasised. Andrews claimed that “a major part of the work [of film production] must depend on a more or less articulated theory of human relationships”,⁷⁵ which earlier State films had lacked. Furthermore, Andrews gave two sources of inspiration for the work of the NFU. One came from Grierson and the British Documentary Film Movement: “Grierson and his fellows proved that the romance of reality can be far more effective than the romance of unreality”, while the other came from the films of Robert Flaherty: “These were not story picture, not newsreels, but something in between the two, with more real emotional power than either. This was reality, and Flaherty’s discovery was the discovery that reality could be made the star turn in romance.”⁷⁶ In short, Andrews envisioned NFU films to be dramatic and/or romantic interpretations of actuality, focusing on human relations, while strategically calculating the production of films with reference to the expectations and knowledge of targeted audiences, the purposes attached to film production, and the projected effects to be achieved. Film was therefore to be a productive instrument for “positive suggestion”, working largely by addressing and shaping non-conscious processes.

While Andrews’ writings allow the tracing of projected relationship of realist factual film and democratic government, it is also important to discuss the institutional and political context of State publicity in which the NFU was embedded when it was first established.

⁷⁴ Stanhope Andrews, "Movie-Making in the Public Service," *Journal of Public Administration* 9, no. 2 (1947), 68.

⁷⁵ Stanhope Andrews to John Thomas Paul, confidential letter, 11 November 1940, MS 0982-484, Hocken Library.

⁷⁶ Andrews, "A Dream Come True: New Zealand Films for the People, by the People," 7.

Directing Democracy – State Publicity and “the Positive Effort”

Shortly after Labour won the elections in 1935, the need for and use of State publicity for governmental purposes was reconsidered and control of the airwaves was further centralised and nationalised. Labour also initiated the production of *One Hundred Crowded Years* on the occasion of the Centennial of New Zealand (as discussed before). However, the government not only extended the use and control of public media and publicity through State agencies, it also established an Information Service within the Prime Minister’s Department in 1935, “for the purpose of serving the Prime Minister [and other Departments] with information of economic, statistical, or political significance”.⁷⁷ The Information Service was thus occupied with the gathering and processing of “objective” information for governmental purposes, while the NFU became part of the “projective” functions of the State that were readjusted and extended under Labour. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, the whole State apparatus and its agency was significantly expanded, including the gathering and projection of knowledge about the population, particularly through statistics, thus at once creating and providing for increased specific knowledge and agency in the administration, control, guidance and improvement of the population.

This expansion of the State apparatus closely related to the extended functions of the State with reference to social welfare and civic education. During the 1940s and 50s, education was widely conceived as a technique that should produce responsible and useful citizens of a democratic nation-state. A booklet entitled *Reconstruction in Primary Education*, published in 1944 by the New Zealand Educational Institute, defined the terms and scope of education as follows:

The specific aim of our education system is to produce citizens who will be capable morally, intellectually and physically of taking their place and doing their duty in a truly democratic State. To this end, the ultimate goal of all our teaching will be Character Training for Citizenship.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Report on Information Section,” 1949, AAPG W3435 2 1/6 Part 1, Archives New Zealand.

⁷⁸ The New Zealand Educational Institute, *Reconstruction in Primary Education* (Wellington: Tolan Printing Company, 1944), 10.

Therefore,

Our influence ... will be directed towards the establishing of a belief in and a respect for the basic and unchanging spiritual and moral values; in inculcating those principles which go to the making of a good useful citizen, and a valuable unit of our British Commonwealth of Nations; and in establishing a respect for and an understanding of the rights of all nations to Freedom, Justice and Liberty.⁷⁹

In relation to these abstract and universal ideals education came to be regarded as a continuous and life-long task and Labour introduced State adult education and established the Council for Adult Education among several other cultural and educational institutions.

After war was declared in September 1939, the government began to impose tighter control of public discourse and over private communication within State agencies. This was regarded to be imperative, firstly to avoid the leaking of valuable information to “the enemy” and secondly to minimise subversion and critique of the war enterprise, since this could undermine the concerted effort of the State administration to mobilise the population for war. In September 1939, the Censorship and Publicity Emergency Regulations were adopted, which broadly defined a “subversive statement” to be one that was “likely to prejudice ... the discipline of His Majesty’s Forces” or would be “likely to interfere with the national effort by disruption of the morale of the civil population”, or a statement that was “likely to prejudice or interfere with the ... carrying on of any services required by reason of or in connection with the war”.⁸⁰

The Regulations also provided for the establishment of a wartime Publicity Office (PO) within the Prime Minister’s Department, charged with supervising and controlling censorship and publicity. John Thomas Paul was appointed Director of Publicity. Reporting directly to Prime Minister Fraser, he was assigned considerable authority, since he

was to implement the policy of the Board of Censorship and Publicity; to prepare and issue information both as news and for propaganda, using and co-ordinating the press, broadcasting and films; to maintain continuity of policy and direction

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁰ A. E. Currie to Attorney-General, “Public Safety Emergency Regulations,” MS 0982/748, Hocken Library.

in publicity, and to be the sole authority through which all government departments would issue statements relating to the war.⁸¹

The work of the PO consisted of, as Paul frequently pointed out, “negative” as well as “positive” functions. The negative functions lay in the censorship and suppression of information deemed to be contrary to national security and public morale. This included information on the movement of armed forces, preparations for the defence of national borders, and military strategies. However, censorship was also used to address problems with “manpower” and dissidents.

Paul, however, paid particular attention to the “positive” functions of the PO, which were implied in the specific conception of “publicity” and entailed the strategic arrangement and publication of information. These included the production and dissemination of articles and photographs to the press, the production of booklets, pamphlets and posters, as well as radio broadcasting and film production by the NFU which, in Paul’s opinion, was of particular value.

In July 1942, Paul prepared a report for Fraser on the work of the PO in which he pointed out why such a “positive effort” was vital and how it could work against possible suspicion within the population that knowledge disseminated through the PO was politically motivated and biased:⁸²

It is a fact that newspapers (this applies all over the world) look with suspicion, even distaste, on statements issued by a Government officer. They prefer the information from an independent source – their own writers, for instance. This problem has been met by encouraging newspapers to ‘see for themselves’. Their articles revealing the war effort are of inestimable value, because the Director of Publicity does not appear in connection with them ... The proper discharge of his duties requires that the Director of Publicity should keep himself as much as possible in the background ... Thus only in a few cases have those outside of

⁸¹ Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front*, Official history of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945 (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs Government Printer, 1986), 888. The Board only met about twice – the last time was in April 1940 – and was superseded by a War Publicity Committee as discussed below.

⁸² John Thomas Paul, "Report on the Work of the Publicity Office," 1942, MS-0982/501, Hocken Library. A similar strategy was applied at the British Ministry of Information during the war. See AALA W4232 1 PM 25/2/1, Archives New Zealand.

newspapers actually handling the material been aware of its place of origin, and in some instances even newspapers have not been sure ... Much of our positive work has been abundantly successful ... The positive effort has been of such dimensions that it is only possible to summarise it here.

Paul continued to provide an overview of the “positive” results of his office, which included the production and distribution of information from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Public Relations Office to 123 national newspapers in circulation. Articles were usually written within the PO, or they came from the British Ministry of Information as well as from administrations of various other countries. Furthermore, information that had been published and was deemed to deserve wider circulation was redistributed to other newspapers, cablegrams were circulated through Press Agencies, booklets such as *New Zealand's War Effort* printed and distributed, as well as windows displays, slides, photographs and matrices prepared and circulated. Another preoccupation was the distribution of films received from the British Ministry of Information, which thus far numbered ninety, and were screened in New Zealand over 15,000 times. However, as Paul claimed:

One of the most satisfactory sides of our positive publicity is the production of our own war films by the National Film Unit at the Miramar Studios ... It is now unquestionably true that our national war films occupy a leading position in the film world. Incidentally, there can be no question of the value of the film as a medium of publicity: It has all the advantages of broadcasting plus the visual presentation of the subject on the screen.

Paul saw this “positive” aspect of his work as most important, while the “negative” aspect, the suppression of information, was only desirable in cases where publishers and producers of public media deviated from the detailed instructions they were given. Although there were instances in which Paul was disappointed about some “deviations”, he generally regarded the co-operation of newspapers as satisfactory:

It would be impossible to carry on complete censorship without a very large staff were it not for the active co-operation of the newspapers in general, who work on the ‘honour’ system, which has been found necessary in other English-

speaking countries. Newspapers have instructions to guide them, but in addition, a watch is kept on their columns.

The regular screening of newspapers was a technique begun during World War I and was deemed of particular importance, since newspapers were mostly privately owned and regarded as politically conservative. In a memo Paul called the way in which the press worked together with the PO on the control of information a “system by which editors can co-operate with me by being their own censors”.⁸³ In short, individuals and institutions would ideally regulate themselves by only uttering or publishing statements that were in line with the advancement of national interests, as primarily defined within the State administration. Another technique employed at the PO was to provide simultaneous publicity for “an official explanation” in cases where accusations “against any department of the administration associated with the war effort is published”.⁸⁴ However, it also became practice at the PO to correct perceived errors in articles that were submitted for censorship and intended for publication.

The censorship and publicity apparatus of the State thus worked along the following lines. All public discourse that somehow could be seen to relate to the war effort was to be controlled through the “negative” function of censorship, which included a component of self-censorship of media producers who were required not to publish information known to be undesirable and “unproductive”. More important however was the production and dissemination of desirable and hence “positive” knowledge that could integrate and harmonise potentially conflicting forces into a corporate and co-operative relationship. That is, throughout war desirable knowledge advanced faith in the forces that were organising warfare and aiming at forming a uniform will for the concerted conduct of war. Therefore, the emphasis lay not on the suppression of knowledge, but on the positive disposition of knowledge that would project a common cause, particularly through visions of interdependency and reciprocal responsibility amongst the population.

These goals were to be achieved in subtle ways that would avoid public rejection or critique. As Paul pointed out, “‘publicity’ for a war effort, it has seemed to me, must be basically true, and it must avoid exaggeration if it is to achieve that vital end: the retention of public

⁸³ John Thomas Paul, “Memo to Newspapers,” 1942, *MS 0982/671*, Hocken Library.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

confidence".⁸⁵ In this sense, the strategy for producing film and for publicity in general was to be subtle and credible providing information that would be perceived to be true as a matter of fact. However, this did not imply an attempt at an impartial or neutral dissemination of information, nor a deception or manipulation of the population. Rather a strategic selection, disposition and dissemination of knowledge would be employed that was more or less based on facts, in ways that advanced a homogenised will to win the war. This involved cultivating a specific vision through the strategy of "remaining in the true", thereby providing and disseminating appropriate, desirable and useful knowledge for the general population and specific groups therein, in a form and manner that would be effective and efficient.

Despite the effective use of "positive efforts" to support the war effort, there were still groups within New Zealand that opposed or were at least critical of the mobilisation for war. These included Christian pacifist groups and the Communist Party (up until 1941, when Russia entered the war). Therefore "negative" aspects of government agency needed to be employed to silence oppositional voices. *The People's Voice*, the Communist Party's official periodical, was suppressed on 30 May 1940, one day after the Censorship and Emergency Regulations had been altered to allow the Attorney-General to "seize any press that had printed subversive material and was likely to do so again; in like case, to order any periodical to cease publication".⁸⁶ The editorial of the issue of *The People's Voice*, claimed:

Those who left the bridges standing against which the enemies of the working class are now advancing are those who were pledged to defend them – the Leaders of the Labour Party. They have proved themselves the 'Fifth Column' of capitalist reaction in the Labour movement of this country.⁸⁷

Only a few weeks later *Tomorrow*, a critical Left-leaning journal, ceased publication. No printer in New Zealand was willing to risk printing it, due to the threat of having their printing presses seized. The editor of *Tomorrow*, Kennaway Henderson, wrote on 17 June 1940:

⁸⁵ John Thomas Paul, "Report on the Work of the Publicity Office," 1942, MS-0982/501, Hocken Library. The ambiguous term here is "basically," which can mean "fundamental" or "essentially", as well as "chiefly" or "mainly".

⁸⁶ Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front*, 216.

⁸⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 217.

Under the Emergency legislation 'Subversion' is very vaguely defined, so that almost any critical writing might be regarded as subversive. Consequently no printer is prepared to print *Tomorrow*, and, in effect, we have been suppressed under legislation passed by the first N.Z. Labour Government. New Zealand now has no independent critical journal.⁸⁸

Furthermore, throughout the course of war, there were repeated incidences in which protests and strikes of workers were interpreted as undermining the war effort. These included the strike of railway workers in the Hutt Valley in March 1941, after which Paul, on instructions from Fraser, telegraphed the following to newspaper editors: "From this date the publication of all resolutions, reports of meetings, statements in support, or any information relating to the railway strike cannot be published without permission."⁸⁹ Similar procedures were repeated on the occasion of the Westfield freezing workers' strike in March 1942 and the Waikato coal strike in September of the same year. That is, worker unrest was defined as being opposed to the interests of the political wartime economy and regulated accordingly.

However, as pointed out above, such "negative" intervention was to be minimised, and it was perceived that one of the most successful attempts at directing the population came from the "positive" publicity produced by the NFU. In the following section, some of the circumstances, calculations and events by which it came into being are traced and discussed.

The Birth of the National Film Unit

In January 1941 it was decided that two cinematographers from the Government Film Studios, Ronald McIntyre and Mervyn Elias, should be sent with New Zealand troops to the Middle East to provide footage of war activities on the front. However, at this stage no final plans for continued film production on the home front had been made. The NFU was finally established after Andrews and Morton, in the wake of Grierson's visit, had successfully lobbied the government to continue film production. It was not only Andrews' report, which seems to have finally convinced Fraser to set up the NFU, but also his film *Country Lads*, which was released about six weeks before the NFU was formally instituted.

⁸⁸ Kennaway Henderson, quoted in *ibid.*, 894.

⁸⁹ Paul, quoted in *ibid.*, 904.

When Morton was told that film production at the studios in Miramar would end during the war, he tried to change the intentions of the government. He wanted to see film production continued and his and his colleagues' jobs saved. Morton too was convinced that film had an important role to play during wartime and therefore produced three "anti-waste films" in order to promote the production of film to further the war effort:

One was boosting an imaginary war loan, one boosting the saving of ferrous metals, and the third boosting the saving of paper. I got these shown at a screening which was held once a week in Courtenay Place, and was attended by people of that sort [politicians and government officials]. When I got them screened there I pointed out how important the film place would be in the war effort. Morale films, and informational films of all sorts would be wanted, and I pointed out that once they led the skilled staff go they'd have a very difficult job ever to start it up again.⁹⁰

Sometime later Morton was ordered to meet Paul who, Morton wrote, was "jokingly called the Dr. Goebbels of New Zealand, because he was in complete charge of all publicity and announcements of the war effort".⁹¹ Morton was told to get in contact with Andrews, whom he had only known as a film critic, and met him for the first time after he had produced his anti-waste films.

Andrews lobbied for wartime film production in his report as well as in two issues of the *Film Letter*, published in November and December 1940. Additionally, together with Morton, he began the production of the aforementioned *Country Lads*, which was released on 3 July 1941. The title refers to a comment on New Zealand's war effort from Germany that called New Zealanders "poor ignorant country lads".⁹² The film was to be the first edition of the *Weekly Review*, although it was not known as such at the time. It was primarily made, like Morton's films, to lobby the government to continue film production during wartime. However, this film differed decisively from the "anti-waste films", which directly appealed to the population to change its behaviours in relation to the consumption of scarce resources

⁹⁰ Cyril Morton, "The Formation of the National Film Unit," 1985, D3845, New Zealand Film Archive. The film dealing with the saving of ferrous metals was most likely *Help Win the War* (1940), and that dealing with the saving of paper was probably *Waste Helps the Enemy* (1940).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Country Lads," *The Education Gazette*, 1 September 1941.

during war. *Country Lads* was a compilation film edited from stock footage shot by Bridgman and others on the troop departures of the First, Second and Third Echelons to the Middle East between January and August 1940. It neither focused on the chronology of specific events, nor provided information or details about the events or the conduct of war in general, but cut back and forth between different locations and events in order to establish its “moral”, thereby creating a new generalised filmic event for audiences that was to create effect through affect. Andrews had planned the film to have

a purpose, with a beginning and an end and a moral. The ‘moral’ in this case is morale, plus the simple statement that these men are ourselves, marching and training in our country, the film making us feel that we, too, are part of the fine show that these fellows put up.⁹³

Country Lads can be seen as an outstanding piece of film propaganda. While focusing on human interest and emotional appeal, the film constructs a narrative of “ordinary” New Zealand citizens turned soldiers, determined to defend New Zealand and its democratic values. It employs generalised rhetorical patterns relating to the notions of co-operation, freedom, democracy, egalitarianism and ordinariness. Its strong emotional appeal was largely achieved through the commentary that Andrews himself wrote and narrated, continuously making use of the first-person plural.

It was advanced through the strategic editing and dramatisation of actuality footage not only by means of commentary, but also through the use of a symphony by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and the cutting back and forth between crowd scenes and soldiers marching by and preparing to leave. The film includes frequent close-ups on facial expressions serving to advance identification and empathy with characters on the screen. As a review of the film put it, “the cutting ... directs the interest of the audience from the crowd to the individual. Through close-up shots one is led to share the feelings of this man and that woman, who represent a resolute nation determined to maintain its British way of living.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Stanhope Andrews, “Memo For Sub-Committee,” 6 November 1940, AAPG 6025 3/j, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ “Country Lads.”

The film opens with panning shots from a high angle of a waving crowd that witnesses a parade of troops as they are marching in military uniform and formation down a street. Andrews' voice is heard off-screen:

Just a few months ago these men were working alongside of us in shops, factories, cow-sheds and offices. Good workers and good friends ... This is a war with everyone in it; women too [Images of a Female Corps marching by]. It is just a matter of taking our turn. In a few weeks or a few months, we may be on the inside; trained, skilled and proud of it. So we look on what might be ourselves. It is not just another army marching past, but *our* army.

In his narration, Andrews talks about how workers, employers, country and city "lads" – in short, men from all walks of life – have come together and become soldiers. The imagery alternates between shots of marching troops and the cheering crowd. "They helped to make this country the way it is. Happy, prosperous, free ... Country lads and town lads, they have gone right across the world to help those who feel like us, to be free and happy too."

The film then cuts to soldiers that wave at the camera from a train leaving the station, and as dramatic music sets in, others are seen bidding farewell to families and friends. Soldiers from the Māori Battalion are included in this sequence as are shots of Āpirana Ngata and Māori Princess Te Kirihaehae Te Puea Hērangi. The commentary continues, it is "a war to be fought by men who have the courage to say au revoir when they know that for some of them it must be good-bye". Another appeal to national identification and the democratic ideal of freedom follows:

As a people we are a little reserved and very determined. We usually know which way we want to go and when we have made up our minds about it, we go there. The men in the army know what they are fighting for and the rest of us feel with them, that what they have undertaken is the right thing to do. We are proud of them. And our pride is mixed with sorrow that they are leaving us ... They will be back amongst us sometime not fighting then but helping to remake the world a world fit for people who have risked so much for the right to be free.

The film ends by cutting back and forth between waving soldiers on a boat as it is leaving the harbour and crowds on the docks waving in return.

After the production of *Country Lads* had finished, it was screened at the Majestic Theatre in Wellington to Prime Minister Fraser and most of the Cabinet. Andrews later recalled, "It was magnificent, some beautiful photography. There were tears pouring down Peter and Janet Fraser's faces, there wasn't a sound in the theatre. I was absolutely exulted! I knew then that we were going to have a film unit."⁹⁵ Andrews clearly implied that it was the strong emotional impact of the film which finally convinced Cabinet and in particular the Prime Minister to establish the NFU.

However, before the NFU was finally established, various plans had been made for the organisation and control of film production during wartime. One initial plan, which had been proposed by Grierson, was to set up a central co-ordinating council that was attached to the Prime Minister's Department. This plan was supplanted by a committee system that only consisted of members of the State administration, which went against Grierson's suggestions. After the Board of Censorship and Publicity had been disbanded, a War Publicity Committee was established in July 1940 consisting of Paul, D. Wilson, R. Semple, who was the Minister of National Service and in charge of industrial "manpower" during war, as well as representatives of the Prime Minister's Department and the National and Commercial Broadcasting Service. Its formal task was to coordinate and administer all aspects of publicity during war, including the planning and approval of film production.⁹⁶ In order to facilitate this process, two further committees were established. The first was the War Effort Film Production Sub-Committee which was headed by Andrews and included staff of the Government Film Studios. This soon became dysfunctional and after only a few months was disbanded. The second committee formed was the Film Distribution Committee, which consisted of representatives of the film industry and was to ensure the efficient and wide distribution of film.

The decision to institute a film production unit that would produce film on a regular basis was made in a Cabinet Minute under wartime emergency powers.⁹⁷ Andrews was appointed Producer by the War Cabinet and was commissioned to organise the NFU in terms of personnel, equipment and production and its terms of reference were to produce films that

⁹⁵ Andrews, quoted in Benjamin, "Film Pioneer Stanhope Andrews," 36.

⁹⁶ "Minutes of the Publicity Committee," 10 August 1940, MS 982/455, Hocken Library. Additionally, see Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976," 23-24.

⁹⁷ Dennis and Sowry, *The Tin Shed: The Origins of the National Film Unit*, 9. See also Geoffrey B. Churchman, *Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand* (Wellington: IPL Books, 1997), 56.

would "further the war effort".⁹⁸ Thereby, from the outset, the work of the NFU was defined in terms of the projected effects and purposes of film production, not with reference to a specific relation between actuality, its recording, and subsequent filmic representation. On 14 August 1941, the NFU was formally established and Andrews assumed his post, although by this date he had already begun working at the Government Studios. Morton became Assistant Producer. The NFU began its work with a staff of twelve people, including Bert Bridgman and Charlie Barton as cinematographers, Geoffrey Scott as technical director, Bob Shennan as laboratory supervisor as well as Mark Twomey, Harold Righton, James Harris and Oxley Hughan from the Statistics Department.

Thus the NFU began its work with newly appointed personnel as well as funding from the war expenses account, which gave it considerable independence from monetary restraints imposed during wartime. It was placed under the administrative control of the Tourist and Publicity Section within the Department of Industry and Commerce, Tourist and Publicity. Before the war this section had primarily focused on the production of publicity material for overseas purposes. In policy matters the NFU was placed under the auspices of the War Publicity Committee and the PO, within the Prime Minister's Department. This arrangement was to ensure the efficient co-ordination of production and policy and allowed for a close control and supervision of the NFU by Prime Minister Fraser.

During the war, Andrews, Paul and Fraser were the central personnel directing the course of the NFU and its film production. Paul, together with Fraser, in practice usually approved the films to be produced, while Paul and Andrews mediated between the political administration and the NFU with the former monitoring the public reception of NFU films.⁹⁹ Creative decisions concerning film production rested largely with Andrews and the NFU production staff, which allowed the filmmakers a degree of creative leeway. Paul and Andrews had a very good working as well as personal relationship, which assisted in the smooth operation of the NFU in policy matters.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the terms of reference of the NFU were broad and detailed standing policies and regulations were absent, meaning the NFU was not yet entirely institutionalised within a bureaucratic top-down chain of command. A close ad hoc co-ordination between Andrews, Paul and Fraser evolved and

⁹⁸ Stanhope Andrews, "The National Film Unit," *Here and Now* 3, no. 3 (1952), 8.

⁹⁹ See also Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976," 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

became common practice, while creative leeway at the NFU was maintained. This became the framework for the NFU's operation during war.

Mobilising the Population for War – Wartime Film Production

It was decided after the NFU was established that it should produce a weekly series of film items, which would be mainly screened in cinemas throughout the nation. The *Weekly Review* officially began in October 1942 and was the NFU's main output until 1950. It was a mix of a newsreel, in that it loosely dealt with more or less contemporary events, and magazine programming that frequently focused on human interest stories and entertainment values. The series commonly employed techniques of documentary film as envisioned by Grierson and sometimes consisted of only one longer item. These came to be referred to as "baby documentaries". From the beginning, the *Weekly Review* frequently went beyond the representation of singular historical events, the provision of a series of views and/or the chronological depiction of events, as *Country Lads*, its inaugural edition, clearly indicated.

Items in the *Weekly Review* were varied and often appeared to provide straightforward reports of contemporary events, while only occasionally explicitly appealing to the morale of the population. Off-screen commentary continued to predominate in the *Weekly Reviews*, providing logical coherence to the images and certain continuity. It also drove arguments forward and evaluated and described images beyond what they "literally" rendered visible. On-screen diegetic sound was only used occasionally, while frequent use of additional sound effects was made, sometimes entirely invented. Initially fireworks were used to produce sounds of gunfire and exploding bombs. Dramatic orchestral music became a feature of almost all film items and provided a certain general mood and ambience; it was also used to build up suspense. Sound was thus used to implicitly evaluate and direct the stance of audiences towards what was presented on screen. Another technical convention was to use alternating wide shots, orienting audiences within the scene and providing an "overview". Medium shots and close-ups could then heighten and emphasise certain aspects, for example, showing facial expressions, which also advanced identification and empathy. Instead of being entirely scripted prior to production, shorter items for the *Weekly Review* were often shot on location, then edited, the image track supplemented by music, sound

effects and a commentary. Such items were neither scripted in detail nor entirely pre-planned, a process that became common for longer, more complex documentary films, particularly after the war. Some *Weekly Review* items, such as those about funerals of famous personalities, remained focused on the chronology of specific singular historic events and did comparatively little to dramatise and optimise its subject.

Overall however, items of the *Weekly Review*, like film production in general, were to be “productive”, and the films undoubtedly remained selective and limited in the sense that only certain aspects regarding the conduct and experience of war would and could be shown. In short, filmic visions somehow had to further the war effort, not only through a teleological transcendence in the form of documentary film as suggested in Grierson’s programme. The furthering of the war effort did not only operate through specific topics and by appealing to and advancing morale and affect, or the aesthetics and form of the films, but also through the setup of the *Weekly Review* as the first regular New Zealand produced film series with a nationwide distribution that was shown in most cinemas in New Zealand. Prints of the *Weekly Review* were first distributed to the main cities and then continued their circuit throughout local theatres in provincial centres. This was to foster *national* identification through a certain homogenisation and sharing of vision by the population.

The *Weekly Reviews* initially ran for three-to-five minutes but their length steadily increased throughout the war. Each episode usually consisted of three to four short items, or occasionally only one item, as noted above. Their content more or less closely related to the war effort. Since film material from the front was hard to get and frequently perceived to be of inferior quality, the focus lay on the efforts made by the civilian population in assisting in the war effort “at home”.

Domestic topics focused on a range of wartime activities and particularly the industrial production of commodities and war machinery. The *Weekly Review* included topics such as the production of munitions, military and defence preparations, women in industry, speeches and appeals of politicians and military personnel, soldiers leaving for and returning from the war front, and troop parades. Topics directly war related were frequently interspersed with topics of interest such as sports, fashion styles, arts and crafts, aspects of health and education, and the funerals of famous people. After a time of familiarisation and

initial reservations, with some audiences concluding that it was employed as a means for propaganda, the *Weekly Review* became very popular in New Zealand cinemas. The suspicion of it being propagandistic, according to Geoffrey Scott, diminished after the films became more “polished”.¹⁰¹

However, as noted earlier in the chapter, Elias and McIntyre had been sent with the armed forces to the Middle East in April 1940, and later moved on to Europe to film aspects of war and the life of New Zealand soldiers at the front. In addition, throughout the war Stan Wemyss and Roger Mirams were sent overseas to gather film footage. From the beginning filmmakers faced tremendous technical and logistical problems, struggling to deliver footage of battles that were considered to be of sufficient interest and technical standard. Andrews as well as Paul grew increasingly frustrated with the filmstrips that were received from overseas. The footage was, in Andrew’s opinion, of low technical and aesthetic quality, and lacked intimacy and any realism of how battles and life at the front really were. Furthermore, he desired shots of battle scenes and the preludes and aftermaths of battles.¹⁰² These were hard to get, due to the restricted possibilities of technical equipment, particularly the light sensitivity of available film stock. Battles frequently took place during night with insufficient light available for shooting, and the recording of battle scenes placed the lives of camera operators in immediate danger. Despite these limitations, up until early 1944 it had been deemed generally undesirable to stage battle scenes for the *Weekly Review*. Andrews had claimed in a letter in March 1944:

I have nothing at all against reconstruction in films such as ‘Desert Victory’, but I have always emphasised that for newsreels purposes I would sooner have nothing at all than receiving a reconstruction. Ours is one of the few reels in the world which has made a determined and fairly successful attempt to present the war in picture as it really is.¹⁰³

However, in the same month the NFU began to use fully staged war footage in the *Weekly Review*. A rationale that justified this procedure came from Captain Webber, Public

¹⁰¹ See Geoffrey Scott, Interview by Jane Paul, broadcast 25 November 1991, F47746, New Zealand Film Archive.

¹⁰² See documents in EA1 602 87/5/15 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

¹⁰³ Stanhope Andrews to John Thomas Paul, letter, 27 March 1944, EA1 602 87/5/15 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

Relations Officer in the Middle East, who claimed that “re-constructed scenes almost invariably conform more closely to the popular conception of war than does the reality”.¹⁰⁴ Webber argued that audiences had grown used to inauthentic and staged depictions of battle scenes so that these were more likely to be perceived to be authentic than actual battle footage. By including staged war footage in its films, the NFU began to employ techniques that had been used during World War I and by other film units during World War II. These techniques advanced the impression of authenticity, while certain film scenes were deliberately arranged and inserted into films that showed actual war occurrences. In March 1944, *Weekly Review 132*, which contained an item edited by James Harris from footage of three different events shot in Italy, was released. Harris reported on one film strip shot in Castelfrentano that it

had some extremely bogus restaged shots of mopping up, which it has been possible to make look convincing by careful cutting, and by building up with sound-effects. The most effective thing I have found possible to do with the whole bunch has been to take the title off the last item, and apply it to a film built out of the material from the first two.¹⁰⁵

Here it was not only the strategic selection and arrangement of filmed events in the editing process by which a certain vision of what is real could be advanced, but now events *before* the camera were deliberately staged and “realised” for war purposes, while sustaining an impression of authenticity and realism.

Until 1944, NFU films only rarely included extended shots of battles. One of the first films that showed “the intimacy” of battle was *Weekly Review 140: Easter Action on Bougainville* (1944). Wemyss had travelled to Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea to film war activities there. Bougainville had been invaded by Japanese forces in 1942 and Allied troops, including New Zealand soldiers, were trying to recapture the island. Establishing a moralising undertone and emphasising mutual responsibility between the home front and soldiers at the battlefield, one of the opening titles of the film reads, “These grim pictures were taken under fire by a N.Z. National Film Unit Cameraman. We show them to remind you that the

¹⁰⁴ Captain Webber to John Thomas Paul, letter, 31 December 1943, EA1 602 87/5/15 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

¹⁰⁵ James Harris, “Editor’s Report,” 1 March 1944, EA1 602 87/5/15 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

troops sweating and dying in the jungle will not easily understand or forgive any slacking on the home front.”

What follows are scenes of the aftermath of a battle with soldiers walking through bombed jungle, while the soundtrack dramatises the images through non-location sound effects of exploding bombs. The commentary points to the dramatic authenticity of the scene: “This is no holiday spot; this is no scene on a Hollywood set. Here trees smoulder from the racking fire of shells.” Battle preparations and scenes of life at a base camp follow where American, New Zealand and Fijian soldiers were stationed and had to deal with adverse living conditions. New Zealand soldiers are introduced by name and shown in close-up. The film then begins to move towards its climax, depicting battle scenes in the jungle. One can see and hear soldiers seemingly under fire from Japanese troops while advancing through the jungle and returning gunfire. Sound and sound effects were “necessarily” added later, as sound recording equipment was not available and it would have been impossible to shoot location sound under these conditions. However, a close reading of these battle scenes indicates that the images were indeed shot during shelling from Japanese troops and in this sense they were authentic, while sound was added during post-production. Audiences were thus immersed into the battle from the perspective of Allied troops advancing towards “the enemy”, the “Japs”. Credibility was added and affect heightened through repeated intertitles that showed excerpts of the “cameraman’s report”. One intertitle reads:

One fellow was making good progress towards us dragging a box of grenades and a shirtful of Bren gun clips. When about twenty feet away he made a run for us. He nearly made it when a shot went through his hand, deflected off a clip and went on down through his leg. As he fell he threw the ammo, so that it landed within reach. We dragged him into a hole.

The film also, likely for the first time in NFU films, repeatedly shows close ups of dead soldiers from the Sixth Japanese Imperial Division. There had been some discussion within the NFU whether the depiction of corpses was desirable. A taboo on New Zealand screens had been broken, and the portrayal of dead bodies in films was now implicitly used to further the war effort by depicting the effects of the military power of allied troops. Unsurprisingly, only anonymous corpses of “the enemy” are shown, while no information on the loss of life on the side of allied troops is presented. While the images are disturbing, the

killings are justified by the commentary, which points out that “We have seen more horrible pictures than these”, which were those of “men, women, and children” that the dead soldiers had “slaughtered” before. The film ends by pointing out that the task now is to “wipe out” the remaining “little yellow men” in the “foul and stinking jungle”, as more battle scenes are shown.

Besides the *Weekly Review*, the NFU produced films for military training that were not released as well as didactic “direct appeal” films which asked audiences to change their conduct and thereby save commodities such as metal, paper, petrol or provide necessary funds to the State government for war purposes. These films were the most overt form of propaganda in that they directly addressed a problem and proposed a solution through an appeal to audiences by pointing out their appropriate behaviour in the achievement of specific goals. However, in line with the general propaganda and publicity strategy, and as noted earlier in the chapter, such films were usually not specifically marked as NFU productions, given their explicit appeal to the population. Instructionals made during the war included films like *Help in the War Effort* (1940), which made use of a cartoon of Hitler and stated that “the boys overseas want your help” and that “wasting oil fuel is helping Hitler”. It concluded with “It’s up to you: save petrol!” *They Asked for It* (1942) suggested audiences should invest their money in war bonds that were used for buying bombers for the New Zealand Air Force: “We are investing in victory and we are investing in survival. It’s a case of who hits first and who hits hardest ... We are not thinking of defence anymore. It’s attack now.” The film ends with the commentary appealing to the memory of audiences: “Remember this week its bonds for bombers”, while an intertitle commands: “Make your money fight!” Post-war, in 1945, another direct-appeal film was made, this time asking audiences not to invest in war, but in peace and the future. *Urgent! Support the New Ten Million Dollar Loan* (1945) asked audiences to provide money for schools, roads, land development, hydroelectricity and railways that in turn would increase prosperity for “you and your children”.

A series of longer documentary films dealing with a variety of wartime activities were also produced by the NFU on roughly a monthly basis. These sometimes included direct appeals to audiences, but these were couched in vague and generalised terms referring to wartime morale and democratic values, rather than to specific behaviours. These films were usually

not edited into an explicit problem-solution structure, but generally pointed out the positive achievements of New Zealand's war effort. Thereby they sought to reassure audiences about the conduct of war and to foster a desired ensemble of knowledge, emotions and motivations.

New Zealand Munitions (1941) was one of the early documentary films produced by the NFU. It was directed by James Harris and depicted, as the title suggests, munitions production in New Zealand. It begins with a military manoeuvre, including tanks and weapons training. Then technological and industrial advancements in mass production since World War I are shown in a positive light, as is the industrial production of commodities such as cars, radios and washing machines. The film indicates how war had necessitated a shift from the production of domestic goods to wartime production, and then shows the industrial production of ammunition and hand grenades.

The film avoids critically engaging with the conditions of industrial production, particularly under wartime manpower regulations, which in effect forced employees to stay in "essential" occupations (including staff at the NFU) and to work overtime. Instead, it shows rather happy and seemingly motivated workers at assembly lines, while the soundtrack provides obtrusive, cheerful and untroubled orchestra music. Two shots of a "cute" cat near an assembly line in a factory add to the positive depiction of wartime machinery whose production is rendered normal and legitimised as being necessary for the times.

In a departure from earlier industrials made in the 1920s, *New Zealand Munitions* moved significantly beyond the chronological depiction of industrialised production at a specific location. It moved between various themes and locations in order to establish its narrative which was motivated less by the images than the argument to be made. That is, it focused less on production itself than on pointing out the positive qualities of industrial production and the necessities and advantages of such production during war. Thus rather than simply explaining the production process, the film was primarily preoccupied with the justification and promotion of industrial wartime production.

Wings over New Zealand (1941) was another early NFU documentary, dealing with the Royal New Zealand Air Force and the training of new recruits. The film shows training in various areas including the mechanics of engines, metalwork, flight training in a simulator and real airplanes, the (professedly) pinpoint dropping of bombs, all demonstrating to audiences the

contribution of the New Zealand Air Force to the Empire's war effort. It begins with non-diegetic music of a male choir singing about New Zealand's fight for victory, while flying airplanes are shown. Audiences are then briefly informed about the expansion of the Air Force since 1937, again with a focus on how modern machinery and technology brought about this progress.

The commentary continues to state with dramatic intonation: "Then in September 1939, the storm broke over Europe." Images of a dark cloudy sky appear, symbolising threat and danger and suddenly a siren is heard. A few images of firing anti-aircraft canons are shown, furthering the impression of danger. Then, two young recruits are framed in a medium shot, filmed from a low angle against the sky, thereby heightening its filmic subjects. The film intercuts between the recruits and what they ostensibly observe; flying airplanes of the New Zealand Air Force. The commentary continues: "September 1939. The young men of New Zealand cheer the challenges, as did their fathers before them. From every walk of life they come to offer their services to the cause – farmers, factory hands, business-men." A sense of egalitarianism and unity is thus evoked by the commentary, since it suggested people "from every walk of life" have become soldiers. A staged scene depicting applications for military service being placed on a table in quick succession follows and the commentary generalises: "From these thrifty young men applications fall in by the thousands. The worth of the earlier expansion schemes is proved." This scene advances the generalised impression of enthusiastic "young men" willing to go to war, illustrated and symbolised by the imagery used. However, even in purely quantitative terms, this scene strategically simplifies and generalises the complexities of war. Enlistment for war service had remained voluntary until July 1940 and slightly less than 60,000 people had volunteered by this date. In June 1940, the National Service Emergency Regulations had been issued, which introduced conscription starting from July. Throughout the war, around 306,000 people (excluding Māori who were not subject to conscription) were called up for compulsory war service.¹⁰⁶ Around 800 conscientious objectors were sentenced to prison or put in purpose-built detention camps.

The film then moves to military training in a classroom, where four recruits are introduced by their name and occupation. The recruits are, as the commentary states, a railway cadet, a

¹⁰⁶ NZ Army, "1939 - 1946 World War II," accessed 26 March 2010, <http://www.army.mil.nz/culture-and-history/nz-army-history/historical-chronology/1939.htm>.

bookkeeper, a salesperson and a civil servant. This technique became common in NFU films and continued after the war. Individuals were frequently introduced by their name and occupation while being represented as part of and/or standing in for a collective whole, in this case the Royal New Zealand Air Force and by extension the nation at large. These shooting and commentary techniques again function to emphasise the corporate and co-operative nature of the war effort that moves beyond differences in occupation and class and creates unity through mutual effort and a common cause.

A few sequences later, after audiences have learned about the efficiency, subjects and techniques of Air Force training, they are shown how bombs are attached to a plane. The commentary states: "This time [in training] live heavy bombs are being used ... the bombs are quite safe at this stage. It is when you are at the receiving end that you have to worry. Well, here we go", while images of a starting airplane are shown. Aerial images then depict the release of bombs and the commentary adds: "To Adolf with the compliments of New Zealand. There will be plenty more like that." Here the images serve to demonstrate New Zealand's military and technological power, while the commentary's intonation remains elated. The bombs of course did not kill Hitler himself, but they often killed German civilians and hence the commentary was calculated to evoke Hitler as a trope of evil and simplified the complexities and ambiguities of war.

More flying and training sequences are then shown followed by images of a troop inspection by New Zealand's Minister of Defence as well as troops marching in a parade. The omniscient commentary provides logical coherence and evaluates the images: "They are doing a great job of work and New Zealand's Minister of Defence [close-up on the Minister] reflects the look of pride that *we all* have for these sturdy young air-force men. New Zealand may be the smallest Dominion but *our* air contribution is formidable." Images of pilots sitting on the ground follow and the commentary continues:

Over 2,000 men like these are already serving overseas. Thousands more are following through our training schools. *We* have faith in them as in all our fighting sons. Their courage and daring is the same as that of their fathers. The men who helped to make the name ANZAC live forever. Their skill is everything that an efficient and modern system of training can give.

Again, unity and national identification are advanced through the use of “we”, and “our fighting sons”, while the images serve to advance a sense of pride, faith and heroism. The film ends, as was common for films during wartime and beyond, with a vague and generalising evocation of democratic and progressive ideals, employed to appeal to and foster certain abstract and indefinite values of audiences trained in “Western” ideals:

From all parts of the Empire come men and machines to smash the warplanes of the dictators. In the thick of the fight are the men from New Zealand trained and eager to play their part in defence of the things they love: liberty, democracy and the progress of mankind. That today is the spirit of the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

A quick progression of shots of flying airplanes and marching soldiers follow, shot from a low angle and after this the national flag can be seen, while the male choir again sings off-screen about New Zealand’s fight for victory.

Behind Our Planes. The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (1943) was one of a series of films made dealing with the roles and importance of women in war and their taking on of jobs that were normally performed by men. Similar films included *War Jobs for Women* (1942) and *Women in Transport* (1942). All of them pointed out the positive role that women in general were playing in the national wartime economy. *Behind our Planes* begins with aerial shots of flying planes with an off-screen male commentary, which after a few seconds is replaced by a female voice which states, in the name of all New Zealand’s women, “We are doing our share.” The location shifts to a female corps marching in formation down a street and being inspected, while the female commentary explains that now, during war, women “have a job to do” and “we are proud of the uniforms we wear”. She continues to point out that women are now undertaking men’s jobs: “Our standard of efficiency is that of the men.” A variety of tasks performed by women in the Air Force are introduced in quick succession, while the commentary explains and interprets the images interspersed with appeals to morale and responsibility, all underlined by dramatic orchestral music.

War Jobs for Women focuses on civilian occupations for women and is narrated by a variety of women. Some of them appear on screen, directly addressing the camera or talking to each other, pointing out the variety of work being done, the good working conditions and pay comparable to the men’s, and their contribution to the wartime economy. This film was

innovative in its use of the technique of testimony through on-screen mono- and dialogue to convey its message, although the female characters appearing and speaking on the screen appear stilted and their texts rehearsed. The film ends with a woman addressing the camera and therefore the audience directly with: "Well there are war jobs for women. Take *your* choice."

Education Strikes Back (1942) was a documentary about the Emergency Scheme in Palmerston North, where seven schools were deployed to accommodate recruits and facilitate their training in preparation for combat against Japanese forces. The film suggests that while this caused concern, since the normal education of children was interrupted, it was a necessary move with positive results. Early in the film, H.G.R. Mason, the Minister of Education, states his policy directly to the camera, while the back of a shoulder is visible, suggesting he, Mason, is being interviewed. He states that the situation is at once a "challenge" and an "opportunity". By bringing the children in closer contact with the community, he argues, they would gain valuable "practice in being responsible citizens" and are "attending a much larger school in which the whole town seemed to be involved". Children are seen happily participating in community work. Girls are shown folding laundry at the hospital, working in gardens and sewing handkerchiefs for soldiers. Boys deliver buckets of sand for construction. These activities, audiences are told through the omniscient commentary, "makes them feel to be already useful citizens and they do the work with pride". The film served to reassure audiences that while normal school education continued to some extent, children gained valuable experiences in the community as "useful citizens" and enjoyed their tasks.

Education Strikes Back is one of the films produced by the NFU that contains very little explicit visual references to the war effort and no explicitly moralising or unifying appeals. Rather, it strategically accounted for a historical event that was cinematically arranged and evaluated as unambiguously worthwhile, positive, successful and necessary during times of war. It expresses, like other films of the period, a belief in the value of authority, order and subservient obedience to moral standards and the demands of "the community", by evaluating tasks of schoolchildren, who are positioned as nascent citizens, with reference to their usefulness and responsible conduct. Such a film normalised and promoted certain practices that would have been controversial during times of peace and thereby implicitly

furthered the war effort by designating as at once necessary and positive what otherwise would likely have been regarded by many as negative – the disruption of normal school education.

Throughout war, the NFU produced a wide variety of film items and documentary films on varied subjects for layered purposes, some of them with no clear connection to the war effort, and thus not every film could as such be considered to be explicit war propaganda. However, NFU film production took on a function within a general central propaganda strategy, and as such operated with reference to the war effort. Its task was not to produce explicit, sensationalist propaganda – although propagandistic objectives and strategies, as discussed above, can undoubtedly be read in many of the films – but to produce subtle propaganda for various purposes relating to the advancement of the war effort. As such, even those films that were relatively little marked by a teleological transcendence and a discursive arrangement – and which might therefore not be considered documentary – and those that did not deal with war and morale explicitly, still served to advance a certain vision of New Zealand and its population. This vision contained no controversy, ambiguity or heterogeneity and was marked by an absence of critical engagement. At the same time, NFU films provided for variously entertaining, gripping and dramatic filmic experiences that were shared by large parts of the population and as such served to advance a homogenised, productive and normalised vision.

The terms of reference of the NFU to further the war effort changed the dispositive of filmic visions of the real produced under the auspices of the State in a variety of ways. First, film production ceased to be focused on overseas audiences in order to entice capital, labour and commodities to enter the country through the promotion of tourism, immigration, investment and trade. It instead shifted to contemporary themes and human interest stories, and films were refocused on the achievement of projected domestic socio- and psycho-political effects. Second, film production was again extended and New Zealand's population came to envision a specific national identity through films that were distributed nationwide on a weekly basis and shown in various locations including cinemas, schools and town halls. Third, film production was inserted into a central publicity apparatus and was made subject to a series of calculations that rationalised their purposes and projected effects with reference to a general propaganda strategy. Fourth, film production

incorporated an ensemble of techniques and strategies by which the “literality” and specificity of images could be transcended in order to advance projected “visionary” effects on and within audiences. Fifth, the films were to ideally remain within what could count as true, while subtly advancing certain purposes by focusing on the normal, ordinary and necessary, particularly through the calculation of effect through affect, thereby advancing identification, empathy, responsibility, motivation and will. NFU films thus were to empower popular audiences by subjecting them to a vision appropriate for the conduct of war.

This arrangement of film production and the filmic techniques and strategies employed, as will be argued throughout the next chapter, did not substantially change after the war, although the NFU came to serve the conduct of peace instead of war and set out to “educate” the population.

4. Civic Education

Introduction

This chapter discusses shifts and continuities in the organisation and film production by the National Film Unit (NFU) after the end of World War II, as well as the readjustment of State publicity and the educational role of film therein. By the end of the war, the original purpose of the NFU – to produce films that furthered the war effort – had faded, and with it the publicity and censorship apparatus established specifically for war purposes. After some initial uncertainty, the NFU continued to operate within the realm of the executive government and to function under readjusted, but not profoundly altered or redefined, rationales. The NFU's mandate was to educate and inform post-war society by fostering humanitarian and democratic values, advancing national identification and responsibility, and furthering understanding of and faith in the larger economic, political and technological forces that shaped society. While the wartime censorship apparatus established within the Prime Minister's Department was dismantled, the "positive" functions of publicity remained, and indeed were extended, further rationalised and harmonised, becoming part of the State's extended educational role for the guidance and shaping of the population. The NFU continued to form the film production wing of State publicity that had taken on the "projective" part of Government Information Services, now entirely located within the Prime Minister's Department.

In this sense, the move from wartime propaganda to civic education was largely a semantic exercise, partly due to the stigma that was attached to the term "propaganda" particularly after the war. Nevertheless, the word continued to appear frequently in government documents and it is impossible to establish a clear-cut distinction between the concepts of propaganda and civic education, as these terms were and continued to be used interchangeably. While "civic education" became a term of reference for the NFU, the institutional setup, rationales and purposes that were attached to film production were largely a continuation of the instrumentalisation of film that had occurred during the war period. After the end of the war, tourism also became a major focus of film production and New Zealand was projected at once as modern and progressive while at the same time being romantic and exotic.

NFU documentary films to some extent took on a more demure and “objective” tone in comparison to the more explicitly discernible attempts to foster morale through wartime productions, and their production came to be marked by an increasingly sophisticated usage of feature film conventions, narrative strategies and dramatisation. They continued to produce visions of the real that however were increasingly marked by a fluid transition between actuality footage and footage derived from the strategic realisation of certain sequences, already planned in the scripting stage. Additionally, such films were marked by an increasing de-limitation and abstraction from specific locations in that films routinely went beyond the literality of images and thus inserted them into synoptic and generalising narratives in which the multiplicity and heterogeneity of events and people frequently stood in for and/or were related to a unified and typical whole of the nation.

A decisive event at the NFU in the late 1940s was the so-called “Holmes Affair”. Holmes was a member of the New Zealand Communist Party and directed the only NFU film during the 1940s and 50s, *Mail Run* (1947), which had profoundly politically controversial content in the form of a critique of the legacy of European colonialism in Eastern Asia. After his political affiliation, together with a letter that called for a stop-work meeting at the NFU, was made public, Holmes was suspended from his director position at the NFU. Shortly afterwards, he produced *Fighting Back* (1949), a radical partisan film made to support the Auckland Carpenter Union’s struggle to change working conditions. Since this film was made by a former member of the NFU, it provides an insight into the limitations under which its personnel operated.

The mention of *Fighting Back*, which attests to the continual worker protests in New Zealand during the 1940s and 1950s, raises the issue of how workers were represented in the films of the NFU. As was the case in documentaries made by the British Documentary Film Movement films, the working class of New Zealand was projected as dignified, even heroic, and as essential for New Zealand’s economic progress and public services to the nation at large. Films like *Power from the River* (1947), *Railway Worker* (1948) and *The Coaster* (1948) provided the working class with an aura of worth within society, a style of projection that had become common throughout the late 1930s. However, such a dignifying projection of workers, it is argued, needs to be seen in the light of governmental strategies that sought to strengthen the labour force and improve its efficiency, which is discussed further below.

The Reorganisation of State Publicity and the NFU

With the end of the war in the Pacific in early September 1945, marked by the capitulation of Japan's administration, the official reason for the NFU's existence, to provide films that furthered the war effort, ceased to exist. By 1944, however, with the end of war in sight, plans for the expansion and reorganisation of the NFU for peacetime conditions had already begun. The work of the NFU had been regarded as a thorough success and it was frequently reiterated within the State administration how valuable and important film would be for publicity and educational purposes once the war had ended. As the role and organisation of the NFU within the government was reviewed, Prime Minister Peter Fraser was particularly supportive of the extension of State publicity, including the NFU.

In order to ready the NFU and its film production for peacetime conditions, Stanhope Andrews had travelled in May 1944 for six months to the USA and Canada to buy new equipment and study the work of other film production companies, including that of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), where John Grierson was still Film Commissioner. Andrews worked for a couple of weeks at the NFB, which he later described as an "exhilarating experience".¹

After his return, in February 1945, Andrews presented a report to John Thomas Paul on his research overseas as well as his recommendations for the continuation of film production in peacetime.² In his report he again emphasised "the need for national rather than departmental control of the National Film Unit", that is, control from within the Prime Minister's Department. He pointed out "three fundamental requirements of good film making": first, the need for "some central guiding principle of policy which will give direction to specific demands on the production unit"; second, at "the heart of the production unit must be a small group of diligent, versatile and creative minds"; and third, that "adequate technical equipment" was provided. The notion of a creative group was essential, since, according to Andrews, "Without the moderately rare ability to make something out of nothing, to give form and special meaning to selected elements of the life around us, good pictures cannot be made." More efficiency, standardisation and set production routines

¹ Stanhope Andrews to John Thomas Paul, letter, 26 February 1945, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library.

² Stanhope Andrews, "Report on Reorganisation of Activities of the New Zealand National Film Unit," 28 February 1945, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library.

were needed to achieve “good pictures”. Regarding film production, he pointed out the value of the *Weekly Review* in providing timely information, but also wanted to make “longer and more deliberate films for local release”, that is, documentary films. “The part that such films could play in strengthening civic pride, promoting growth of the social consciousness and the development of progressive community ideas cannot be over-estimated.”

The readjustment and further development of film production under the auspices of the State closely related to the reorganisation of the censorship and publicity apparatus operational during war. In 1945, press censorship was officially abolished and film censorship again became the sole task of the Censorship Bureau within the Department of Internal Affairs, as had been the case before the war. Censorship operated under the general censorship regulations passed in 1916 in the form of the Cinematograph Film Censorship Act. The State film censor operated under a policy that forbade any film to be publicly screened “that depicts any matter that is against public order and decency, or the exhibition of which for other reasons is, in the opinion of the censor, undesirable in the public interest”.³

The “positive” publicity function of Paul’s office was neither abolished nor simply refocused on its primary pre-war tasks of promoting New Zealand overseas. Now State publicity had a double function. It continued its wartime role to advance the conduct of the domestic population, and was now to be used again to attract overseas audiences. This move implied that the State now not only provided for the advancement of a specific vision of New Zealand overseas, but also had an extended and legitimate role to play in not only the regulation and administration of the population, but also in its continuing education, supervision and improvement.

In 1947 a report was prepared by the Information Section describing the organisation, objectives and policy of State publicity and giving detailed recommendations for its reorganisation in order to increase its efficiency.⁴ It begins with an outline of objectives:

³ Quoted in Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1998), 30.

⁴ Report on Publicity, 1947, MS 0982/035, Hocken Library.

The primary function of Government publicity in New Zealand is to promote support for the policy of the Government and the measures taken in pursuance of that policy. Wherever practicable the basic approach to all publicity projects should be to gain the maximum benefit for the Government; in the light of this requirement all particular publicity projects may be directed to the provision of information, instruction and persuasion in respect of various details of policy.

Objectives cited in the report for successfully promoting New Zealand overseas were to increase the “prestige” of the country as well as to encourage “social democratic forces in other lands”. In detail they remained basically the same as before the war, that is to “stimulate immigration, tourist travel, and to further the marketing of New Zealand produce”.

The report assessed the NFU and the *Weekly Review* favourably, pointing out the former’s ability to provide “positive” publicity:

The National Film Unit in its *Weekly Review* provides the only instrument for cinema news of New Zealand and in this respect is simply a Government news service. The *Weekly Review* is also a vehicle for descriptive subjects presenting aspects of New Zealand life to New Zealanders and can properly be regarded as a form of adult education. The *Weekly Review* is also valuable as a means of presenting information regarding various Governmental activities and policies. It is also valuable in a persuasive function as it has been, for example, in the Food for Britain campaign and for J-Force recruiting.⁵

The report went on to outline possibilities and strategies for “conscious propaganda” and concluded that film subjects that have specific “elements of value must be indirect in their message”. From a governmental perspective, the *Weekly Review* was seen as able to integrate the functions of news reporting, adult education, information about government activities as well as persuasion, which, however, was not to be explicitly perceptible as such.

The report also pointed out the need for increased central planning and co-ordination of all publicity activities within a single institution. Additionally, the development of State publicity in New Zealand was summarised as “consistent with that of an integrated Department of

⁵ Emphasis in original.

Information". However, the author of the report was aware of the potentially controversial nature of such a centralised government agency and added that it is not "considered desirable to establish an agency which is *ostensibly* so fully organised".⁶ It seems that it was considered an advantage to avoid public discourse about and potential controversy over the work of State publicity and the Information Section.⁷

The concern about the "public image" of such a centralised publicity agency becomes clearer when the report discussed a report by the Council of Adult Education. In the latter report, it was expressed that "the major field of adult education should not, in our view, be administered as part of a State department", since "adult education must deal with controversial topics and the greatest freedom of discussion must be allowed. No matter how impartial a State department may try to be, it will lay itself open to the charge of 'manufacturing public opinion'." The response to this in the Information Section's report is instructive:

The function of Government information services ... is based on the specific recognition of the importance and justification of 'manufacturing public opinion' ... Continued high production must depend upon the inculcation of a sense of responsibility in the community. This is a function which belongs both to the field of adult education and Government information services, and in this and related matters there is justification for 'manufacturing public opinion'.

In other words, projected social and economic progress justified "the inculcation of a sense of responsibility" within the population and an attempt at "manufacturing public opinion" through educational State publicity, even at the expense of "controversy" and "freedom of discussion". Adult education was thereby conceived of as a function of the advancement of "continued high production" through visions of interdependency and responsibility. However, civic education through publicity also served "the purpose of creating interest in,

⁶ Emphasis added.

⁷ George Fraser, who began his work for the Information Section which included publicity in 1946, states in his autobiography, "It seemed that, while making the most of our services [of the Information Section], the Government preferred to pretend that we didn't exist." George Fraser, *Both Eyes Open: A Memoir* (Dunedin: John McIndoe 1990), 84.

and sympathy with, Labour's policy and programme".⁸ State publicity was conceived of as an instrument that could make government and administration more efficient, particularly in relation to socio-economic progress and national coherence, but also in relation to the promotion of party-political interests.⁹ In this sense, the rationales and strategies attached to publicity and by extension the production of film by the NFU were a continuation of the purposes that were envisioned for State publicity before and during the war. They remained purpose-oriented and not process-oriented in that they were focused on effects to be achieved, not on how film could advance or serve the process of "open" and potentially controversial and critical public discourse.

Although the staff of the NFU had lobbied Paul to remain in his supervisory position there, he retired. In April 1946, the NFU became part of the Publicity Division, which had been established within the Information Section of the Prime Minister's Department one month earlier. The Publicity Division incorporated the continuing "positive" tasks of the Publicity Office in operation during war. The Information Section was directed by Sid Odell, who was to oversee all publicity efforts by the State and he therefore increasingly gained control over film production at the NFU. The administrative control of the NFU was also transferred, from the Tourist and Publicity Department to the Information Section, thus the NFU was now entirely controlled and administered within the Prime Minister's Department, indicating the importance attached to publicity. This move allowed further harmonisation of publicity work and imposed a more centralised control, thus advancing the projection of coherent and closely co-ordinated "images" of New Zealand. Such a reorganisation of publicity, government information services and the public service in general was also occurring in other countries and this provided a justification for the changes undertaken in New Zealand. James Harris, one of the NFU's directors, expressed this change pragmatically: "In most countries of the world Civil Services are in process of change from being organisations concerned mainly with collecting taxes and enforcing restrictions, to organisations for getting things done."¹⁰

⁸ Additionally to the report on publicity from 1947 see file TO 10 5/20, Archives New Zealand, for various documents detailing intentions and considerations of how to use media and publicity for specific party-political ends.

⁹ See Fraser, *Both Eyes Open: A Memoir*. See particularly Chapter 8 for a further discussion of the work of the Information Section.

¹⁰ James Harris, "Making the New Zealand 'Weekly Review'," *Public Service Journal* 33, no. 1 (1946).

The centralisation and extension of publicity resulted in the production facilities at Miramar being officially divided into the NFU and the National Publicity Studios. The latter produced a variety of publicity material, including still images, lantern slides, pamphlets and booklets. Between 1945 and 1948, the NFU was repeatedly expanded and obtained new production and processing equipment, which made it, according to various claims, one of the most modern and well-equipped film studios in the world. In 1947, the staff at the NFU was again expanded to fifty, including twenty-three working in production.¹¹ The same year it was also decided that a programme of the films to be produced at the NFU needed to be prepared annually, and approved by the Prime Minister. From then on, the subject matter that films by the NFU would come to “document” would have to be pre-planned up to one year or more in advance.

In 1948, due to increased staff and expanded facilities, the National Publicity Studios were moved to the ABC building in Lambton Quay, Wellington, and the NFU took over the entire Miramar Studios. The expansion of the NFU allowed it to meet the increasing demands for film production from various government departments, particularly the Departments of Education, Health and Works.

By the 1940s, several private film production companies had been established, including Neuline Studios (established around 1940/41),¹² the Pacific Film Unit (established in 1948 by Alun Falconer and Roger Mirams after they had left the NFU), Apex, Fletcher Films, Astor Productions and Acme Films. Pacific and Neuline particularly tried to expand their production and sought to produce films for the government. While both production companies were at times contracted to produce a few films for government departments, the NFU remained dominant and by far the largest film production unit in New Zealand. Furthermore, both private companies to a certain extent relied on access to the NFU production facilities at Miramar, since it had the only professional film processing equipment in the country.

However, Andrews remained critical of privately-owned film production and continued to promote the production of film on a national level, organised and controlled within the State

¹¹ Sid Odell to Peter Fraser, memo, 14 April 1947, MS-0982/35, Hocken Library.

¹² Geraldene Peters, "Political and Alternative Film Making 1940 to 1950," 122.

administration. He sought to dispel accusations of a party-political direction of the NFU, such as those made by the National Party. In 1947, in an article he claimed:

Often expressed fears that such Departmental control of the Unit [within the Prime Minister's Department] would result in party-political direction are quite without foundation. In six years *Weekly Review* has come up against such direction in only three occasions. Each was a request for a deletion, none was carried out, and the Unit's decision was supported by the very Department it was suspected might interfere with the skilled judgments of the staff concerned.¹³

In the same year the Committee on the Motion Picture Industry was set up to enquire about the current state of the film industry in New Zealand, particularly regarding the increasing concentration of ownership of theatre chains. The NFU was also subject to enquiry, and Michael Forlong and Margaret Thomson, two NFU directors, were invited to state their opinions on the organisation of the NFU before the Committee. Thomson, who was employed at the NFU from 1947 until 1949, had worked as a film director in Britain and was highly critical of the institutional organisation and control of the NFU. In her statement before the Committee she stated, "The fact that the Film Unit is under the direct control of the Government ... has prevented objective but possibly embarrassing films being made", and "No films have been made that fairly present the pros and cons of a problem." She claimed that she was aware of films that had been made and then blocked from distribution, some of which she listed in her written statement submitted to the Committee.¹⁴ In this she defined documentary films as going

to real life for their material ... The main endeavour in this type of film making is to be objective. Documentary films try to be liberal, to show both sides of a question ... For us in New Zealand, it is this type of film which has a most valuable role to play in the forming and moulding of public opinion, and the strengthening of our democratic traditions ... It is of the utmost importance ... [to

¹³ Andrews, "Movie-Making in the Public Service," 75.

¹⁴ Margaret Thomson, statement, LE 1 1316/1948/10, Archives New Zealand. The list of films reportedly blocked from release could not be traced.

have films that] will help to integrate and unify ... conceptions about their own country.¹⁵

While Thomson criticised the control of the NFU within the state, she also believed that documentary film should assist in the “forming and moulding of public opinion”, and should help to “integrate and unify” national sentiment. This would need to be done through an “objective” approach to filmmaking that left space for controversy. Her view thus was opposed to Andrews’ stance which was to use film for non-controversial and “positive suggestion”. However, the films she directed while working at the NFU remained non-controversial and it would be difficult to establish that they showed “both sides of a question”. The administrative and political interference in the film production process was probably one of the reasons why she left the NFU after three years.

In the late 1940s, filmmakers grew increasingly frustrated with the increasing bureaucratic and administrative control of the NFU. This gradually removed authority in terms of initiative, subject matter and decision-making from the NFU. Whereas during the war, filmmaking policy, specific purposes and subject matter could be constantly negotiated between Andrews, Paul and Fraser, in the post-war period a more anonymous procedure of top-down implementation became routine, integrated into a general publicity policy. After the lifting of “manpower” regulations put in place during the war, which had made it illegal for employees in “essential” occupations to leave their work, including staff at the NFU, most of the early creative staff had decided to leave, including Holmes, Falconer, Mirams, Stan Wemyss, Harris, P. C. Alcock and Thomson. Andrews left the NFU in February 1950 and Forlong in 1952.

Controversy on and behind the Screen – The Holmes Case

After the war, the New Zealand State administration became concerned about the increasing tensions in Korea, which in 1945 had been divided by US administrators into two separate nation states, North and South Korea. In June 1950, the Korean War began with the invasion of South Korea by North Korean military forces. The war in Korea became the first proxy war for the doctrines of Capitalism and Communism conducted by the USA and the

¹⁵ Margaret Thomson, evidence, LE 1 1292/1947/9, Archives New Zealand.

USSR respectively. New Zealand allied itself with the USA and officially supported the “Truman Doctrine” which pushed for a global containment of the spread of Communism. One of its positions, that Communists would infiltrate important positions within the State administration and public media, spread to many Western countries, including New Zealand. The National Party and others had long regarded Labour’s policies as well as the filmmakers of the NFU as suspiciously Left-wing, and suspected them of harbouring Communist sympathisers. National used this as a strategy to discredit the Labour Party as well as the work of the NFU. However, Labour also made efforts to contain the “Communist menace” and more radical Left-wing sympathisers within the Labour and Trade Union movements.

In 1947, Cecil Holmes a NFU director and a member of the Communist Party made *Mail Run*, a film in the style of a documentary diary that was released as *Weekly Review 310*. The commentary largely takes the perspective of a subjective report of events that Holmes witnessed when travelling with the Royal New Zealand Air Force by plane from Whenuapai to Japan, delivering mail to New Zealand soldiers stationed there. Holmes employed this subjective voice and imagery to make brief, but politically controversial comments on asymmetrical material relationships in some of the countries he visited, relating these to the legacy of European colonialism.

First, the plane flies to Australia and from there to Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, which at that time was subject to attempts by the Dutch State administration to re-establish its colony after it had been occupied by Japanese military forces during World War II. The national independence of Indonesia had been declared in 1945. *Mail Run* shows various impressions of the city, including a person lying on a pavement, then cuts to three graffiti slogans on walls which read “Hands off Indonesia”, “Colonism [sic] is Crime” and “Freedom is our Birthright”. The commentary states, “Dutch forces occupy the city”, and points out that many Indonesians have no running water, and that the city is on the brink of war.

The plane also visits Saigon, which at that time was still part of colonial French Indochina and occupied by French forces. The film’s commentary states that Saigon “is a French city and there are plenty of troops out on the streets”. Then images of French soldiers, dwelling in relative luxury in a resort in Saigon, swimming and relaxing at a swimming pool, are contrasted with people seemingly living in the streets. The diary continues: “If you are a French officer or his girlfriend you can relax from the afternoon heat in these luxurious

surroundings. No one works in the afternoon in Saigon; no one that is except the native people who are unlucky enough to have been born here.”

Up until this point the film has employed a mostly subjective commentary to make critical comments on Dutch and French colonial forces and the material inequalities that went along with their presence. Next, however, it begins to criticise British colonial rule in Hong-Kong. The film first shows local people living in materially basic conditions, while the commentary states: “There are plenty of people in Hong-Kong who have to work long hard hours just in order to subsist. They eat and sleep in the streets. But the wealthy can afford to relax on the beautiful seaside resort.” Wealthy residents in a resort are then shown, although this time, the commentary does not specify who they are. It seems as if Holmes realised that to explicitly criticise British colonial rule overseas would have been too controversial, since it could have had repercussions in New Zealand, given its close economic and ideological ties and identification with the “Mother Country”.

As noted earlier, *Mail Run* was the only NFU film with profoundly politically controversial content that went beyond the limits of contemporary New Zealand party-politics released by the NFU during the 1940s and 50s, employing certain techniques to convey Holmes’ sense of the injustices that he observed and related to the legacy of colonialism. However, the images were the result of an observation of events that Holmes witnessed on his one-time trip and hence the film’s representations could not have been planned and scripted in detail like many other NFU films were. Nor could the recording of actuality be controlled and arranged to the same degree as when filming domestically. This left Holmes with a certain leeway to introduce desired themes into the film. It can be assumed that *Mail Run* would have differed greatly if it had been scripted in detail in advance and been approved by Andrews or State authorities before shooting commenced. Its critical outlook went far beyond what was readily shown on New Zealand screens at the time.

Before the film was released, Odell, who had become the central supervisor of State publicity, wanted to examine the film, which had become common routine after the war. According to Holmes’ autobiography, Andrews told him, “Anything you do here will attract attention, regardless of the subject matter ... For godsake [sic] don’t start arguing, say nothing, leave it to me. And remember my job is on the line as much as yours.” Then, according to Holmes,

at the screening Stan adopted a clever technique; he talked and joked throughout its ten minutes so that Sid O'Dell [sic] could only half hear the commentary. No cuts were ordered ... Then Stan took me to the pub and spelt it out: 'I'm an active member of the Labour Party, as you know. I'm a socialist. The achievements of the Soviet Union notwithstanding, I don't hold much with the Communist Party, especially the local variety. Too narrow and dogmatic for my taste. But above all, the Film Unit is my work, my life, even my love, I suppose. So if you or anyone else, for whatever reason, endangers that, I won't have any mercy. Out you'll go. But, unlike your comrades, maybe I'll always defend your right to air your views, as much as anyone else's. Just don't rock the bloody boat, that's all.'¹⁶

Holmes was never to repeat anything similar in films that he made for the NFU. *Mail Run* at once marked the beginning and end of political controversy in NFU films during the 1940s and 50s.

Holmes' critical outlook and his membership in the Communist Party made him suspect within parts of the State administration. However, his political convictions and his Communist Party membership were known not only to Andrews but also State officials, including Fraser who agreed to have Holmes promoted to the position of director in 1947, the year in which he made *Mail Run*.¹⁷

A year later, in December 1948, Holmes' satchel was taken from his car. Inside the satchel was his Communist Party membership card, as well as a letter he had written to Jack Lewin, President of the Public Service Association, calling for a stop-work meeting at the Miramar Studios to achieve improved working conditions at the Unit. This procedure, according to Holmes, had been agreed upon at a meeting of the staff at the film studios. Some of the NFU staff were concerned about their wages, which were deemed too low, as well as the absence of health insurance for certain hazardous activities. Somehow, Fintan Patrick Walsh, an influential union leader and close ally of Fraser, got hold of Holmes' papers and his Communist Party membership card and used them to discredit the more militant sections within the union movement. He convinced Walter Nash, then acting Prime

¹⁶ Holmes, *One Man's Way*, 32.

¹⁷ Stanhope Andrews, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Minister, to release Holmes' documents which were published simultaneously in various newspapers across the country. Thus Holmes became the subject of a concerted media campaign that used his Communist affiliations and letter to condemn the perceived menace of Communism in New Zealand, while the political Right of the day used the incident to claim that the NFU was a propaganda machine for the Labour government.

Holmes was immediately suspended from the NFU without pay due to his disobedience to authority. However, in May 1949, the Wellington Supreme Court ruled that Holmes had been wrongfully suspended and had been denied natural justice by not being given an opportunity to defend himself. Holmes was reinstated as a director at the NFU, but resigned in September 1949 and went to Australia to continue his career as a filmmaker.

Prior to his departure and while he was waiting for his court case, Holmes contacted the Communist-led Carpenter's Union in Auckland to offer it assistance in its struggle to improve working and living conditions, after the compulsory arbitration process through the State Arbitration Court had blocked wage rises and cut travel allowances. In March 1949, after some carpenters had gone on a "go-slow" (working slower than normally), various companies had responded with a "lockout" and many carpenters were fired and blacklisted, which made it difficult to find new work. The Union was subsequently de-registered and thereby lost its legal status and a new union was registered in its place, which every worker was legally required to join.

The result of Holmes' work for the Carpenter's Union was *Fighting Back* (1949), made in collaboration with Rudall and Ramai Hayward. It was the first radical Left-wing documentary made in New Zealand and, according to Union's publicity, "the first on-the-spot film of an industrial dispute ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere".¹⁸ Holmes remembers the making of the film in his autobiography:

For the first time I had complete freedom to express my attitudes on my own terms. I experimented with dramatic reconstruction. I used the talking head device by having someone ostensibly address a meeting, or involved in an argument – scripted and rehearsed.¹⁹

¹⁸ Quoted in "Fighting Back," accessed 15 March 2009, http://data.filmarchive.org.nz/search/details_film.php?ref_no=F7420&result_no=3

¹⁹ Holmes, *One Man's Way*, 35.

In other words, Holmes used the techniques of dramatic reconstruction and talking heads to convey his “attitudes”, which resulted in a partisan worker’s perspective that did not propose abandoning the operation and structures of Capitalism per se, but rather problematised the fate of Auckland’s carpenters working under Capitalist conditions.

Fighting Back begins by broaching the issue of the Waihi miners’ strike of 1913. One of the strike leaders gives an account of the circumstances leading up to the event. In a later sequence, “two Aucklands” are contrasted and thus a binary opposition is established, with the commentary distinguishing between the Auckland of “the Chamber of Commerce and private enterprise” and that of “the workers”. Images are employed to illustrate and sustain this claim, including those of the slum-like living conditions of workers. Government statistics are then used to point out the shift in the distribution of national income and four workers then express their concerns and personal problems. Subsequently, the main events that have led to the dispute between the Auckland carpenters on the one side and the “bosses” and “the Labour government” on the other are recounted in detail. Audiences are thus informed about the reasons behind the “go slow”, which led to many workers being fired and blacklisted. Then, various union leaders give speeches and an enacted sequence shows strike breakers who are urged to demonstrate their solidarity with the striking carpenters by refusing to work. It is pointed out how the workers are “fighting back” by organising resistance and solidarity. The film ends with a staged sequence in which three union leaders speak successively into the camera, the last one asking which side the Labour government is on, and claiming that “the workers” want “peace and Socialism” not “war and Capitalism”.

Fighting Back includes various personal and oppositional voices of workers, and frequently makes use of diegetic sound. As such, the film provided a space for critical voices of workers which in NFU films were to remain silent. However, like in NFU films, the voices that can be heard assumed a function in the propagandistic objective of the film, advancing an argument and certain objectives from a specific perspective. Where NFU films invariably promoted a vision of New Zealand as egalitarian and classless, *Fighting Back* projected New Zealand as divided into two classes, “workers” and “bosses”, with the film seeking to advance the interests of the former. Its narrative, one of unity and solidarity between workers in their struggle against the owners of the means of production, frequently makes

use of enacted sequences and dramatic interpretation. Whereas NFU films advanced a national perspective of harmony and co-operation of the entire nation, *Fighting Back* promotes solidarity amongst workers to advance their struggle against the perceived domination of capital interests under a Labour government.

In this sense, *Fighting Back* attests to the strategic and specific governmental perspective from which NFU films were made, and also points to the possibilities of filmic construction that had profoundly expanded in two decades, making it possible to stage, record and dramatise actuality in the service of an argument and the advancement of certain values and desires, while drawing upon the realism of the image. Whereas Holmes had produced a critical film in the form of *Mail Run* through an observation of events that he witnessed with the camera and provided a subjective voice that transcended images in a comparatively limited way, in *Fighting Back* images were frequently realised and enacted in order to advance a predetermined purpose.

The Economy of Vision I – Educating the Population

After the war, the NFU saw itself faced with increasing demand for films from various Government departments. It continued the production of the *Weekly Review* and also increased the production of longer documentary films, so-called “baby documentaries”, on various subjects, which were usually released as a single issue of the *Weekly Review*. Other films produced were instructionals, which were formally a continuation of the “direct appeal” films made during war. The production of films for overseas promotion also resurfaced after the war, including the “general prestige film” *Meet New Zealand* (1949) and *Journey for Three* (1950), which was made to attract immigrants. Another staple output, once again, became films for tourism promotion focusing primarily on scenery, outdoor and leisure time activities as well as Māoritanga as displayed at the model pa in Whakarewarewa.

Documentary films became increasingly complex in their construction and more often made extensive use of feature film conventions and deliberately staged scenes. Thus increasingly varied and more sophisticated techniques and strategies were employed to dramatise the subject matter and to heighten and direct affect. In the early 1950s films such as *Journey for*

Three (1950), *The Elysian Bus* (1950) and *Aroha* (1951) were made. These were entirely scripted and enacted, but were nevertheless promoted as belonging to the realm of documentary. Now films that were entirely devoid of actuality footage were designated and understood as belonging to the realm of factual non-fiction film and promoted as such.

Filmic images were thus further subjected to techniques of optimisation that included the staging of sequences and even entire films. Additionally, filmic images were routinely employed beyond what they literally depicted in order to evoke certain associations, connotations and emotions. Such images were inserted into a narrative that claimed to represent “the real”. The specificity of images and what they depicted routinely functioned as a synecdoche for a larger general and typical whole. Thus, by extension, the vision of what is and should be real imparted through film became further abstracted and de-contextualised from the specific co-ordinates in time and space which images depicted, but also further de-limited and reshaped the vision of an embodied observer in the historical world.

Documentary films were now often structured as “problem films” that first identified a certain problem, elaborated its sources, and then proposed suitable solutions, to be achieved through the application of certain techniques and strategies. However, not all films that were made in reference to specific perceived urgencies were structured in this way. In other films the problem remained implicit, and the film itself functioned as a “positive” means to bring about certain desired solutions, as discussed further below.

It is possible to discern two different groups of “problem films”. The first took as its referent certain perceived technical, scientific and economic problems that were seen to impede material security and progress, while the second group of films concerned different groups in society whose conduct and behaviour were considered to be problematic and in need of improvement. Martin Blythe has identified this latter group of films as “social problem documentary”.²⁰

Housing in New Zealand (1946), a fifteen-minute-long documentary scripted and directed by Forlong, was one of the first documentaries produced after the war. It was innovative in that it made extensive use of staged scenes to visualise and illustrate *the present* and, at the end,

²⁰ Blythe, *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television*, 88-105.

the future. This was a new development with regard to scope. While staged scenes had been used, for instance, in the first half of *One Hundred Crowded Years*, these served to visualise *the past* through *re-enactments*. During the war, after initial reservations it became practice to sometimes stage events entirely, but this was rather done on an ad hoc basis when the desired material was unavailable and this practice was rather confined to the staging of particular scenes. In contrast, *Housing in New Zealand* was deliberately planned and scripted, mixing actuality footage with extended staged sequences that served to drive the narrative forward and provide a symbolic expression and a “human face” to the larger problem of the housing shortage. Thus, the transition between the recording of actual events and staged scenes was fluid and already blurred in the scripting stage, and by extension further advanced indiscernibility between actuality and its strategic realisation for popular audiences.

Titles at the beginning of *Housing in New Zealand* inform audiences that the film provides “a history of New Zealand houses ... It shows *our* present problems, *our* achievements & *our* plans for the future.” It deals with the housing shortage in New Zealand by first describing the present conditions and then the techniques to be employed to overcome the shortage. *Housing in New Zealand* served to reassure the population, and in particular returning service men, that the government was doing its best to provide suitable State housing, primarily for rent.

In an “overview” of the current situation, an architect provides an evaluation of building styles, emphasising the need for functional, purposeful, simple housing as opposed to “large pretentious [houses] that were often made to resemble something they were not”, while claiming that modernist houses often had a “meaningless design”. A variety of houses are shown in quick succession, while being evaluated and contrasted by the expert, and the off-screen commentary suggests the aim should be to build “good common sense houses for New Zealanders to live in”.

Then the commentary claims, “A nation’s prosperity isn’t measured in exports and show and false fronts. It’s in the way people live”, and the problem is established by claiming that in 1935, “nearly 40,000 families were living in defective houses”. The shortage of housing is then demonstrated through staged and enacted sequences, which show a young couple with a baby on the way trying to find suitable housing. After several unsuccessful attempts,

they have to rent a single-room apartment, which is characterised as overpriced, small and run-down, since they cannot afford a house that's up to modern standards. In the following sequence, intertitles quote John Michael Savage, and the Department of Housing is introduced, which is said to have been set up in 1936 to provide "homes of a modern standard" to be rented "to people in the medium and lower income groups". The term "class" was not used in films by the NFU. Another government agency, this time the State Advances Corporation, is introduced on screen. The continuing housing shortage, the film suggests, is largely due to the economic demands of World War II. The commentary claims, in accordance with Labour's policy of centralised state planning of the economy, "*We know that the solution of our housing problem lies in large scale planning, and that the future of housing depends on a community effort by the people. We know that we can plan the future away from the confusion of the past.*" This is accompanied by a quick montage of smiling people in their houses. Symbolising and visualising the prospects of the future, the film makes an unmarked leap in time and ends by showing the young couple, now happy and smiling, with their now approximately two-year-old daughter, walking down a street lined with modern urban houses.

Technically, the film combines an off-screen commentary with the expert opinions of a variety of architects, informing the audience about the current situation and the necessary steps to be taken to improve it. This reportage style is combined with frequent staged and enacted sequences in which the fate of a young couple serves to symbolise the human consequences of the housing shortage and thus serves to legitimise and promote the suggested solution to the problem by advancing identification and empathy with the characters on the screen. The problem structured into the film finds its solution through the efforts by the State to provide suitable modern housing, resulting in better housing and living conditions as symbolised at the end of the film through smiling people and the happy young family. *Housing in New Zealand* is also one of the NFU films in which the realm of party politics is most obvious. The film, in accordance with Labour Party ideals, promoted "large scale planning" by the State.

After the film had been released, Forlong wrote an article for *The Listener* in which he promoted earth-buildings as suitable low-cost solutions to overcome the housing shortage. He stated that during his research for the film he had become acquainted with this style of

building and suggested it should be further explored, since it could allow people to build their own homes with comparatively little necessary expert knowledge and capital.²¹ However, no references to earth-building techniques as potential solutions to the housing shortage appear in *Housing in New Zealand*. This potential solution would have conflicted with the central message of the film, which is that large-scale State planning and State agencies would provide for suitable housing. Given that the director and script writer of *Housing in New Zealand* did not promote his own vision, one can conclude that he was unable to insert this theme into the film due to the institutional limitations within which he was working.

In 1948, Robert Allender published an article in *Landfall* about the work of the NFU, which he criticised for its lack of critical elaboration of current affairs. He compared *Housing Problems* (1935), produced in Britain by Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey for the British Commercial Gas Association, with *Housing in New Zealand*. He saw the first as superior, since it showed the living conditions in slums, while *Housing in New Zealand*, he argued, rather promoted the work of the government than to critically engage with enduring housing problems, such as the Te Aro slums in Wellington. Allender demanded:

Let us have our housing films to show us that we are not always behind the rest of the world, let us draw convenient comparisons occasionally, yet it is not enough to show ourselves only the things which please us. So far the National Film Unit has erred on the side of self-admiration.²²

When Allender published his critique of the work of the NFU, he was not aware that an earlier, unpublished version of *Housing in New Zealand* had contained shots and references to existing slums in New Zealand, but Forlong was instructed to remove these.²³ Furthermore, in the early 1920s Cyril Morton had shot a film entitled *Slums of Wellington* that showed the living conditions in slums that were deemed undesirable to be shown in *Housing in New Zealand*. Additionally, where *Housing Problems* had used the voices of slum dwellers that expressed and testified to the living conditions and problems of their lives in

²¹ Michael Forlong, "Homes Made from Earth," *The New Zealand Listener* 15, no. 377 (1946): 6-7.

²² Robert Allender, "The National Film Unit," *Landfall* 2, no. 4 (1948): 323.

²³ Robert Allen, interview by Diane Pivac, 17 April 1996, A0411, New Zealand Film Archive. See also Geraldene Peters, "Political and Alternative Film Making 1940 to 1950," in *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*, edited by Diane Pivac, Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 113.

adverse conditions, the final version of *Housing in New Zealand* gave voices to a scripted couple, experts and politicians.

In addition to addressing shortages in housing after the war, the State government wanted to increase national primary production. In order to achieve this, the application of science, mechanisation and industrialised agriculture were the favoured techniques NFU films set out to promote, along with an appeal to responsibility and co-operation of farmers and the population at large.

Weekly Review 337: Wheat Problem (1948) is a ten-minute documentary directed by Falconer which deals with wheat breeding and production in New Zealand while appealing to audiences – in particular farmers – to increase production on the grounds of patriotism and national duty. It was made for the “Grow more Wheat” campaign that was closely associated with the “Aid for Britain” campaign, which was initiated to supply primary produce to Britain to relieve food shortages after the war.

The film begins by discussing scientific endeavour which would improve wheat varieties for New Zealand conditions and points out how mechanisation and industrial techniques advanced efficient production. The commentary states, “So with *our* new wheat varieties and new machines *we* have all the facilities *we* need for maximum production.” Then the film establishes the problem: “Rich New Zealand imports grain. Millions of loaves a week from grain for which the rest of the world is starved.” It is pointed out that while imports from Australia to New Zealand have increased, wheat production in New Zealand has decreased. Next the film shows a Pākehā family as it is about to consume bread, while the commentary continues, “*We* are hardly aware of the problem. The mills turn. *We* have bread. *We* are getting along pretty well.” Suddenly dramatic music sets in and the Pākehā family is contrasted with a compilation of images of people of different ethnicities from different parts of the world, living in materially basic conditions, including a shot of people of Asian origin whose sole function within the narrative is to symbolise despair and deprivation and to advance the empathy and pity of audiences and by extension their economic conduct. While these images are shown, the off-screen commentary states:

But this is the other side of the medal. This is the face of a third of humanity.

While *we* import wheat, a third of the world’s people hunt, steal, beg for bread.

But there is no answer from New Zealand wheat plans. In fact, less and less

wheat has been grown since the end of the war ... The situation is alarming. We want to help Britain and the rest of the world. We may first have to help ourselves.

The film continues by showing three men sitting around a table discussing the problems of wheat production, alternately speaking stiltedly to each other or directly into the camera. It can be assumed that their conversation, as was frequently the case, was scripted and rehearsed and shot in the studio, particularly as the speakers seem to be reading from a piece of paper in front of them and certain movements, such as the turn to the camera by one of them, have been clearly timed. Two of the characters appear to be scientific experts, while the other represents an ordinary farmer. The discussion ends with the farmer addressing the camera directly, claiming that increased wheat production is most likely to arise out of “patriotic grounds and from the stance of national duty to aid Britain in her time of trouble”. The commentary supplements his line, broadening the request: “That is the appeal. *The farmer* is called upon for some sacrifice. For increased wheat production is bound up with providing the world’s people with their daily bread.” Next, the need for increased production is again urged by employing images calculated to be disturbing. Shocking footage of dead children, ruins and falling bombs are shown in quick succession, probably shot in Europe during World War II. These are contrasted with smiling Pākehā children and a commentary which reflects on the world’s need in the post-war era for New Zealand wheat, ending with: “What is *our* answer? Will it be hunger or bread? ... We can help the people to peace and security.”

The film was designed to have a strong emotional appeal, particularly through juxtaposing images that connote despair and deprivation with those of a content and happy New Zealand family and smiling children. Additionally, *Wheat Problem* employs highly dramatic music that not only functions to convey a certain ambience and mood, but also was timed for “optimal” emotional impact by building up dramatic suspense. In addition, it uses off-screen commentary, an “ordinary” farmer, as well as experts in the form of “talking heads” who frequently address the camera, and by extension the audience directly, to further advance the intended effects of the film.

The film employs various techniques of dramatisation and coalesces temporally and spatially disparate images into a narrative that is set up to foster an incentive to increase wheat

production, which could supposedly help to feed “the world”. However, the film does not set out to clarify and inform audiences how the people shown in the film as being in need for food, nor the world at large, might benefit from increased wheat production in New Zealand. It is repeatedly pointed out that increased production could assist the “third of humanity” that is in need of food, or even “the world”, or “Britain” in particular, but fails to be more specific or consistent. Nor does the film set out to clarify the terms under which food would be distributed and made available. Furthermore, beyond citing World War II, the film does not aim to establish or discuss historical reasons why “a third of humanity” may lack essential goods.

In this sense, various images that show people in (ostensible) need are de-contextualised and dislocated from the physical location in which they were shot. They are then re-contextualised within the filmic narrative to connote deprivation and despair. They thus function as generalised symbols employed to produce a calculated set of emotional and moral reactions, serving to further actions of New Zealand’s population, particularly farmers, to assist the objective of increased industrialised wheat production. Audience emotions and moral reactions were therefore calculated and anticipated in order to have audiences subject themselves to responsible and appropriate behaviours, while the actual existence of the people shown in the film as being in need is insignificant beyond their symbolic and evocative function within the narrative.

The latter half of the film in particular focuses on providing incentives and instilling moral convictions through an appeal to patriotism and sentiments of responsibility towards Britain and hungry people worldwide. However, the majority of food aid provided by the New Zealand State after the war was exported to Britain and primarily sold, not gifted.²⁴ Furthermore, in order to allow for continued high exports to Britain, food rationing in New Zealand had been successively introduced from 1943 and remained in place for some items, such as butter, until 1950. Additionally, throughout the film it remains unexplained how it would be possible and desirable to increase production of wheat for export, while New Zealand itself imported significant amounts of wheat (which was partially used as fodder for the poultry industry). In this sense, one may argue, the film primarily served to stimulate the

²⁴ See “Aid for Britain” in Walter Nash Bundle, 1179, 0362-0406, Archives New Zealand. For an additional critique of the Food for Britain Campaign see Jock Barnes, *Never a White Flag: The Memoirs of Jock Barnes, Waterfront Leader* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1998), 77-88.

growth of the national economy while appropriating and exploiting certain images of people in (ostensible) need as well as the calculated reactions of audiences towards such images and moral appeals to humanism and patriotism.

There were several other films made after the war that dealt with problems of material security and progress, including ones that focused on electric supply, such as *Power from the River* (1947), the problem of soil fertility, such as *Pumicelands* (1954), and forest management, such as *Beech Foresters* (1951).

The second group of films emerging after the end of war dealt with perceived social problems. The first group of people whose conduct was perceived to be problematic were children, who became the subject and object of a series of instructional films, at once didactic and entertaining. The films aimed to teach children appropriate behaviours, relating mainly to health, hygiene and safety. They taught children how to brush teeth (*Clean Teeth*, 1949), how to cross the street and take the school bus (*The School Bus*, 1947), how to use bicycles correctly (*Monkey Tale*, 1951) or how to use the footpath (*Keep on the Footpath*, 1950). Such films were designed, according to Morton, “to capture the young child’s attention and to appeal to its imagination from the very beginning, to retain the interest, and to impart the desired lesson without seeming to preach or teach”.²⁵

The NFU also produced a range of films on State school education. A documentary like *The First Two Years at School* (1950), directed by Thomson and produced for the Department of Education, addresses early school State education of children. It does not set out to teach audiences specific behaviours, nor is it structured as a problem-solution film. The problems with child education in the past, the film suggests, have now been successfully overcome, given the “revolution” that is proclaimed to have taken place in State infant education.

The film begins with a staged sequence in which two “role model” children are shown playing, which is followed by a flashback visualising their mother’s ostensible memories about the adverse school conditions she had to face, memories which are then reinforced by an off-screen commentary that talks about the legacy of crowded classes, strict discipline, and dull learning conditions. By contrast, contemporary education conditions are characterised by the commentary through references to sunny rooms, exciting toys, and the

²⁵ Cyril Morton, AAPG 6025 16/f, Archives New Zealand.

friendliness of teachers. This change is due, as the commentary claims, to a “revolution” that has taken place in State education – it is now realised how important it is for “these young minds to be kept lively and eager and full of wonder”. The value of the children’s own effort and their “real experience”, the commentary continues, provides for increased efficiency of learning. “It is not what we do to children that educates them, but what we enable them to do for themselves; to see and feel and understand for themselves”, while, as the commentary states, they remain unconscious of the fact that they are learning.

While roughly the first half of the film points to the positive developments in State infant education, focusing on “free play” sessions, the second half depicts specific classroom activities, such as reading, counting and painting, and frequently shows children in self-directed activities. The narrator, as common in NFU films, is “all-knowing” and he is able to know the feelings of children and what supposedly is good for them. He is able to generalise about all children – for instance states that all children want to learn to read or that every child loves stories. The film advances the vision that primary State education no longer operated with disciplinary techniques, while children are marked by their happiness, playfulness, curiosity and self-directed learning.

However, corporal punishment continued to be a legitimate disciplinary practice in New Zealand schools until 1990. School attendance was compulsory, schools had to follow a nationwide curriculum, and policies of State education, as argued in detail before, were little focused on unconditional self-determination; schools and “self-determination” had to operate according to and remain within a certain set of values, norms and “necessities” that were aimed at producing normal and useful citizens. The film provided neither what one might conceive of as a balanced insight into State education, nor did it critically engage with its subject. *The First Two Years at School* was rather the result of a strategic selection and arrangement of images which were provided with logical coherence and evaluated through the commentary, the result of which was a promotional film for State schooling.

The film is one of many from the NFU that showed images of a variety of places – here different schools – without distinguishing amongst specific locations. By filming at various schools the editor of the film had a wider range of film footage available that enabled the production of a desired story about infant school education. The film thus resulted from an assemblage of a variety of shooting locations, logically framed by an omniscient narrator and

affect directed through “sentimental” orchestral music. Differing formal elements of the film, its title, the commentary, and its unspecified school locations enable the film’s projection of school education to represent New Zealand infant school education in general and as a whole. Thus the film provides an optimised, normalised and homogenised vision of what is implicitly designated as typical New Zealand infant education, which audiences seemingly could “see for themselves”. As the film pointed out, an ideal of education was not to “impose” certain behaviours, but to guide and supervise the experiences and self-development of children and stimulate them with activities of interest while growing up to become good citizens. *The First Two Years at School* thereby followed a general educational strategy that also applied to NFU film production.

As well as focusing on children, NFU films also delineated two further groups that posed perceived problems in the attainment of a “better future”: workers and Māori, as discussed below.

Envisioning Workers – The Politics of Dignity

After the end of war, New Zealand’s national economy was restructured to deal with peacetime conditions, focussing on increasing primary and secondary production, full employment and on greater efficiency. Private as well as State corporations were facing labour shortages. Many soldiers returning from war could not return to their former occupations due to disabilities and injuries they had suffered, while immigration and thus the input of labour from overseas had dropped. Women were now returning to their “traditional” roles as “housewives” as well as to jobs in education, health care, administration and the service industry. One of the measures taken to deal with labour shortages and to stimulate increased immigration was the setting up of the Dominion Population Committee in 1945, while the NFU produced a variety of films designed to assist the strengthening and efficiency of the national labour force. In the following, some significant films produced during the 1940s and 50s are discussed. They are located within a wider historical context of how a dignified projection of workers functioned as a governmental strategy to advance the normal and efficient functioning of the political economy.

In 1947, the NFU began to produce a “Meet the Worker Series” which was to be “designed to create interest and appreciation of the services rendered by various types of workers and to build up pride of occupation and assist the Employment Service”.²⁶ These films did not have a problem-solution structure, but worked through positive suggestion to advance a vision of worker’s worth and build up “pride of occupation”.

The first documentary in this series was *Weekly Review 355: Railway Worker* (1947), directed by Thomson. Its title, through the use of the singular, suggests it is occupied with one specific railway worker. However, it deals with various railway workers across the country that are implicitly designated and referred to as *the* typical railway worker, standing in for all railway workers of the country. This focus on the typical is underscored by the film being structured chronologically, ostensibly observing 24 hours’ work on the railways. However, the film was shot at various locations on the North and South Islands over a period of three weeks, while nevertheless implying that the events depicted follow each other in the same day. Thus, the film, like many others, assembles a filmic vision that moves significantly beyond the observational possibilities of an embodied, physically located observer, while creating a new cinematic space-time continuum in which disparate events and people implicitly – and explicitly through the title – are subsumed within the theme and narrative of a typical day’s work of *the* railway worker.

The film refrains from the explicit referencing of people and events depicted as part of a State agency – the railways were State owned and controlled through the Railways Department – and it does not verbally promote “modern progress” and machinery, as is common in other films by the NFU. It instead sets out to provide railway workers with a sense of pride and dignity and points towards their responsibility, as well as establishes the interdependency of audiences (as New Zealanders) and the workers depicted on the screen.

At the beginning of the film, the off-screen commentary states, “In the very early morning the Railway yards at Wellington look almost romantic ... But let *us* come in a little closer, among the grit and noise and smoke, and meet some of the people who work on the railways. *Let us see* something of how a day’s work goes there.” One minute into the film, the commentary briefly points towards the working conditions faced by railway workers. Images of workers engaged in a variety of tasks are shown, surrounded by clouds of smoke

²⁶ Sid Odell to Peter Fraser, memo, 14 April 1947, MS-0982/35, Hocken Library.

from a steam locomotive. The omniscient commentary generalises: “‘Oh there is nothing romantic here’, they will tell you. ‘It’s just a job like any other.’ But it’s a job that is dirtier than most, sometimes dangerous, always exacting.” Then the commentary moves on to point out that railway workers also have a certain pride in their job, since they know that “the community can’t get on without them. And that they in return have a responsibility to the community ... Running trains is essentially a co-operative business. And railway people have a clear sense of what that means.” Various scenes follow; apprentices are shown being trained for the job, varied tasks such as the carriage and sorting of mail and the checking of train tickets by a conductor are depicted, as well as aspects of social life in the railway town of Otira, including a dancing event.

Like many other films, *Railway Worker* provided a series of surface impressions of its subject, without including the voices of those depicted, interpreting its subject matter by providing a narrative that advanced the positive recognition of what is designated as the typical railway worker’s life. Nevertheless, the commentary of the film, more than others that have been sighted for this study, briefly, but repeatedly, points towards “not so positive” aspects of the typical work life of railway workers such as the “difficult hours” they have to work, which pose a “disruption of their home life”. This, however, is presented in the film as normal and “natural”.

The second documentary film in the “Meet the Worker Series” was *Weekly Review 374: The Coaster* (1948), directed by Holmes. It was technically innovative in that it is a “poetic” documentary; its commentary consists entirely of the poem “The Coaster” written by Dennis Glover specifically for the film. The film was inspired by Harry Watt and Basil Wright’s *Night Mail* (1936), which was produced for the British General Post Office.

The Coaster shows various activities performed by workers on a coastal ship and on the wharves. In one scene Glover’s poem provides references to the difficulties and physically demanding job of workers, this time seamen working on a coastal ship. One passage of the commentary, employing a “man vs. nature” theme, states:

Seamen adjust their lives ...
Signed on with wind and weather
It’s not a romantic life -
You are a bit of a slave.

It's plain hard hazardous work
To work with the white-collared wave.

Seamen are thus provided with an aura of heroism and struggle and the last line could be interpreted as metaphor for the conditions of blue-collar workers under a "white-collar regime". However, the "plain hard hazardous work" is not associated with the history of economic forces, but framed in terms of a struggle of seamen against natural, eternal forces and hence implicitly works to naturalise industrialised working conditions as simply given.

In an article published in *Landfall* Glover described his work for the film. The planning for the commentary began with a shot sequence, which gave the number of shots, their description, the dialogue or natural sound to be incorporated, and the exact length of shots down to one-third of a second. Glover wrote his poem in reference to the shot sequence, that is, the sound and images of the film were already planned down to fractions of a second before the camera moved to record events on location.

At the end of his article, Glover wrote:

One more remark: Mr Andrews had seen the script in all its stages, and his criticism was informed and useful. I was more than a little put out to discover that it had to be submitted also to the Prime Minister's Office. Waterside workers were nowhere mentioned in *The Coaster*.²⁷

The last remark by Glover is significant in that it expresses a concern about the film not engaging with waterside workers. New Zealand's wharves were of vital importance to the national economy due to the geographical isolation of New Zealand from overseas markets. During the late 1940s, there had been repeated clashes between waterside workers and their Union and the employers and the Government, culminating in 1951 into the Waterfront Dispute, New Zealand's largest and most widespread industrial dispute, which is discussed in the next chapter.

In another article on *The Coaster*, Holmes told "the story behind the film".²⁸ He claimed, "You have your ideas, you organize them (with an eye to Policy ... the audience and running time) and then you have to realize them." In other words, the physical surfaces that would

²⁷ Dennis Glover, "Verse Commentary for a Film," *Landfall* 3, no. 2 (1949): 172.

²⁸ Cecil Holmes, "The Story behind the Film," *Public Service Journal* 36, February (1949): 20-23.

be recorded and rendered visible were made a function of certain norms, policy, audience expectations and effects to be achieved, and this relied on a strategic and directive “realisation” of the film. In the case of *The Coaster*, this included an initial research trip by Holmes in order to find suitable material for what he wanted to be a “dramatic story”. In the production of the film, Holmes had to overcome a variety of problems. One related to “the use of natural sound and dialogue to give the thing an air of reality”, while also using the “verse-commentary and music to provide a sort of lyrical lift to the images”. Another problem was shooting the planned scenes given the technological limitations of equipment. One scene in the film showed a storm at sea, which involved editing and juxtaposing shots derived from the observation of the tasks performed by seamen with others staged for the camera, including buckets of water being flung over seamen, thereby simulating the ostensible impact of a storm at sea. Another planned scene showed shots of Wellington Harbour at night. This was technically impossible because of the limitations of film stock and slow lenses, so a miniature model of the harbour was built in the studio, filmed, and then inserted into the film.

Another group of films produced by the NFU that addressed workers were instructionals, which were explicitly didactic and incorporated techniques of documentary filmmaking. While clear-cut distinctions between the projections of workers made under Labour and later under National are impossible to draw, particularly given the wide variety of films being made, the films discussed above were generally more sympathetic towards workers and less instrumental than those made under National, which often took the form of instructionals.

Instructionals were aimed at teaching appropriate behaviour in the workplace. Farm workers had to learn how to use milking machines efficiently (*Efficient Machine Milking*, 1949), wharf workers had to be taught what to wear at work and how to avoid accidents (*Dress for the Job*, 1957; *General Waterfront Safety*, 1958) and workers in general had to be told how to stay healthy and safe at work, thereby furthering efficiency, profit and safety (*Wherever We May Work*, 1957). The last of these is a sixteen-minute instructional documentary structured as a problem-solution film. It begins by showing a succession of possible work accidents – staged for the camera – while the commentary states: “It could have been anyone at almost any job. It could have been you.” In the following, national

work accident statistics are cited, establishing the film's problem, with the commentary announcing:

All these accidents cause the country to lose 3 million man days of production every year, and they *cost us* about 8 million pounds. And besides this there is the personal suffering which every accident causes; Suffering which we'd usually give anything to avoid. Yes, *we* have a real accident problem and it's serious. To overcome it we've got to *understand the nature of the problem*; that's what this film is about.

Attention is drawn to *national* economic problems expressed in terms of lost human labour and capital loss for "the country", as well as the "personal suffering" caused by accidents. The film goes on to show a variety of staged accidents while the commentary, accompanied by suitably dramatic music, creates a generalised sense of danger and insecurity. Everyone is designated as being in constant threat of an accident at work. Later the film asks who is responsible for avoiding accidents: "Whose job is it to remove these causes?" Suggested possibilities include managers, who, the commentary states, say that the supervisors and foremen are paid to do it. The foreman's thoughts are known and expressed by the narrator, who says: "If only the workers would co-operate he might get somewhere." Images of a worker follow and the commentary continues: "And *the workman*; he doesn't often even think about accidents." The solution proposed by the commentary lies in "all co-operating together. *We* all must do something ... Let's see what *we* can do." Then the film goes on to briefly address factory owners who should strive to keep workers healthy through, for example, suitable lighting and safe machinery. The film then focuses on the role of workers, and promotes workplaces that are orderly, clean and efficient. The effort of "maintaining this kind of order and efficiency is of course made up by better tempers, better work, more profit and fewer accidents".

The film is focused on providing knowledge and detailing appropriate behaviours for workers to function in an orderly fashion under the given working conditions, which in the film primarily, but not solely, relate to the conditions of industrial work in factories. These conditions are once again presented as naturally given without any history of their own, and are not presented as a point of negotiation between workers and employers. "The *nature* of the problem" is defined as resulting largely from the carelessness of workers. The film's

promotion of tidiness, order and appropriate behaviour by workers suggests present conditions could be made safer, thereby increasing efficiency and profitability, while minimising human suffering. *Wherever We May Work* ends by pointing out six rules for workers to follow, and a blue-collar worker, in clean and tidy work-clothes, has the final word: "If we do these things, develop safe working habits, we will be going a long way to seeing an industry here in New Zealand [which] is safe and healthy for all of us. For industry can be made safe; wherever we may work."

Such projections of workers need to be related to "the politics of dignity". Like the British Documentary movement, the NFU frequently offered up dignified representations of workers in its films, pointing out their relevance and worth for the nation at large. While some films referred briefly to the physical demands and difficulties of working conditions, they never attempted any sustained analysis of these conditions, nor did films show workers raising controversial or critical voices. Despite a *Labour* government throughout the 1940s, the asymmetrical power relations and conditions of industrialised labour, and differences in material wealth and class remained indiscernible in films by the NFU. The few voices of workers in NFU films were not "autonomous" expressions, but assumed a function in the advancement of specific governmental purposes encoded into the films and were frequently rehearsed. Additionally, after the war, as discussed above, successively tighter control mechanisms were put into place, ensuring that only suitable voices could be heard. In this sense, asymmetrical power relations within New Zealand were to remain invisible and were "flattened" into specific projections on the screen, providing a "positive" and productive vision that would contribute to the advancement of the national labour force.

Stuart Hood has pointed out in his discussion of the British Documentary Movement that the concept of the "Dignity of Labour" can be and has been adapted to various political doctrines, including Fascism and Communism.²⁹ It is important to note that modern national economies and nation-states, irrespective of political doctrines and the intentions of State administrations, are a result of, and interweaved with, the abstractions and totalising tendencies of modernity and modernisation. Nation states came to rely on specific techniques of perceiving, projecting, controlling and implementing national "progress"

²⁹ Stuart Hood, "John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement", in *British Cinema History*, ed. James Curran and Vincent Porter (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1983), 100. See also Winston, *Claiming the Real II. Documentary: Grierson and Beyond*, 83.

based on certain “simplistic”, schematic and largely quantitative knowledge, and techniques of top-down implementation of policies and projects through experts, administrators and engineers.³⁰ However, such projected progress in material terms crucially relied on the working classes in the coals mines, on the wharves, in transport, and on assembly lines in industrial production. The dignifying projection of workers through NFU films “naturalised” modern labour and abstracted it from the historical forces and developments that predisposed its functioning and operation. Hence such modes of “dignification” worked towards labour’s “harmonisation” within the political economy through the strategy of positive and productive suggestion. In other words, while such images of workers may be seen as preferable to more demeaning projections of workers such as in early Hollywood movies, in the case of NFU films, they operated within the realm of governmental strategy focused on the realisation of certain projected ends, not on the processes by which certain ends could be negotiated and achieved or their desirability discussed.

While the New Zealand Labour Party, as the name suggests, had historically emerged from and been focused on the problems and needs of workers, when it came into power the perspective it adopted was necessarily focused on a regulation and arrangement of the workforce and “manpower” according to *national* projections of progress within an existing institutional arrangement of government. In its 1935 election manifesto entitled *Security and Prosperity for All*, the Labour Party defined as a main objective “to utilize to the maximum degree the wonderful resources of the Dominion”,³¹ and repeatedly claimed it would govern in the interests of the whole population. In 1947, the Labour Party officially abandoned the clause in its constitution that had aimed at “the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange”.³² The Labour Party thereby formally moved towards distancing itself from associations with revolutionary Communism as well as from its historical origins within class struggle.

However, as with the British Documentary Movement, many of the production staff at the NFU identified as Left wing “Socialists”; Holmes and Falconer even identified as Communists.

³⁰ For a sustained critique of the “simplifications” on which social and economic engineering of the modern State relied see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

³¹ New Zealand Labour Party, *Labour's Election Manifesto: Security and Prosperity for All. Higher wages, Guaranteed prices, Credit control* (Wellington: Standard Print, 1935).

³² See Bruce Brown, “Holoyake's Precursors”, in *Holoyake's Lieutenants*, ed. Margaret Clark (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2003), 14.

A socialist vision implied that NFU films, including those that provided workers with a sense of dignity and social worth, were framed around abstract and idealised conceptions of co-operation, equality, egalitarianism, and mutual understanding conceived in generalised humanitarian terms, while actual struggles within society remained invisible, thereby rendering them cinematically non-existent. NFU films invariably promoted modern labour and its organisation and functioning within the political economy as normal, necessary and worthy. Audiences were made to identify with the workers on screen, which generated sentiments of pride, sympathy and empathy. This, by extension, would serve to produce a vision that would not govern according to class divisions, but indiscriminately seek co-operative harmony and advance the “responsibilisation” of fellow members of the population in their daily conduct.

An analysis of the history, arrangements, procedures and organisation of the nation-state and State government as well as the political economy in general remained absent in the films, while frequently providing positive references to State employees, politicians and certain State policies. Politicians are frequently seen making public statements at public occasions, including funerals, exhibition openings, public works, or in direct address to the camera, promoting the work and agencies of the State, or pointing out problems and solutions in the realisation of state policies. Strikes, political controversies, radical, subversive or “maladjusted” perspectives, bureaucratic procedures, prisons, and slums remained invisible, as did wealthy classes and an analysis of the conditions that allowed them to accumulate such wealth. While “ordinary citizens”, in particular workers, featured prominently in NFU films, the owners of the means of production, corporations and/or leaders of industry remained absent from filmic enquiry.

In reference to these blind spots of NFU film one should point out that the strategic and invariable projection of New Zealand as a prosperous, stable and modern nation not only served to advance projections of progress by the State administration, but also served the accumulation of capital of private industry, which in turn assisted the developing of the national economy, as measured by increases in the gross domestic product. Around 1950, W. H. Knox published an article entitled “Sound Films Mean Better Understanding”,³³

³³ W. H. Knox, “Sound Films Mean Better Understanding,” around 1950, NFU Press clippings pre 1980, New Zealand Film Archive. Emphasis added.

written to promote the use of film to further the interests of private industry. In this article, Knox talked about the worth of recent Neuline film productions, such as *Industrial Auckland* (1950) and *Here is New Zealand* (1947) – which was bought by the government for overseas promotion – and claimed:

Sound films are the ideal information channel; on the screen, facts and ideas, points of view and convincing explanations emerge quickly, concisely and definitely. *They are selling points, and they're doubly selling because the audience has no idea that it is being 'sold' anything.* The theatre chair is comfortable and the screen itself is still as eyefixing as ever it was. The rather significant possibilities of this form of propaganda (and I use the word in its best sense) are boundless.

He then asked how the “Chamber of Commerce Movement” could “exploit the film further”. “If we are to fulfil our promises of educating the public not only in our commercial interests but in our civic responsibility viewpoint, we must use every medium which will bring about happy public relations.” Echoing Andrews or Grierson, he added:

New Zealand industrialist and commercial man must be explained in terms of New Zealand to the New Zealand farmer. ‘Here is New Zealand’ will explain us to overseas peoples, but a motion picture of the ‘Industrial Auckland’ type is necessary if we are to explain the city to the country, the businessman to the farmer.

Knox’s suggestion was to develop the possibilities of 16mm film as an inexpensive medium for publicity that could “carry the message industry wants to deliver” to advance “better understanding” and “happy public relations” through this form of one-way communication, while “the audience has no idea that it is being ‘sold’ anything”.

Thus there was a certain synergy between State efforts to achieve projected growth of the national economy and those of private enterprise. Both relied on an increasingly efficient organisation of the workforce in order to achieve projected national security and progress, while increasing capital accumulation through the exploitation of labour. Additionally, both had begun to make strategic and calculated use of film for certain projected ends. This synergy of interests and the projection of a specific political economy are further elaborated

in the next chapter in the discussion of the Waterfront Dispute of 1951 and the NFU production *The New Zealanders*, made in close co-operation with Caltex Oil.

This chapter has discussed how the NFU became extended and reorganised after the end of the war. Its main function became largely one of civic education, as opposed to propaganda which had been the case during the war. Throughout the late 1940s, the NFU was inserted into an increasingly rationalised and harmonised State publicity strategy and functioned as a part of the “projective” aspect of government information services within the Prime Minister’s Department. In terms of film production, the NFU continued making the *Weekly Review* and didactic instructionals, while also increasingly producing more complex documentary films that incorporated narrative techniques and strategies of feature film. Such realist films continued to claim to represent the real, even when they were entirely scripted and enacted, and devoid of any actuality footage. However, more commonly, actuality footage was created, treated and optimised with reference to various norms, values and desires and mixed with enacted scenes. Thus what the camera “documented” was frequently marked by a fluid transition between actuality and staged scenes and it is often impossible to clearly discern between these two, neither through a close analysis of film scenes, nor through further extra-filmic research given information is often fragmentary or non-existent. Hence, the vision of the real thus created for popular audiences was characterised by a difficulty, even impossibility in discerning between authentic and staged footage. This chapter has argued that this vision was marked by an increasing abstraction and de-limitation from the specificity of images and their contexts – and an abstraction of an embodied observer – which resulted from processes of generalisation, homogenisation and normalisation. This vision was to be productive in the shaping of the future, while being indiscriminately affirmative of the existing political economy and patterned along national modes of identification and perception in which the class struggle of workers threatened and opposed projected national harmony, progress and co-operation.

5. Public Relations

Introduction

This chapter discusses the changing procedures and arrangement of the modes and apparatus of realising visions of the real through film with the change in government from Labour to National after the elections in late 1949. It will chart the shifting purposes, reasoning and practices that were attached to the NFU and its film production. State publicity and the Information Section were again reorganised, while the NFU continued to be a part of the executive of government, now institutionalised within the reorganised Tourist and Publicity Department. Once again, there was an attempt to increase the economic efficiency of the NFU, but now under National whose party doctrine favoured “free market” capitalism over State regulation. The NFU was further subjected to bureaucratic top-down procedures that “managed” the Unit, which was to be run as a State corporation, its profitability and accountability to be increased. At the same time, NFU film production came to be rationalised as advancing a “brand image”, and enhancing desirable public relations.¹

Film production at the NFU had to increasingly take into account the marketability and saleability of films to generate revenue that could compensate for the immense costs involved in the approach and organisation of film production. Thus the work of the NFU was refocused towards overseas distribution and marketing. It did continue to produce films for domestic “consumption”; however the purposes of these were also to be readjusted to more narrow definitions of the purposes of film production. The perceived creative leeway of film production, which had marked the initial years of the NFU, was thereby further removed from the NFU towards streamlined management processes.

However, National’s initial focus on reducing costs was relative. During the 1950s, the government increasingly recognised the value of film for its purposes. The production of the *Weekly Review* was stopped and the NFU increasingly had to focus on producing instructional and departmental films, particularly in order to advance the “safety” and “security” of the population. However, as discussed in the preceding chapter, such films were already being produced under the Labour government and again clear-cut distinctions

¹ See, for instance, “Telling the World: Interview with Sid Odell,” *The New Zealand Listener* 32, no. 825 (1955): 6-7.

in the kinds of films being made are difficult, if not impossible, to draw. With the change of government from Labour to National a shift in emphasis and focus occurred, rather than a categorical change in film production.² However, the infusion of films with more narrowly conceived party-political ideals tended to diminish, and the shift from the ideal of State planning to “free market” capitalism can be detected in various films made during the 1950s. Nevertheless, National formed the government and as such the desire to unambiguously and optimally project State agencies and the nation at large remained.

In the following, the changing institutional organisation of State publicity and the NFU is discussed in detail. Some of the significant films produced are described, along with their task to promote the nation, particularly overseas. Tourism again became an important focus, particularly since it promised to be the area of film production which could achieve measurable capital gain. The projection of Māori and Māoritanga became an important aspect of tourist films.

The re-emergence of NFU films produced for the promotion of tourism after the war was accompanied by a mode of envisioning Māori which in some ways resembled that of earlier tourism productions before the war. However, State policy regarding Māori had changed and NFU film came to deal with contemporary concerns and perceived problems, and filmic projections of Māoritanga reflected this. NFU films frequently signified Māori as *generally* modernising (which implied that they were successfully adjusting themselves to the demands of a modern political economy), while also remaining “exotic” and “maladjusted” in certain areas. The projection of Māoritanga as an exotic and attractive feature of New Zealand was common in films for overseas production, while maladjustment of Māori became a focus of social problem documentaries made primarily for domestic release. As discussed in detail below, particularly in the projection of Māoritanga and Māori, the NFU was facing a variety of problems to ensure that filmic subjects could be arranged into a desirable and useful vision.

² See also John F. Reid, *Some Aspects of Film Production in New Zealand* (Wellington: Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, 1972), 25-27.

National and the Political Economy of State Publicity and Film Production

In November 1949 Labour had lost office to National, which soon began to reorganise parts of the State administration that had been significantly expanded during Labour's term in office. One of National's promises during the election had been the reduction of taxes as well as to stop further extensions of the State administration, and in line with its party doctrine, National sought to reduce State expenditure, particularly within the public service. However, while ideologically critical of the increased State bureaucracy and State enterprises established under Labour, National neither profoundly reversed legislation and practices regarding the Welfare State, nor did it dismantle the information and publicity apparatus. It maintained State control of broadcasting, and like Labour, did not open up State publicity to include controversial topics to stimulate "open" public discourse. Instead, during the 1950s, State publicity continued to be expanded after National realised its governmental value and it was institutionally further centralised so that "the State" could speak with one "voice" and project a coherent and optimal image of itself and the nation. One of the measures to co-ordinate and harmonise such an image was to advise government departments that before information was made publicly available they needed to check whether it would "clash with other publicity plans".³

In this sense, National continued to expand an information apparatus established under Labour. It has been observed that since World War II, despite ideological differences between the parties, Labour and National increasingly shared common interests, practices and aims in the governing of the nation. National, as Labour had done before, promised to govern in the interest of the whole population and, according to James Belich, "preached the restoration of 'true harmony ... a remarkable co-operative effort by all classes to live together'".⁴ In this sense, National broadly shared Labour's corporate vision of New Zealand in the governing of the nation. One of the shared practices, it can be argued, lay in controlling and shaping public discourse, together with the aim to produce a harmonised and well-disciplined population that through its vision and agency would assist in the realisation of projected national progress, security and harmony.

³ Sid Odell, memorandum regarding the release of information to the Press, AAPG W3435 5 1/11, Archives New Zealand.

⁴ See James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin Press, 2001), 305-06.

An important event during the 1950s, which disrupted the vision of national harmony and economic progress, was the Waterfront Dispute (also called, depending on the perspective, a strike or lockout). In 1951, the government saw itself faced with the largest and most widespread industrial dispute in New Zealand's recorded history.⁵ At its height, up to 22,000 workers from various occupations supported waterfront workers in their demands for improved working conditions on the wharves, increased wages, and the alteration of the framework under which working conditions could be negotiated with employers. However, after 151 days the waterfront workers eventually surrendered. The Waterside Workers' Union was officially deregistered and in its place 26 local unions were registered, which effectively splintered the organisation of the waterside union movement.

Of interest here is the extent to which the democratic principle of the freedom of speech was at once to be curtailed and controlled in the name of democratic freedom itself – as opposed to the claimed authoritarian threat of Communism, with which the workers' struggle on the waterfront was frequently associated. At the beginning of the dispute, in late February 1951, Prime Minister Sidney Holland issued a statement in which he interpreted New Zealand as being “actually at war”. He claimed, “There is the enemy within, which is just as unscrupulous, poisonous, treacherous and unyielding as the enemy without”.⁶ He was implicitly associating the perceived Communist menace emanating from the USSR with certain labour unions within New Zealand. In order to end the protest of workers in the interest of national economy, the government declared a State of Emergency and imposed the Waterfront Strike Emergency Regulations under terms of the Public Safety Conservation Act that allowed for such action where the “essentials of life” of “the community” were perceived to be threatened.⁷ The Regulations restricted formal democratic liberties, including the formal right of free expression, congregation and trial by jury. Of particular interest here is Regulation 3, section d, which defined that “every person commits an offence against these regulations” that

⁵ The Waterfront Dispute is discussed in Michael Bassett, *Confrontation '51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute* (Wellington: Reed, 1972); Dick Scott, *151 Days: The Great Waterfront Lockout and Supporting Strikes, February 15-July 15, 1951* (Auckland: Reed, 2001); and Barnes, *Never a White Flag: The Memoirs of Jock Barnes, Waterfront Leader*.

⁶ Holland, quoted in Bassett, *Confrontation '51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute*, 87.

⁷ See Barnes, *Never a White Flag: The Memoirs of Jock Barnes, Waterfront Leader*, 163-64.

prints or publishes any statement, advertisement, or other matter that constitutes an offence against these regulations, or that is intended or likely to encourage, procure, incite, aid, or abet a declared strike or the continuance of a declared strike, or that is a report of any such statement made by any other person.⁸

In other words, any publications that either directly supported the conduct of a strike – declared and defined as such by State authorities – or aired opinions from the perspective of those who were striking, were made illegal as long as the State of Emergency remained in force. In the words of Michael Bassett, “The Emergency Regulations had made public opposition to the Government virtually impossible”, while “the radio had been used openly for propaganda purposes”,⁹ advancing the objectives of the government and capital interests to end the “strike” according to the government’s set conditions. These included the imperative to increase “substantially” the “efficiency in the industry”.¹⁰ Bassett concluded in reference to the control of public discourse during the Dispute, “Few acknowledged dictators have possessed more effective control of the mass media than Holland did during 1951.”¹¹

In the same year, the NFU produced a film entitled *The Territorial Recruit* (1951), which dealt with the army training of new recruits. Conscription had remained in force after the war and hence military service was compulsory. The film contained a discussion of, according to the commentary, the “democratic way of life” between recruits of a military training centre. To the question, “What do we think of when we speak of the democratic way of life?” one recruit replied, “A country where people are free to express opinions on anything.” No further elaboration or discussion takes place. The film was part of a series of films made “to increase the appreciation of the values of Western democracy, particularly as we enjoy them in New Zealand ... This is part of the campaign to strengthen people against Communistic ideas.”¹²

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 166. Large parts of the Emergency Regulations are reprinted therein. See 165-170.

⁹ Bassett, *Confrontation '51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute*, 192.

¹⁰ Quoted in Barnes, *Never a White Flag: The Memoirs of Jock Barnes, Waterfront Leader*, 182.

¹¹ Bassett, *Confrontation '51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute*, 168. Belich has criticised Bassett, arguing that “Anti-waterside bias in the press was awesomely unfair and consistent, but it was voluntary, not government-dictated”. See Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, 303. This claim may oversimplify the case, given that positive statements regarding workers on the wharves were prohibited through the Emergency Regulations.

¹² NFU programme 1952/53, TO3 W1656 7 1/6 1, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis in original.

One focus of reorganising the State administration under National was the Information Section and its Publicity Division within the Prime Minister's Department, to which the NFU was attached as the film production unit. Holland was quoted as saying that "In the 14 years of the Labour Government's existence hundreds of thousands of pounds were spent on maintaining an increasing horde of journalists, research workers and clerks, whose main duties appeared to be to churn out a spate of party political propaganda."¹³ The existence of the NFU and its legitimation, purposes and functions were to be reconsidered in the light of whether film could be more efficiently produced by private companies, particularly since the NFU did not contribute to the national economy in monetary terms and instead increased State expenditure. Holland arranged for a report that assessed the Information Section, including the Publicity Division and the NFU.

The report was prepared by John R. Marshall, assistant to the Prime Minister, and examined the staff and their political affiliations, the costs and accountability of the NFU, as well as its organisational structure. During his research Marshall noted that Stanhope Andrews was a "neo-communist", while Geoffrey Scott, the technical director, was regarded as being "really the man who knows his drill".¹⁴ In his report Marshall recommended the cessation of the *Weekly Review* and reducing the staff at the NFU to 17. The enquiry criticised the limited accountability of the NFU and its producer Andrews as well as the inefficiency of film production. It also evaluated the quality of films produced in technical and aesthetic terms. The camera work was considered good, while the sound, subediting and the processing work was judged to be of an inferior standard.¹⁵ After this critique, and in the face of the changes in the organisation, control and projected output of the NFU under a National government, Andrews resigned in February 1950. Scott had shortly before been appointed to a newly created senior position as manager at the NFU, while Cyril Morton became producer after Andrews left.

Scott recalled in an interview his meeting with Holland where they discussed the reorganisation or even closure of the NFU in favour of private production companies. Holland said to Scott, as the latter recalled in 1994,

¹³ Sidney Holland, *New Zealand Truth*, 1 February 1950.

¹⁴ John R. Marshall, hand-written note, 1403 – 19/2, Alexander Turnbull Library.

¹⁵ John R. Marshall, report, 1403 – 19/2, Alexander Turnbull Library.

You change the policy somehow, you probably have to get rid of the *Weekly Review* because we have been criticising it so much we got to have to get rid of it ... So you run it [the NFU] but you don't forget where the chips come from. So we were friends, great mates.¹⁶

As Scott's remarks about the *Weekly Review* indicate, its abolition was at least to some extent a party-political move, regarded as necessary after National had repeatedly blamed the Labour government for using the NFU and the *Weekly Review* in particular for party-political propaganda. While no documents throughout the term of government of National could be traced that indicate film was purposefully used to advance specific party-political objectives, the NFU continued to function as an instrument to at once increase the public image of government and improve the economy of the nation, and was now conceived of more in terms of public relations than propaganda or civic education. However, as was the case during the Labour government, documents continued to use varying terminology regarding the purposes of the NFU and State publicity in general, including the term propaganda.

In July 1950, it was decided by Cabinet to remove the Information Section and with it the Publicity Division and the NFU from the Prime Minister's Department and to attach it to the reorganised Tourist and Publicity Department. The Information Section now formally became a part of the Publicity Division of this department. Sid Odell became Director of Information Services and continued to be the central supervisor and mediator of film production at the NFU. The whole publicity apparatus was thus removed from the immediate control of the Prime Minister and his Department and further inserted into the bureaucratic structure of the public service hierarchy.

Holland, as quoted in an article in the *New Zealand Truth*, claimed, "The new arrangements will bring about considerable economy and increased efficiency, and at the same time it will confine publicity activities to legitimate Government functions." This move included the further centralisation of publicity within one department, while at the same time the operations of publicity and information work were detached "from the Parliamentary sphere".¹⁷ However, Holland kept a Reference Section and what was now termed a "Public

¹⁶ Geoffrey Scott, interview by Hugh Macdonald, 14 June 1994, F47746, New Zealand Film Archive.

¹⁷ Holland, quoted in "Reorganisation to Tidy Up an Untidy Situation," *New Zealand Truth*, 12 July 1950.

Relations Officer" in the Prime Minister's Department. This indicates that the NFU was removed from the legislative and deliberating functions of representative government. While Holland may have meant to indicate that the NFU was removed from the realm of party politics in parliament, it may be necessary to point out again that these services had never been institutionalised within the legislative of government nor was film employed to assist or stimulate political deliberation. Thus, while the NFU was removed from the Prime Minister's Department, supposedly detaching it from party political objectives, it remained a direct part of the executive branch of government until it was dismantled in 1990.¹⁸

In reference to the NFU, the *Weekly Review*, and the projected changes of film production, Holland claimed,

In the Film Unit there will be a change of policy. Although the general standard of work is very creditable, some of the material produced in the New Zealand 'Weekly Review' has relatively little value in relation to its expense. Also, this production hinders the unit from getting on with other necessary work such as departmental films and films for overseas publicity. Therefore, in the interests of economy and of a more balanced performance of the Film Unit's functions, it has been decided to discontinue the 'Weekly Review.' The film Unit will be established as a trading unit required to stand on its feet.¹⁹

In August 1950, the *Weekly Review* was discontinued after 459 episodes. Public reactions about the abolition of the *Weekly Review*, as far as can be gathered from newspaper articles and other publications, were mostly critical of National's decision, and can be seen as an expression of the vision that the NFU advanced about the nation.

One commentator stated in the *Evening Post*:

For years now I have enjoyed this interesting and educational film [the *Weekly Review*], and have clapped it with the rest of the audience, because we had come to feel that it was our very own and we were proud of it. It has meant so much to

¹⁸ The role of the Prime Minister's Department within New Zealand's system of government is defined as "to support the effective conduct of executive government by the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and members of the Cabinet." Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, "About DPMC," accessed 19 June 2011, <http://www.dPMC.govt.nz/dPMC/index.htm>. The role of the Public Service is defined as "part of the executive branch of government." Cabinet Office, "The public service, the state services, and the state sector," accessed 19 June 2011, <http://www.cabinetmanual.cabinetoffice.govt.nz/3.2>.

¹⁹ Holland, quoted in "Reorganisation to Tidy Up an Untidy Situation."

me, as I have seen very little of my own country, and through the Weekly Review I feel I have travelled all over the place and learned much about our own lovely country.²⁰

Another article by Frank L. Combs, vice-principal at the Wellington Teachers Training College, criticised National's "cash register policy" and claimed that the NFU did "a splendid job in making New Zealanders nation-conscious". According to Combs, "*the NFU laid the groundwork of imagery and impressions*", which assisted the "growth of the soul" of the population by providing it with a "sense of belonging". "For there is such a thing as the soul of a people ... a soul upon which every country, as it matures, comes to depend for its unity and vigour of spirit. The spirit pays the greatest and most lasting of dividends." Combs added that "a whole rising generation had had *its imagination quickened and its feeling fed*" and "the national imagination was being stored with pictures that uplifted the collective spirit and *awoke the affections*".²¹ Another critique came from a theatre manager who wrote, "We are a small country and people get a thrill out of seeing people they know by sight, or by reputation or personally in the newsreel. It is regarded as an asset in our programmes."²²

Another change resulting from the reorganisation of publicity was the removal of authority from the NFU over which films would be made, and what their content and purpose would be. Now its annual programme had to be mediated through a Sub-Committee of Cabinet on Publicity. This consisted of the Minister of Tourism and Publicity, Frederick W. Doidge, who was also Minister of External Affairs and Broadcasting, the Minister of Finance, Jack T. Watts, as well as the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister, Marshall. Based on the recommendations of the Sub-Committee, Cabinet decided on the budget, while the Sub-Committee had to approve all films to be made by the NFU.²³ This process also required providing a detailed outline of the film which had to be approved by the Cabinet Sub-Committee and then Scott had to arrange the initial research for the film. Subsequently an estimated budget as well as a treatment outlining the aims and purposes of the film and a synopsis had to be submitted to a departmental publicity committee, consisting of the General Manager of the Tourist and Publicity Department and the Director of Information

²⁰ Disappointed Nationalist, "Weekly Film Review," *Evening Post*, 21 July 1950.

²¹ Frank L. Combs, "Farewell, Weekly Review!," *Southern Cross*, 29 July 1950. Emphasis added.

²² A theatre manager, quoted in "Wide Condemnation of Decision to Scrap Film Unit's Weekly Review," *The Standard*, 3 August 1950.

²³ Foss Shanahan, "Re-Organisation of Information Services," TO1 W1845 70 48/31 1, Archives New Zealand.

Services, Odell. Its brief was to “control and authorise all stages of production”.²⁴ If the budget and treatment was approved an order to proceed was issued. A detailed shooting script would then have to be prepared and submitted for approval. Throughout production, the commentary also had to be approved by the Committee before it was recorded and the final version, once again, was to be approved before it was released.²⁵

The production staff at the NFU was therefore further moved towards the role of creative agents who made films according to a variety of institutionalised bureaucratic procedures, regulations and policies, as well as certain routines of supervision and control. The comparatively informal and personal negotiation of the work and control of the NFU in place during war was now replaced by a variety of management and control procedures that mediated the production of films. Thereby, while control and supervision of the work of the NFU was on one hand institutionally further centralised and harmonised, at the same time, a more anonymous, dissected and finely graded system of mediation was put in place. No single agent could regulate film production. Thus technically control was decentralised and dispersed amongst a variety of designated authorities and experts who were to follow certain routines and regulations.

Another measure put into place was to specialise and divide film production into five sub-production units, each producing specific types of film. Additionally, a production sequence for film production at the NFU was drawn up, subdivided into four production areas, namely “Production”, “Sound Dept.”, “Technical Services” and “Laboratory”.²⁶ The production sequence dissected film production into 51 discrete processes and each production area was assigned with specific tasks. Film production at the NFU was thereby subjected to Taylorist and Fordist organisation principles and scientific management routines. As a result, film production at the NFU was arranged into a finely graded and streamlined process, similar to the work performed at an assembly line in which various agents are assigned with specific tasks that contribute to a whole – the product – without being able to oversee the production apparatus and without the authority to alter the technical processes, framework and control imposed over production. Nor was the resulting product to be subject to reflection and critique by those who made the film. While initially, during war, the whole

²⁴ “Control of Film Production,” TO 3 W1656 7 1/6 2, Archives New Zealand.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Production Sequence,” TO3 W1656 7 1/6 1, Archives New Zealand.

production staff at the NFU had held regular meetings during which specific films were screened and discussed, this procedure had ceased by 1950. Now only certain designated authorities were to be involved in assessing whether the final film was deemed satisfactory. Each production process would thus be performed in the most efficient and effective way, resulting in an “optimal” film.

The production process began with “Negotiations & Research”, followed by “Scripting and Planning”. That is, the material to be “documented” through the camera was routinely planned, scripted and ordered into a shot sequence in advance, based on research that allowed calculating and anticipating how a specific subject or theme could be realised as a film. Thereby, the physical surfaces that the camera recorded could be more efficiently managed, selected, adjusted and arranged, thus achieving the projected purposes and effects of a film. “Picture photography on location” was point 5 in the production sequence, just after “Set construction if required”. Point 6 was the sound recording on location, followed by the processing and editing of visual and sound material. Point 20 was the “preparation of commentary”, followed by the composition or compilation of music score and recording of sound effects. More steps of processing and editing followed until a release print was made. Point 46 was the “projection and approval” of the film, followed by more laboratory work until enough copies of the work print had been made for distribution.

Brian Winston has asked “whether there is any ‘actuality’ left after the ‘creative treatment’” of films.²⁷ One also should ask what is actually given to vision through film after the recording of aspects of the historical world had become subjected to a variety of strategies, regulations, management procedures and calculations that made actuality to varying degrees a function of the purposes of the films. Where John Grierson had demanded a “creative treatment” and to “master” the “material on the spot”, the production sequence above outlined a series of processes that ensured the controllability and arrangement of visions of the real long before the camera even moved on location – or was placed in a studio setting.

Margot Fry has noted in reference to the changes in the organisation of the NFU that

²⁷ Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, 11.

The political changes of 1949-1950 meant that the NFU was no longer regarded as a semi and potentially independent unit, working out the parameters of its existence, but a direct part of government. The Unit had changed from being creatively independent, although politically directed in the 1940s to being both creatively and politically directed from 1949-1950. It is ironic that Marshall's act of removing the NFU from the 'political' arena of the Prime Minister's Department, in fact ended any notion of independence.²⁸

Additionally, the work of the NFU was further subjected to economic calculations that not only supposedly increased the efficiency of films but also by which NFU film itself was produced and distributed. A new directive stated that the NFU had to operate as a trade unit that was "required to stand on its own feet competitively with private enterprise".²⁹ It implied that now publicity had to be profitable in a twofold sense. First, NFU films had to project specific visions that advanced economic conduct domestically as well as overseas. As the NFU Programme for 1952/53 expressed it in reference to overseas promotion:

It is considered that a useful line of publicity overseas would be to portray New Zealand as a sound and prosperous country, making good progress in its national development. *A film could give the impression of economic stability* in New Zealand and quicken overseas interest in investment policies.³⁰

Second, as argued above, film production and distribution itself was further subjected to economic imperatives, which demanded that films could be exploited in terms of directly measurable capital gain. Michael Forlong stated that this new focus on efficiencies and capital gain led him to leave the NFU. In the early 1950s, Forlong had begun to prepare a film biography of Lord Rutherford when he was questioned by a member of the Prime Minister's Department about the film. According to Forlong, he was told, "If it's not going to make any money it's not worth making, you must stop production at once."³¹ Shortly thereafter Forlong left the NFU to embark on a career as a filmmaker overseas.

Another aspect of government information services that was expanded during the 1950s was the gathering of information and feedback about the reception of films. Particularly for

²⁸ Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976," 76.

²⁹ Cabinet Minute, 3 July 1950, SSC W2984 84 24/2/46/25 2, Archives New Zealand.

³⁰ National Film Unit Programme 1952/53, TO3 W1656 7 1/6 2, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

³¹ Michael Forlong, "Departure Lounge: An Autobiography," (Javea, Alicante), 51-52.

more ambitious film projects, previews to selected audiences were arranged and information was sought through opinion polling about how the films were received, what could be improved and what worked well. This information was then reported and circulated within the Publicity Division. Feedback was gathered in order to gain knowledge about how to make efficient films that audiences enjoyed but retained their formative and directive impact.

In an article published in 1952, Andrews expressed his disappointment about the changes that had occurred in the organisation and control of the NFU after World War II. In his view, the NFU had been deprived of its creative spirit and vision, and its creative autonomy:

In the beginning the Film Unit did not fit unhappily into the public service mold. Secure in the support of Messrs Fraser, Nash and Paul, we bashed out enough space amidst the red tape to give us elbow room for work. By the time the war ended, from being the most inadequately equipped studio anywhere at any time, the Film Unit had become one of the best equipped of its kind in the world ... But with the equipment came peace and the public service. The days of the hand at the helm were numbered. In future we were to be steered not even by a committee, but by a hierarchy.

According to Andrews, through the imposition of "check and control procedures ... The Unit was isolated as well as co-ordinated." Thereby,

Quietly and skilfully the Film Unit was deprived of its identity and became another Department, or a branch of one ... But the public service system quietly went its way till all those not content or not able to march nose to tail had gone ... By and large those who stayed were the technical men and the steady competents who contributed most, not to the flavour, but to the age of Weekly Review. This is the group, now securely grafted onto the parent stock of the public service, is ready to put out new buds. My guess is that it will produce an impeccable crop of shorts, mildly flavoured by the local scene, and certain to be warmly welcomed by the consumers.³²

³² Andrews, "The National Film Unit," 8.

Andrew's last sentence indicates that he felt that the NFU had been commercialised. Audiences had now become "consumers" and films were now to be "impeccable", that is, easily consumable and assimilable. Thus, with the increasing rationalisation, economisation and harmonisation of State publicity a shift had occurred from what *could* be envisioned as real to what *should* be envisioned; the possibilities of filmmaking were thus further strategically adjusted to engage with certain subjects in particular ways.

Where Andrews had conceived of film functioning as an educational and propagandistic tool to advance national cohesion and a progressive outlook, film production now became rationalised as a public relations technique that was increasingly removed from the "ideological" undertones that were attached to film production during the 1940s under the Labour government. At the NFU, the optimisation and arrangement of filmic visions in reference to specific purposes had become a self-evident routine; particularly since Andrews was the only person at the NFU who more substantially reflected on the "educational" potential of film during the 1940s and 50s. In this sense, until the 1950s film production was a normal and self-evident aspect of government activity whose value and political implications were hardly questioned. The programmatic and normative reasoning that Andrews had attached to effective film production and the initial "educational spirit" at the NFU was superseded by a more "pragmatic" and "technological" approach.

The change from a trained educator, Andrews, in the leading position as producer at the NFU, to Scott, a trained film technician who held the position of manager, indicates the change in the organisation of film production. It was no longer mainly legitimised through its potential for progressive civic education, but through its potential to function as a technology that could advance a set of desirable public relations. Scott, even more than Andrews, favoured a non-controversial, reassuring and "positive" filmic image of New Zealand. In an interview he claimed that earlier NFU films were "a bit ponderous" in their approach; he wanted films "to be brighter and more entertaining". Additionally, referring to films shot in New Zealand by overseas filmmakers, he stated, "Some of the material they shot ... was a bit critical of New Zealand ... which I didn't like much but I couldn't do anything about it."³³

³³ Geoffrey Scott, Interview by Hugh Macdonald.

After the NFU had been reorganised in 1950, no new staff were employed at the NFU in order to cut costs. In 1952 however it was decided that film production needed to be extended once again and the staff was further increased to 80. The staff at the Publicity Division was also considerably expanded, indicating that National had realised the value of (filmic) publicity.³⁴

In 1957, Labour was for the second time voted into government and remained there until 1960. Fry has claimed that during this time control procedures were “considerably relaxed”.³⁵ However, filmmaking was by then firmly inserted into graded and streamlined management processes and the institutional organisation of the NFU remained in place, as did the general publicity policy that governed film production at the NFU. That policy demanded the production of a “favourable” image of New Zealand and its population until the NFU was dismantled in 1990.³⁶

The Economy of Vision II – Promoting the Nation

In the early 1950s, NFU film production was divided into four general categories. These were “general publicity films”, also referred to as “general prestige films” produced for domestic as well as international distribution. These, in Grierson’s terminology, functioned as “background” films. Further categories were “tourist publicity films”, “departmental and instructional films” and “miscellaneous work”.³⁷ The first category included the *NZ Now* series, involving films like *Fighting Fins* (1951), *The Legend of the Wanganui River* (1952) and *The Valley Settlers* (1952). The *NZ Now* series also included the *New Zealand Mirror*, a film magazine geared towards and popular in the British market. It was instituted in 1950 and frequently recycled film material from the *Weekly Review* and the *Pictorial Parade*. The latter was established in 1952, two years after the *Weekly Review* had been stopped. It was a series of magazine items sold and distributed in the domestic market and released monthly. The *Pictorial Parade* was initiated under a directive requiring the NFU to devote

³⁴ See various documents in AAVK 22950 W3180 56 PUB 58 Part 1, Archives New Zealand.

³⁵ Fry, "A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit 1941 to 1976," 51.

³⁶ In 1978 the policy that governed the NFU required it to be the government’s film production agency and “to produce films of an educational, informational, cultural or general publicity character *conveying a favourable image of New Zealand*”. AAPG W3607 53, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

³⁷ National Film Unit Programme 1952/53, TO3 W1656 7 1/6 2, Archives New Zealand.

50–60% of its running time to government projects and State enterprises in an effort to enhance public relations and the “image” of the State and its government.³⁸

“Tourist publicity films” had proven to be particularly popular overseas and when the NFU was reorganised as a “trade unit”, the production of films for tourism promotion was further increased and could be capitalised on in a double sense. The films themselves could earn revenue by being sold overseas, while they also indirectly assisted the national economy by enticing capital to enter the country through tourists. After the war, it was deemed desirable and necessary to produce films that would not only look “pretty”, but would also advance desires to experience New Zealand’s attractions directly. Andrews had written in 1945 that “occasional ‘pretty’ pictures” were not enough, since “*the object is to secure lasting impression in the minds of audiences*” and “mere prettiness” had to “compete with millions of feet of similar prettiness from all over the world. Despite wishful thinking, New Zealand scenery is very similar to scenery in many other parts of the globe.”³⁹ In order to advance a “lasting impression”, specific strategies and techniques came to be employed that rendered New Zealand visible in terms of what was anticipated to be perceived to be scenically beautiful, attractive, of interest, and exotic. In the words of Lynton Diggle, former camera operator and director at the NFU from 1959, filmmakers producing films for tourism promotion were looking through “rose-tinted glasses”. “You knew what you had to shoot and how it had to look like without even thinking of it.”⁴⁰ In this sense, it seems that it had become a routine for filmmakers to produce films aimed at gratifying the “tourist gaze”.

Films made for tourism promotion tended to designate and demarcate a field of vision in which New Zealand became knowable through its exotic, untamed and rugged landscapes. In addition, specific features of “ancient” Māoritanga, shot almost entirely in the area of Rotorua, were an important feature of such films. At the same time, however, New Zealand was projected as providing modern conveniences exemplified by cities, technologies and tourist amenities that visitors, who primarily came from the USA, Australia and Europe, had grown used to. In this sense, New Zealand was rendered perceptible as being to a certain extent free from the impact of “Western civilisation” as embodied by the landscape and

³⁸ See various documents in SSC 1 W2303 191 20/2/46/1 Part 1, Archives New Zealand.

³⁹ Stanhope Andrews, “Report on Reorganisation and Expansion of Activities of the New Zealand National Film Unit,” 28 February 1945, 93-320-1/03, Alexander Turnbull Library. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Lynton Diggle, interview by the author, 29 October 2010.

“nature”, and in the display of “exotic” pre-colonial Māoritanga. These then were the three points of reference for films made for tourism promotion: landscapes and “natural” locations of interest that also provided for certain outdoor pursuits such as tramping, fishing, skiing and sightseeing, Māoritanga in its commodified and supposedly “ancient” version, and modern amenities for tourists.

Until the 1930s, camera operators worked on a “hand-to-mouth basis” and travelled to various typical tourist destinations to record images that were later selected and assembled into panoramas of New Zealand scenery. Such films allowed overseas audiences to view distant and “exotic” locations, selected and recorded to look as beautiful as possible given the technological and logistical possibilities of the day. As film technology advanced, films began to go beyond providing just attractive views, incorporating some innovations. Nevertheless, many of them bore strong similarities to the pre-war scenics, as many tourist films continued to be primarily focused on “timeless” scenery.

One new technique employed in tourist productions after the war was to use tourist “characters”. Some films were framed around tourists travelling the country, in opposition to early scenics that were largely devoid of people. Now audiences not only got to see a variety of landscapes and performances of “exotic” Māoritanga, but also “white” people positively experiencing these landscapes and activities. Thereby a level of “human interest” was added and this technique increased possible identification and affect, while also providing for a sense of continuity as the same characters travelled from one tourist destination to the next.

Furthermore, it became common to show tourists enjoying leisure activities such as tramping, boating, fishing, skiing and visiting a variety of tourist destinations. The use of non-synchronous sound was another technique introduced to tourist films, which allowed for the guidance and evocation of affect. Pleasant orchestral music and a “light” and upbeat commentary were used that assisted the orientation and direction of audience’s attention and provided potentially interesting anecdotal knowledge about the various attractions shown, frequently including aspects of Māori mythology. In addition, after the war, films for overseas promotion began to be increasingly shot in colour instead of black and white, thus increasing aesthetic pleasures. Films produced for tourism promotion included films like

Thermal Wonderland, Rotorua New Zealand (1950), *Rotorua Radius* (1951) and *Snows of Aorangi* (1955), and numerous others.

Two “general prestige films” of particular significance released during the 1940s and 50s were *Meet New Zealand* (1949) and *The New Zealanders* (1959). These set out to provide a synoptic “overview” and survey of New Zealand as a whole. Thus these films moved to a level of generalisation and abstraction in which disparate events, locations and people were subsumed within a homogenising and schematic narrative about the nation and its population, for which their images served as illustrations and evidence of general “truths”.

Meet New Zealand (1949) was directed by Forlong and made primarily for British audiences. It incorporated stock footage as well as material shot especially for the film and in several scenes the director, his wife and daughter are identifiable. *Meet New Zealand* was a successor to productions like *Romantic New Zealand* (1934) and *One Hundred Crowded Years* (1940). However, where *Romantic New Zealand* was largely a scenic and thus focused on “timeless” tourist attractions, and *One Hundred Crowded Years* was largely concerned with a reconstruction of major historical events as they related to the “civilisation” of Aotearoa/New Zealand, *Meet New Zealand* focuses entirely on surveying “the contemporary”. It makes extensive use of a pansophical off-screen commentary to signify the general contemporary reality of New Zealand, and is divided into four sections: “The Shape of the Land”, “Transport and Industries”, “Sports” and “The People”.

The first three sections focus on introducing themes valuable for the advancement of capital gain through trade, investment and tourism. The film thus provides a generalised outlook on what is signified as being typical and generally true for all New Zealand in terms of agricultural and industrial production, scientific and technological advancements, travel and leisure time activities. “The People” section is the last in the film and begins by showing images of Whakarewarewa, which are employed to signify the “ancient” aspect of Māoritanga. A sequence of Māori performances follows and subsequently the film makes a transition to “the modern Māori” through the commentary which claims: “Today though ancient crafts are being revived *the Maori* has turned decisively to the European way of life”, which is symbolised by a Māori driving a tractor. “In working hours *he* is a farmer, a labourer or a skilled tradesman. *He* wants an interesting job and independence”, audiences are told.

But Māori, the commentary continues, only pick up from European life what is found to “be practical and agreeable”, while most Māori prefer to stay “Maoris at heart”.

State schools are then introduced and it is pointed out that Māori get the same education as Pākehā children and both have “equal opportunities”. The film departs from its Māori theme and continues to generalise about State education, dental services, health camps, social security schemes and State housing, providing a typified overview of the life of individuals that are signified as New Zealanders; these individuals are all Pākehā. The four main cities are introduced in quick succession and the film ends with a performance of the National Symphonic Orchestra.

The second “general prestige film” was *The New Zealanders*, shot entirely in colour. Caltex Oil had requested the assistance of the NFU in the making of a film as part of the Caltex International Public Relations series of films. This series had the objective “to foster international understanding and goodwill through developing an appreciation abroad of the unique culture and history of each country where Caltex operates”.⁴¹ In other words, the film was to be made in a way that would advance a general “appreciation” of the countries in which Caltex had a commercial interest, while the corporation was to be subtly inserted into the filmic narrative, highlighting its positive role for “the public good”. Caltex Oil was formed in 1936 from the Standard Oil Company and the Texas Company, and was one of the largest oil and petroleum corporations of the time. Like Shell, Caltex began to get involved in public relations techniques to advance a favourable corporate image. Where Shell had established its own film unit in 1934, based on the recommendations of Grierson and headed by Edgar Anstey, Caltex tended to contract film work to existing production companies.

In 1951, Caltex Oil New Zealand approached the NFU asking for a film to be made, while requesting the authority to control and approve of the various production processes involved, beginning with a general outline of the film. H. P. Griffin demanded:

Such a film, besides being an interesting, highly informative travelogue, can *subtly* show Caltex transporting and distributing equipment and installations ...
Especially, show any progress in which petroleum plays an important part, such

⁴¹ H. E. McDougall to Sid Odell, letter, 08.09.1965, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand.

as the Dieselization of transportation and conversion of industry to fuel oil. On the farm the change from antiquated horse-drawn equipment to modern tractor-drawn equipment might be shown ... *The 'commercialism' in the film should be handled subtly so as to be impressive but not painfully obvious*, as we plan to obtain wide distribution, including theatrical. Anticipating a wide distribution outside New Zealand, *human interest* featuring the people of New Zealand *should be stressed*.⁴²

Furthermore, Caltex reserved “the right to re-edit the film and make any other changes in titles, film or sound track which are deemed necessary”, while the film would “be an excellent public service to New Zealand as an *authentic documentary film*”.⁴³ The film also had to include “identification shots” of Caltex Oil that thereby would seem to be an ordinary part of New Zealand life.⁴⁴

The New Zealanders can be seen as a culmination of a development that had begun three decades earlier when film began to move beyond the provision of a series of views towards “optimal” filmic narratives. While the title indicates that the film is about people, framed within the concept of the nation-state, various treatments prepared in the planning of the film are indicative of the appropriative and strategic approach that documentary film production by the NFU had taken. In an early treatment, the “intention” of the film was defined as “being primarily concerned with presenting an informative and factual survey of New Zealand”, while “the New Zealanders themselves are used for continuity purposes”.⁴⁵ A revised treatment from 1955 rephrased this intention: “The film is to be divided by subtitles into ten sections. Within this framework will be a statistical survey of New Zealand, *using the people themselves as illustrative material*.”⁴⁶ That is, the film’s ostensible subject, a plurality of people living in New Zealand – the title is plural – was assigned with the status of serving as “illustrative material” for statistical knowledge by which a synoptic “overview” of New Zealand as a whole could be provided.

⁴² H. P. Griffin to Geoffrey Scott, letter, 05.06.1951, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Scott to Oxley Hughan, memo, 13.03.1958, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand.

⁴⁵ Treatment for *The New Zealanders*, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand.

⁴⁶ Revised Treatment for *The New Zealanders*, 01.06.1955, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

After production had begun, it was decided that several versions of the film, suited to various purposes and target audiences, would be made. One version was edited for Caltex Oil and another version was made for State publicity purposes. These versions differ in that scenes and commentary were adjusted to make more favourable and explicit references to State enterprise and fewer references to petroleum in the NFU version, whereas the Caltex version reverses this emphasis. Both versions, however, contain several identification shots of Caltex Oil, such as showing the Caltex logo on a petrol station or in the background of shots of a harbour. In addition, the Caltex version includes explicit references to the use of petroleum products in transport and agriculture, and makes absolute claims, such as aerial top dressing “using petroleum by-products” is “the 20th century version of farming”. Thus Caltex is subtly related to what is signified as the typical life of the country. In this sense, the films differ in detail but not in their general approach and aesthetic.

Both versions of the film consist of a comparatively fast-paced synoptic succession of images, subordinated to an omniscient off-screen commentary that continuously expresses certain generalised and schematic factual and statistical knowledge about the nation and its population. Like *Meet New Zealand*, both versions of *The New Zealanders* are clearly laid out to implicitly, and sometimes more explicitly, promote industry, science, technology, tourism and trade. Images of people are frequently used to illustrate and provide evidence of general “truths”, such as that all New Zealanders are keen on sport, that rugby is “our national game”, that “New Zealand is never monotonous”, that working conditions in the country are “good”, that life is “pretty free and easy”, that there is “no real poverty”, that today “the Maoris” are becoming “more and more absorbed” into a modern way of life, that “the Maori New Zealander lives and works much as his Pakeha brother does”, and so on. In one sequence showing a troop parade dealing with the “necessity” and value of the military, the commentary claims: “It’s likely that the national character is being shaped by having to march along together to make a nation down here in a short time.” Hence, the commentary continually appropriates the specificity and concreteness of images, referencing them to New Zealand as a whole or what is designated as to be typical, generally true, normal and necessary.

Individuals shown in the images have no own voices or opinions, but remain silent, and are subsumed within what is generally signified as a well-integrated and overall uniform

national identity. This national uniformity, however, is not visible in the images, but crucially relies on techniques that transcend and functionalise their concreteness and specificity. In *The New Zealanders*, as in most other expository NFU documentaries, this transcendence is mainly achieved through the commentary, while images serve to illustrate and prove its generalising claims. In other words, images were gathered and employed in the film to provide a series of specific and concrete surface impressions, while these are frequently appropriated to support claims made by the commentary and serve to signify “truths” beyond those the images can sustain. Thus the vision of the real New Zealand created through the film is not a result of viewing various locally filmed (and to a certain extent modelled and optimised) actualities, but of their arrangement within a larger whole – the filmic narrative of New Zealand. That is, the perspective established and the knowledge provided from this perspective is not immanent in the images, nor is it primarily established through them. This perspective crucially relies upon the transcendental commentary that subsumes the images to a schematic and generalising logic that narrates the nation and its assumed identity into being, largely based upon statistical knowledge that is far removed from and homogenises locally lived experiences.

Thus a vision of the real is established in which images have already been evaluated, patterned and ordered according to a reductive governmental logic. The film is occupied with advancing an optimal, affirmative and productive vision while remaining within the limits of what can count as true as a matter of (assumed) fact. Such a vision, in order to be able to function efficiently, relies upon the homogenisation of heterogeneous events, people and locations under the banner of national identity, and is established through modes of realisation creating coherence, singularity and universal, de-limited and encompassing knowledge.

After the film had been released for distribution, both the NFU and Caltex Oil regarded the project as a thorough success. In 1964, Scott wrote to Caltex New Zealand:

This certainly turned out to be a most happy and successful project and I do hope that Caltex Oil (N.Z.) Ltd. have derived prestige and advantage from the wide screenings which have been achieved. Certainly *from the national viewpoint* you

have been instrumental in achieving magnificent and outstanding publicity for this country.⁴⁷

The co-operation between Caltex Oil and the NFU represents a symbiosis between the State administration and a corporation like Caltex Oil to project a modern, and constantly modernising, productive, technologically advanced, unified and stable nation. Such an image that was freed from contradiction, controversy and ambiguity served to advance both the national economy and the interests of Caltex Oil. However, as discussed below, the ideals and perception of being modern and well integrated as well as the “must”, as expressed in *The New Zealanders*, for the political economy to “always be on the alert for increasing its production” came to be of particular significance in the projection of Māori and Māoritanga by the NFU.

Envisioning Māoritanga – Visions of Māori between “Adaption and Adjustment” and Tourism Commodification

This section considers how Māori and Māoritanga were rendered perceptible through NFU film after the end of World War II. While before the war the projection of Māori in film was mainly motivated by endeavours to promote tourism and hence focused on “exotic” aspects of “ancient” Māoritanga, *One Hundred Crowded Years* (1940) was one of the first that also located Māori within contemporary, modern New Zealand, by generalising Māori as one of New Zealand’s problems. However, after the war films became more “cautious” and sympathetic and did not as explicitly and generally “other” Māori as *One Hundred Crowded Years* had done. This shift needs to be seen in the light of the changing governmental strategies that sought to solve the “Māori problem” as well as in reference to the role of the State publicity apparatus that emerged after the war.

Since the filmic projection of Māori and Māoritanga was closely related to policies and strategies of population management and social engineering, it is necessary to discuss briefly the changing status of Māoritanga and the place and functions that the State administration projected for Māori in modern New Zealand. Richard Hill has argued that at least until the 1970s the focus of State policy regarding Māori remained one of

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Scott to H. E. McDougall, letter, 07.01.1964, AAPG W3435 34 3/8/47, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

“assimilation”, despite the semantic change to “integration” in the 1940s.⁴⁸ However, such a general perspective does not take into account the strategies and techniques that were brought into play during this time, relating to the increasing attempts to salvage, preserve and revive specific aspects of Māoritanga alongside efforts to encourage Māori to “adapt and adjust” to the modern political economy. Specific aspects of Māoritanga were thereby defined as legitimate and even desirable for the projection of a national identity.

What slowly began to change from roughly the 1910s, and with increasing force after Labour formed the government in 1935, was that Māori and their culture ceased to be regarded as *inherently* and *naturally* inferior to the general concept of “Western civilisation” and theories of “race”, “evolution” and “progress” imported from Britain.⁴⁹ Population statistics dissected “British Subjects” in terms of “races”, and thus rendered these quantitatively comparable, while indicating that the Māori population was growing at a faster rate than the non-Māori population and Māori were not assimilating to the extent it was widely regarded desirable and necessary. Statistics were a decisive governmental technique by which the population could be rendered visible, measurable, calculable and governable.⁵⁰ They indicated that Māori had a higher rate of health problems, a higher rate of delinquency and crime, higher unemployment rates, had less education and skills, and belonged to the lower socio-economic class of society. Hence, as a policy paper in the late 1930s expressed it, “the quickening of the Maori spirit, significant of vitality and growth”,⁵¹ demanded new strategies and policies. Additionally, anthropological theories of cultural relativism slowly gained force in educational policy, suggesting that racial and evolutionary theories claiming an *inherent* and *natural* inferiority of Māori and Māoritanga were inappropriate or simply false.⁵²

⁴⁸ Richard S. Hill, *State Authority, Indigenous Autonomy: Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa 1900-1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004); ———, *Māori and the State: Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa, 1950-2000* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ See Hill, *State Authority, Indigenous Autonomy: Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa 1900-1950*, 18-20.

⁵⁰ See also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York; Dunedin: Zed Books and University of Otago Press, 1998), 42-57.

⁵¹ “Policy of Native Education in New Zealand,” late 1930s, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, AAZY W3901 226 44/1/1.

⁵² See John M. Barrington, *Separate but Equal? Māori Schools and the Crown, 1867-1969* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2008), 174.

Thus there was a shift away from doctrines that saw Māori as biologically inferior to Pākehā – a biological racism that had promoted, for instance, intermarriage to facilitate biological assimilation of a presumed “dying race”. Furthermore, it implied that Māoritanga increasingly ceased to be regarded as culturally inferior *per se* and as a whole – which implied full cultural assimilation as expressed in the belief that Māoritanga as a whole would perish since it was regarded as evolutionarily obsolete. Instead, it increasingly became common practice to envision Māori and their culture as profoundly changeable and adaptable. Colonisation had resulted in the concept of “Māori” which subsumed the heterogeneity of indigenous people living in the South and North Islands under one term. Subsequently, and increasingly from the 1930s onwards, Māoritanga became subject to dividing practices that evaluated certain traits as positive or negative. “Positive” aspects had to some extent be preserved and revived through the assistance of State agencies and almost exclusively related to the field that had been classified as “arts and crafts” (culture in a dissected and narrow sense), and to some extent to Te Reo Māori. This “revival”, it was assumed, would provide Māori with a sense of dignity and pride and also cultivate a motivation and discipline to advance their own adjustment. The identified negative aspects were to be diminished as this advanced the “adaption and adjustment” of Māori into modern New Zealand.

Walter Nash succinctly expressed this changing view in relation to the functions and aims of the State in an address he gave in Canada in 1942:

The idea of a superior people is false. It must go. One simple illustration to back up my point. We have a group of people called Maoris in New Zealand. They are as good a type of people the world ever produced ... The Maoris were cannibals one hundred years ago, but they are as good as any of us, and better than some of us to-day. There are *no inherently superior* people in the world. There are some superior people, but *not inherently superior*. There are none we cannot lift up to our standard, and *if we want to experience life in the full sense of the term, we have got to lift them up to our standard and then we can go forward into our*

better world together ... We have to build a better world. We are using the souls and bodies of our young people to make a new world possible.⁵³

Hence, State policy regarding Māori from the early 1930s began to change from general “assimilation” to selective “adaption and adjustment”, also referred to as “integration”.⁵⁴ It was still assumed that Māori had to be made fit for “modern standards of living” in a New Zealand that was assumedly “necessarily” established around a set of values and practices imported from Britain, particularly in terms of a capitalist economy based upon imperatives of growth, economic efficiency, the division of labour and capital accumulation. However, Douglas George Ball, Senior Inspector of Native Schools, amongst others, saw an increasing need for further “recognition of certain aspects of Maori culture”. Nevertheless, as Ball pointed out,

this is not done merely for the sake of the Maori culture itself, though this would in itself be considered sufficient justification, but rather as a gesture to *the Maori* that certain aspects of *his* culture are worthwhile, and that our system of education is sympathetic to *his* ancient culture.⁵⁵

In other words, the recognition of “certain aspects of his culture” had a strategic function by which the State administration attempted to gain further acceptance and recognition from Māori, who in exchange gained “dignity”. This shift in policy implied a change in focus from, one might say, “letting die” to “making live”,⁵⁶ after it was realised that Māori were not a “dying race”. It also related to the changing understanding of the role of the State towards a more comprehensive and continuing education of its population in terms of the appropriate conduct of life. In other words, now Māori were to be guided and supervised through the application of scientific taxonomies and techniques as well as a set of universal humanitarian and economic standards and norms. Specific characteristics and behaviours

⁵³ Walter Nash, *War in the Southern Pacific: New Zealand's Total Effort, 1942*, MS 0982/380, Hocken Library. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, the report on *Policy of Native Education in New Zealand*.

⁵⁵ Douglas George Ball, “Reasons for the Administration and Control of Native Education by the Education Department,” late 1930s, AAZY W3901 226 44/1/1, Archives New Zealand. See also Douglas George Ball, “Maori Education,” in *The Maori People Today: A General Survey*, ed. Ivan L. G. Sutherland (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 269-306..

⁵⁶ This phrase is indebted to Foucault’s discussion of racism and biopolitics in Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (London: Penguin, 2003), 241-279.

were designated as valuable, and these were to some extent promoted through State agencies.

Other perceived characteristics and behaviours, such as a lack of internal discipline and work ethic, unemployment, lack of skills and education, poor health and safety, had to be eliminated as they were seen to be undesirable in terms of projected socio-economic progress and appropriate citizenship. Māori had to prove themselves to be suitably equipped for the “necessities” of modernity and responsible self-government, and hence to be able to take up positions of authority within New Zealand society.⁵⁷ Through proper education, and by providing Māori with a sense of dignity and pride, it was deemed possible to foster and direct the development of active citizens in order for “the Maori race” to realise its inherent potential to “progress”. To this end, it was crucial that Māori internalised a certain mode of responsibility, discipline and self-regulation, while being allowed, and even encouraged, to remain distinct in certain limited areas. Hence, after the war, the State policy of integration, while defining *some* space for Māori to remain distinct in *some* matters, at the same time functioned as a general strategy to improve the conduct of Māori and increase their efficient and normal functioning within the political economy.

This policy also came to govern State publicity regarding Māori. One area of State publicity in which this policy was undermined was the magazine *Te Ao Hou* – The New World. It was first published in late 1952 by the Maori Affairs Department and specifically addressed Māori, written mainly in English and partially in Te Reo Māori. The editorial of the first issue claimed:

Te Ao Hou is intended as a magazine for the Maori people ... Te Ao Hou should become like a ‘marae’ on paper, where all questions of interest to the Maori can be discussed ... Any subject that affects the general good can be discussed here ...

In the last few years Tribal Organizations and others have stimulated many Maori activities, sports, haka competitions, marae improvements, arts and crafts. In this way *a true Maori world* is slowly shaping itself to stand beside the Pakeha world.

The Maori, in general, earns his living in the same way as the Pakeha. Life on the marae, sports, haka, arts and crafts therefore have to wait until times of leisure

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Ernest Beaglehole and Pearl Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1946), 329-47.

and relaxation. Yet, if these recreational and artistic interests are developed they will make life in a predominantly Pakeha world more satisfying. They can, in fact, be the basis of a Maori culture in which *his* identity will be preserved. Te Ao Hou will give considerable attention to such activities, and also to social progress among the Maori people generally. *It will try to give a faithful record of Maori life in all its aspects* and clarify questions of Maori administration.⁵⁸

That the magazine was from its inception planned to function as an “educational” device went unmentioned. *Te Ao Hou* was made in close co-operation with the Publicity Division, which supplied news and articles as well as sometimes rewrote articles to “harmonise” them with reference to government policy. After an initial period, its content became directly supervised by Odell, the Director of Information Services, since editorial control within the Maori Affairs Department was regarded to have been unsatisfactory. Throughout 1953 and 1954, articles had been published which were perceived to undermine the government’s policy of “integration” and good economic citizenship. In reference to this problem, in December 1954, Odell wrote a memo to the Maori Affairs Department in which outlined the government policy that applied to the magazine:

At the outset the magazine was intended to assist the promotion of the objectives of the Government in regard to its policy concerning Maori Affairs which, basically, is the advancement of the Maori people. It was not to be used for political propaganda. *I am given to understand that the magazine is now being regarded as the “marae of the Maori people” where diverse subjects and thoughts are brought for discussion. This was never intended.*

Odell went on to summarise the encompassing government objectives towards Māori:

The Government’s objectives, which apply particularly to Te Ao Hou, include, among other things, the encouraging and assisting of the Maori people to:

- (a) Conserve, improve, advance and maintain their physical, economic, educational, social and moral well-being;
- (b) assume and maintain self-reliance, thrift, pride of race and such conduct as will be conducive to the general health and well-being;

⁵⁸ "Editorial," *Te Ao Hou* 1, Winter 1952, 1. Emphasis added.

- (c) accept and maintain the full rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship;
- (d) apply and maintain the maximum possible efficiency and responsibility in their local self-government and undertakings; and
- (e) revive and maintain the teaching of Maori arts, crafts, language, genealogy and history in order to perpetuate ancient Maori culture.⁵⁹

In relation to these objectives, supervision and control of that which Māori could read and envision about their selves and their place and functions in society was necessary to ensure that their advancement was consistent with government policy. Therefore, “Te Ao Hou should provide the widest scope for literary contribution of all kinds provided they are consistent with the objectives”, while “no material inconsistent with the stated objectives should appear in this magazine”.⁶⁰ To this end, neither critical Māori perspectives that, for instance, criticised the alienation of Māori land were to be published in *Te Ao Hou*,⁶¹ nor could academic articles be published which criticised the definition and understanding of “integration” and its underlying assumptions of racial evolution, or material that criticised the frequent exclusion of Māori from discussion and deliberations of local affairs.⁶² Hence, not only did NFU film have to advance appropriate “integration”, but the whole array of State publicity and other educational means.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, it was commonly agreed in public discourse that Māori were in need of various improvements; differences in outlook usually related to the techniques and strategies by which this could be best achieved and to the extent to which this would be desirable and necessary. However, at times there was also certain unease expressed with the perspective and governmental framework within which this took place. Some academics as well as political administrators at times realised the abstracting and generalising ways through which Māori were being framed and rendered knowable. In 1940, Ivan Sutherland, who was trained as a moral psychologist and had been working in the field of cultural anthropology, wrote the following: “It is misleading to generalize about the Maori people as

⁵⁹ Sid Odell to Secretary of Maori Affairs Department, 14.12.1954, TO3 W1656 9 9/3/33, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁶¹ See various documents in TO3 W1656 9 9/3/33, Archives New Zealand.

⁶² John Caselberg, letter, 04.1961, AAMK 869 W3074 8b 1/1/42 2, Archives New Zealand.

a whole, save in the most general way ... *One should not generalize and yet one must*,"⁶³ and he continued to write about *the* Māori, in the singular, as a coherent type of people.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Sutherland had realised the need for more subtle, continuous, flexible, "positive", and hence efficient and effective means by which appropriate self-regulation of Māori could be advanced. This crucially included the education of Māori leaders "for the laying down of the foundations of policy". He continued by pointing out:

This is not just perversity. It is largely a question of the interpretation of ideas and this is not practicable without a complete understanding by the one who interprets of all their implications in the daily lives of those whose standards or ways are sought to be altered. And such a go-between must be constantly adjusting and adapting.⁶⁵

Knowledge about those whose "standards" were "sought to be altered" had to be increased and a "lay missionary spirit"⁶⁶ had to be employed to achieve proper self-regulation. This would make possible the constant strategic adjustment and adaption of those that were "maladjusted", particularly in the light of the realisation that "by some Maori 'maladjustment' is deliberately chosen".⁶⁷

Thus, discussions of State policies regarding Māori in terms of "assimilation" do not do justice to the governmental strategies brought into play. It was not the aim to suppress Māoritanga or oppress Māori *per se*, but to produce useful, healthy, well-adjusted and productive citizens, able to function according to normalised and standardised ways of living and working within the nation-state of New Zealand. This allowed for the maintenance of certain differences within the overall uniformity of the nation. To some extent, it became imperative for the State to facilitate the recognisability of Māori as being different in order to normalise their functioning within the political economy, which also relied on "the exotic value" of Māori for tourism promotion.

Martin Blythe has claimed that NFU films dealing with Māori during World War II tended to "emphasize the unity and sense of pride felt by the entirety of Maori

⁶³ Ivan. L. G. Sutherland, "The Maori Situation," in *The Maori People Today: A General Survey*, ed. Ivan. L. G. Sutherland (Auckland: Whitcombs & Tombs, 1940), 418. Emphasis added.

⁶⁴ See also Beaglehole and Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 13-6 & 329-47.

⁶⁵ Sutherland, "The Maori Situation," 432.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 435-36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 427.

culture ... These films are among the finest expressions of the Integration Myth and even a kind of bicultural nationalism.”⁶⁸ After World War II, however, the focus changed and the projection of Māori as a problematic Other that was an obstacle to projected economic progress and social cohesion, became common in social problem documentaries. Since the promotion of tourism had come to significantly rely on profitably “exotic” depictions of pre-colonial Māoritanga, such projections are frequently found in films made for the promotion of New Zealand overseas. NFU films projected Māori and Māoritanga in relation to both, governmental knowledge and policies demanding that Māori be further “adapted and adjusted” in the interests of a harmonious and efficiently functioning nation, while also capitalising on specific images of Māori for tourism promotion. These images were “exotic” in the sense that they were strategically produced to appeal to and satisfy curiosity and interest in the unfamiliar and “strange” customs of a seemingly ancient culture. NFU films cast Māori difference, in other words, in terms of both deviancy and exoticism, largely depending on overall objectives and target audiences of specific films.

A technique of signification commonly employed in NFU films dealing with Māori, however, was to verbally signify Māori as a coherent collective identity, while abstracting from local differences as well as modes of identification and experiences of different iwi and hapū. Thus the films inserted Māori at once within a nationalist framework as well as a totalising mode of thought in which plurality and diversity was rearticulated within the figure of thought of *the* Māori, that is, the typical Māori. Thus individuals shown on screen frequently functioned as a synecdoche for “the Māori race” or *the* Māori. NFU films functioned as a governmental technique and as such the production and reiteration of coherent and totalising concepts assisted in the normalisation and governability of heterogeneity, while at the same time dissecting and evaluating this totality in terms of appropriate/inappropriate, desirable/undesirable.

A focus of NFU film production after the war became documentaries about the perceived “Māori problem”. Such films aimed at showing the population, and in particular Māori, specific aspects of Māoritanga that were considered problematic and needed improvement, while at the same time frequently emphasising the worth of Māori as equal and successfully integrating citizens. These films, according to Martin Blythe,

⁶⁸ Blythe, *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television*, 82.

reasserted the differential of old and new, antiquity and modernity, the primitive and the progressive, where the Maori play catch-up with the Pakeha. No longer was it a question of historical inevitability ... but of an obvious digital choice between health and sickness, education and ignorance, good farming and bad farming.⁶⁹

Such films demonstrated what State agencies were doing to improve the living conditions of Māori as well as to encourage Māori to adopt specific “better” behaviours in relation to matters such as housing, hygiene, health, education, professional skills, agriculture and employment. These problems were no longer regarded to be naturally inherent in Māori culture, but rather a matter of knowledge, successful self-government and economic management. Therefore, NFU films began to provide specific information about such issues and hence implicitly projected an appropriate vision for the future; at the same time, they suggested that, although problems still existed in the adoption of a sufficiently successful self-regulated lifestyle, Māori were in general terms willingly and successfully integrating and adapting to the demands of modern standards of living.

NFU documentary films produced after war dealing with perceived Māori problems in relation to housing, health and hygiene include *Backblock Medical Service* (1948), *Aroha. A Story of the Maori People* (1951) and *Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District* (1952). Furthermore, Māori education and skills were addressed in films like *Maori School* (1947) and *The Maori Today* (1960). Economic behaviour and the imperatives of modern agriculture were dealt with in films like *Weekly Review 402: Maori Rehabilitation. New Farms Beside the Wairoa* (1949) which was re-edited for overseas release as *New Zealand Mirror 10: Modern Maori Farmers* (1951). However, while these films dealt with perceived Māori problems, implicitly and/or explicitly, as pointed out before, they strategically endeavoured to provide Māori and Māoritanga with a sense of dignity and pride in what had been achieved as well as a motivation for what still was to be achieved. At the same time, however, these films substituted the possibility of heterogeneous or critical voices, the validity of local and traditional knowledge, and the struggle for Māori Tino

⁶⁹ Ibid., 83.

Rangatiratanga with contained projections of Māori and Māoritanga deemed suitable to advance State control and guidance of their own improvement.⁷⁰

Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District, a documentary made for the Department of Health with the assistance of Turi Carroll, set out to promote modern medicine and advance proper conduct for Māori to combat tuberculosis. The commentary, mostly spoken by Carroll and illustrated by suitable images, detailed various proper habits assisting with disease control. Differing living conditions of Māori were evaluated by the film, according to the binary of appropriate/inappropriate ways of living. Pākehā ways of living were deemed most appropriate. While an old shack at Te Reinga is seen, representing inappropriate living conditions, Carroll's commentary claims, "The fact is that this whole settlement needs rebuilding if the people are ever to be healthy." These images are juxtaposed and contrasted with several "progressive" settlements and typical living conditions in houses that are characterised as modern, convenient, well-spaced and healthier. Māori shown in this sequence seem to be living in nuclear families and in their appearance are entirely "Westernised". Towards the end of the film Carroll is seen sitting behind a desk claiming that the improvement of Māori health relied on "individual conduct" and that "in the fight against TB everyone has his duties". Furthermore, those infected are told to follow their doctors' advice and instructions are given for an adequate diet, proper hygiene, clean workplaces, exercise and personal care.

While *Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District* to a large extent incorporated the didacticism of instructionals, a film like *Aroha* did not set out to instruct about proper conduct and values through the commentary, but promoted a certain vision through the structuring of a self-contained narrative, rather than employing an omniscient narrator. *Aroha* is an entirely staged documentary drama, scripted and directed by Forlong and made with the assistance of Ernest Beaglehole as anthropological adviser. It revolves around the central character Aroha, who embodies "Western" ideals of beauty. She is the daughter of a Māori chief and has learned about the "benefits" of Pākehā ways of living beyond the claimed "narrowness" of traditional Māori life and teachings of Māoritanga. Hence, she sets out to make some Māori friends and her whānau (extended family) more

⁷⁰ For a further discussion of films with Māori content made by the NFU after World War II, see Part Two of Blythe, *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television*.

receptive to Pākehā values and ways of living. In one scene she claims, “We are living in a Pākehā world. Some say we should keep apart, but we can’t grow up as two separate races in the same country”. In the following scenes she tries to convince one of her Māori friends to learn a proper trade and to study with the assistance of the Maori Affairs Department, before finding out that her father is severely ill. First he refuses to leave his people, but after the *tohunga*, the Māori healer, is unable to help him, and as he is about to die, he agrees to go to the hospital. He recovers there and the film ends happily, employing a commonly used strategy suggesting that it was entirely up to Māori to decide how they wanted to live. Thus *Aroha*, another film promoting modern medicine over traditional Māori healing practices, ended with the following title: “As the Maori people remember their past in singing and dancing, their future lies waiting. It will take the form they desire, for it is theirs to shape as they will ... theirs to form for their descendants and their race”.

Documentary films made by the NFU primarily for overseas consumption tended to focus more on the exoticism of difference by which Māoritanga had been projected overseas since the advent of tourism promotion in the 19th century. Since these films were made to promote specific aspects of New Zealand, primarily in order to entice capital to enter the country, they focused comparatively little on the aspects of Māoritanga that were considered problematic.

A prime destination for tourists was (and still is) the area around Rotorua, which combined the exoticness of the landscape – boiling mud pools, geysers, interesting rock formations – with the exoticism of a commercialised and contained version of Māoritanga. The prototypical location for a tourist promotion of Māoritanga was (and remains) Whakarewarewa near Rotorua and in particular the model pa, a model of a pre-colonial fortified Māori village. The settlement of Whakarewarewa had been established by the Tuhourangi people of Te Arawa, and after colonisation had been classified as a Native Reserve. The model pa nearby had only been built around 1904 and was specifically erected with the expectations of tourists in mind. It was part of a Thermal Reserve, administered by and under the jurisdiction of the Department of Tourism and Health Resorts which from 1930 also incorporated overseas publicity. The pa was designed and built “by the Department not to accommodate the Maoris of Whaka[rewarewa], but *purely as a show-place* to give visitors some impression of what a true Maori Pa really looked like in the olden

days”,⁷¹ as well as to display some “valuable” aspects of Māoritanga. Some Māori had protested from the very beginning against certain features of the pa as being inauthentic representations of pre-colonial Māori life.⁷²

The “valuable” aspects of Māori culture on display at the model pa were closely related to what had been identified as arts and crafts, the area which primarily came to be promoted through State agencies in order to salvage and revive specific aspects of pre-colonial Māoritanga. In NFU films made for tourism promotion, but also in “general prestige films”, Whakarewarewa was by far the most frequently filmed location where certain aspects of what was commonly designated as “ancient” Māoritanga were on display in certain ways, in a space primarily erected and arranged for the gazes of touring non- Māori.⁷³ The model pa at Whakarewarewa was the most convenient and most thoroughly “domesticated” space, allowing aspects of Māoritanga to be projected in easily controllable and desired ways. Māori who occupied the model pa during daytime – officially no one was allowed to live there permanently or to stay overnight – earned a living displaying specific aspects of their culture and performing for tourists. Additionally, the government department in control of the model pa prescribed to a considerable degree how Māori guides had to present themselves and conduct tourists through the model pa. This included the employment and licensing of guides, the regulation of entrance fees, the prescription of dresses to be worn by guides, as well as appropriate language skills, manners and behaviours.

For instance, in 1955, Rangitiria Dennan, better known as Guide Rangi, who had become the most famous Māori guide at Whakarewarewa, and who frequently appears in NFU films, complained about the costumes Māori guides were required to wear. These, according to Dennan, were deemed authentic and picturesque by the department, but were clearly not authentic pre-colonial Māori costume and only came into vogue after colonisation. Furthermore, she claimed, “it must be appreciated that the Maori people are now civilized

⁷¹ Letter from District Manager of Rotorua, “Condition of Whaka,” 1938, TO 1 35/6 1, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

⁷² This included “indecent carved figures that have been erected around the so-called Maori pa”. See *Petition for Minister for Tourist and Health Resorts*, 1905, TO1 56 1904/288 Part 3, Archives New Zealand. According to Teipu Tarakawa of Te Puke, “The work done was in no way resembling that of a real Maori pa”. “The Model Pa at Whakarewarewa,” *The Auckland Weekly News*, 11 August 1904.

⁷³ Examples of films that include an “obligatory” Māori sequence shot at Whakarewarewa are *Meet New Zealand* (1949), *Thermal Wonderland, Rotorua New Zealand* (1950) and *The Maori Today* (1960).

and have [an] European mode of life and wearing apparel".⁷⁴ In 1958, Dennan was blacklisted by the Department and not allowed to guide American or South African tourists through the model pa because of her repeated "mixing of political, racial and religious comment with Tourist guiding".⁷⁵ Her frequent raising of the "colour question" was regarded as a particular problem and it was deemed inappropriate for her to raise such issues. Thus in NFU films Dennan was confined to the role of Guide Rangī, a keen and charismatic Māori guide who presented and introduced aspects of Māoritanga to film audiences. These aspects were limited to poi, haka and tititorea (stick) performances as well as flax weaving, food preparation, washing and carving, usually performed by Māori in (supposedly) pre-colonial costume. The existence of the model pa at Whakarewarewa made it easy to project desired images of "ancient" Māoritanga for the promotion of tourism, since the Māori employed there staged performances for tourists daily, within a space specifically erected and administered by the government for such purposes.

With the increasing strategic importance placed on producing lasting effects through film for educational and promotional purposes, projections of Māori came to be increasingly controlled, not only in explicitly socio-political terms, but also in aesthetic ones. Instructive in this regard was the production of the documentary *Maori Songs and Dances* (production title), which was to be directed by Oxley Hughan.⁷⁶ Archives New Zealand holds various reports Hughan wrote to Geoffrey Scott, summarising the results of his investigatory trips searching for a concert party that suited the requirements for the film.⁷⁷ On his first trip in early 1955 he inspected Tuini Ngāwai of Ngāti Porou, a well-known Māori songwriter and performer of the time, as well as a potentially suitable performance group. After his trip, Hughan wrote to Scott:

I explained the general outline of the film and emphasised that as this was for overseas release a glamorous presentation was necessary ... After all N.Z. people

⁷⁴ Rangitīaria Dennan, quoted in W. E. Penno, letter, "Dress of Maori Guides," 1955, TO1 168 35/3 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

⁷⁵ A. G. Hill, "Guide Rangī: Rotorua," 1964, TO1 168 35/3 Part 2, Archives New Zealand.

⁷⁶ It is likely that the film was finally made with the help of the Mauriora Maori Entertainers and was released as *New Zealand Maori Rhythms* (1962). It was shot entirely in the studio with the characters looking strikingly pale skinned and groomed.

⁷⁷ Reports and memos in AAPG W3435 34 3/8/54, Archives New Zealand. Emphases in the following quotes are in the originals. Other archival traces of techniques used in the production of films include the use of liquor to make subjects amenable. See Dan Oakley, "Liquor Expenses while Shooting the East Coast Mirror Items," 1952, AAPG W3435 11 3/2/10, Archives New Zealand.

knew what Maori people looked like and if they were a bit fat it didn't matter, but overseas people expected slim figures. I was on a very sticky wicket, for I was on a roomful of very fat wahines. Stickier still, I had come 400 miles to interview this expert [Tuini Ngāwai] and found that from the appearances point of view she was an embarrassment.

His second trip in April 1955 led Hughan to Ohinemutu to see whether the Taiporutu concert party would prove to be of a better aesthetic standard. He concluded in his report:

In trying to find girls who measure up to modern standards of beauty, and at the same time are good performers of Maori actions songs and pois we are in some way trying to do the impossible. The girls who have adopted pakeha standards of smartness have in the main given up their Maori ways, many of them have become thoroughly Anglicised and cannot even speak Maori. They have no understanding of the significance of Maori culture, and would tend to be poor interpreters of old time action songs ... In front of a camera they will probably go through the movements of a song gracefully, but it will have nothing of the lusty vigour which characterises the true Maori performance.

Here Hughan, the observer of the performance and of European descent,⁷⁸ positioned himself as the one who defined the parameters of “the true Maori performance”. More significantly, he judged the performers “who have in the main given up their Maori ways” as incapable of understanding “the significance of Maori culture”. They had been too “Anglicised” to be able to live up to the definition of their “true” pre-colonial culture. In relation to their performance this meant they lacked “the lusty vigour” that was seen as the main characteristic advancing the impression of authenticity. This produced a double-bind where Māori at once had to live up to the standards of beauty as defined in relation to anticipated expectations of (“Western”) overseas audiences, while still showing a “natural” and “traditional” behaviour that allowed them to perform authentically, as defined by Hughan with reference to hegemonic discourses and preconceptions about Māoritanga. In other words, the potential for authenticity was removed from locally lived modes of expression and experience and rearticulated as a top-down governmental technique to

⁷⁸ Throughout the 1940s and 50s, no people who identified as Māori or Tāngata Whenua were employed in directive or creative positions at the NFU.

become a mode of projection, a prescriptive normative concept that was then rearticulated into locally lived experiences through techniques of education, including film.

In January 1956, Hughan wrote a further memo to Scott regarding the film and the problem of finding a suitable performance group. He discussed shooting footage in Ruatoria of a Ngāti Porou concert group, arguing that “the Ngati Porou are probably the most Maori-conscious Maoris in the country and their performances will be nearest to the real Maori McCoy”. However,

The greatest difficulty will be probably to get what we want, not what the tribal elders want. The Ngati Porou are notoriously stiff-necked in this direction ... We will be strangers in a strange land. We will not be able to fall back on the Maori Affairs [Department] to act as intermediaries if we can't talk the tribe into doing as we want them ... We will probably encounter difficulties in the matter of dress, especially with football shorts and ragged pui-puis. Also some of the girls have the words 'Ngati Porou' worked into their bodies.

In 1960 *The Maori Today* was released. It was made primarily for overseas distribution, but was also extensively screened domestically. Walter Nash, in his position as Minister of Māori Affairs, provided the following guidelines for the production of the film. It had to

Demonstrate the progress that has been made by the Maoris and the position they enjoy in New Zealand society. The film will also *serve the purpose of encouraging and inspiring the Maori people* by showing through examples what they can achieve ... It will show the Maoris ... in a variety of situations in modern life, in terms of equality and *harmony* with other New Zealanders. Residual problems of adjustment must be kept within perspective. They must be handled with care since they could be used to undermine the essentially good story of achievement ... The film will include material which shows that although economic and social integration is taking place, *the pride of race is not being obliterated and there is much to show concerning the revival of cultural matters,*

*including performances for tourists ... The lasting impression must be that of the unity of the two races.*⁷⁹

The film became a superficial “overview” of Māoritanga, modelling and appropriating images to establish the message of the film, which was, again, that while Māori were generally successfully adjusting, they still faced and generated certain problems. The “exotic” aspect of Māori performances persists, but the film is primarily concerned with the stereotype of “the modern Maori”. It begins by reiterating the equality myth, pointing out that “a man’s worth can’t be measured by the colour of his skin”, but by “his” “qualification” and “ability”. The film shows a series of “role model” Māori in modern jobs before briefly depicting tourist performances and then moving into a paternalist exposition of assumed Māori problems. The films overall objectives are again summarised at the end of the film, with the commentary clearly reflecting Nash’s instructions as well as government policy in general:

To carry respect in the community they [Māori] must also be in demand when skill is necessary, otherwise *all* Maoris will be accepted as only fit for unskilled labour. But to retain the age-old traditions is essential in the shift to modern living. To *take pride* in their past gives a sense of security in these changing times with their subtle problems. In less than a hundred years they’re trying to do what it’s taken Europeans 2,000 years to do. The young people and the older people too, can be *proud* of what has been achieved in their adjustment to the 20th century, and their fellow New Zealanders can share that *pride* with them.

Māori must become more skilled to be useful to the economy and to be “respected” (and not be a drain on State welfare and a part of unemployment statistics). Although it suggests “age-old traditions” can be retained for the sake of pride, the film employs a linear evolutionary model in which Māoritanga is seen as “backward”, placed about 2,000 years behind the implied progress of Europeans.

Beyond such explicit appeals, further aesthetic problems had to be overcome in establishing desirable visions of Māoritanga. One problem became apparent after colour film became the standard film type during the 1950s, particularly for overseas promotional films. Colour film

⁷⁹ Walter Nash, “Notes on ‘Maori Today’,” 1959, AAPG W3435 16 3/2/87, Archives New Zealand. Emphasis added.

used with little natural light, such as when shooting inside buildings, tended to produce a stronger than usual contrast between darker and lighter skin colours. This caused concern to filmmakers involved in the production of *The Maori Today*. The higher contrast between dark and light skin tones with colour film used in interiors tended to contradict Nash's directive to advance the impression of a "unity of the two races". Therefore not only what was shown and said, but also the aesthetics and psychic effects of colour had to be carefully adjusted to sustain the objective of the film. In August 1959, Scott wrote a letter to Odell regarding the making of *The Maori Today*:

My worry with colour is that there are so many interiors in this film which are necessary, that it would be easy to have the Maoris very dark and the pakeha looking very fair. This could of course give the impression that the Maoris are a very dark skinned race, akin to the negroes, but this would be a very grave mistake as it would speak strongly against the very objective of the film. I fully realise that overseas distribution is dependent on the film being in colour and tests are proceeding at the moment to determine how we can photograph the Maori and pakeha without too great a differential in skin texture.⁸⁰

In other words, Māori ideally had to look comparatively pale-skinned in order to avoid associations with darker-skinned "races" like "negroes". Such concerns attest to a continuing and generalised racism that was attached to skin colour in operation at the time to which Scott strategically reacted by trying to avoid such potentially negative connotations. As darker skin tones were seen likely to evoke associations with more primitive, less civilised "races", projecting Māori with a lighter skin colour assisted the objective of showing their successful "integration". This could be visually expressed through a "whitening" of Māori, minimising the contrast of skin colour between Māori and Pākehā, while avoiding the darker side of the colour spectrum.

The appropriative and strategic nature that NFU documentary film production had taken can be particularly detected in the projection of Māori. The documentary films made about Māori that have been sighted for this study did not aim to provide substantial insights into Māori life beyond the artificiality of Whakarewarewa. Images that showed some Māori living conditions were commonly functionalised and evaluated for governmental purposes.

⁸⁰ Geoffrey Scott, memo, 1959, AAPG W3435 16 3/2/87, Archives New Zealand.

Additionally, images were used to demonstrate how well Māori were generally modernising or to point out where problems still existed. In this sense, the vision created of Māori through NFU documentaries during the 1940s and 50s is a result of superficial, homogenising and normalising modes of filmic realisation. They do not endeavour to engage with different Māori perspectives or let Māori speak about their experiences beyond what generally suited the government policy of integration. In this sense, the films, beyond the specificity of particular images, *showed* very little of the living conditions of Māori back then, but *exhibited, exposed* and *evaluated* from a governmental perspective how their life should be.

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that during the 1950s the NFU became further subjected to an increasingly harmonised and centralised publicity strategy which set out to provide a coherent voice and image of the State as well as the nation and population at large. Hence, the NFU was placed into a complex arrangement of check-and-control procedures which removed authority from the NFU towards streamlined management processes. Furthermore, film production at the NFU was reorganised so as to be more efficient and effective. The production of films was mediated through a complex array of authorities and bureaucratic procedures, and production routines at the NFU were further subjected to scientific management principles. The NFU had to increasingly focus on the production of instructionals and departmental films as well as films for overseas promotion.

Beyond the generally increasing sophistication of film production, few technical innovations in the production of documentary films were made during the 1950s. Important techniques and strategies allowing producing, controlling, arranging, and “mastering” actuality as well as the images recorded had already been established before, and as such these continued to be decisive for the making of documentary films. Actuality had been made increasingly a function of the imperatives to produce “impressive” and lasting effects on film audiences and as such films like *The New Zealanders* or *The Maori Today* can be seen to epitomise a development that had begun three decades earlier. Such a strategic approach also holds true for the projection of Māori and Māoritanga through NFU films. These did not set out to provide heterogeneous voices or to provide substantial insights into Māori life without structuring, evaluating and interpreting filmic images in reference to governmental purposes.

6. Conclusions: Envisioning the Real

This thesis has shed light on how the NFU originated from the intersection of a governmentalisation of film which attached specific purposes to film production and calculated certain effects to be achieved during World War II, and the programmatic conception of documentary film through John Grierson. This programme was developed with reference to certain assumptions about the cognitive and intellectual faculties and capabilities of popular audiences/“ordinary citizens” and the problems of modern liberal society, as well as the “visionary” and (re-)formative potential of the cinematographic apparatus.

During the 1920s, Walter Lippmann, amongst others, had diagnosed several problems of democratic government as related to the operation of knowledge and power in modern society. He proposed an elitist, technocratic arrangement of power, generating and processing objective knowledge through rational scientific procedures on which the economic conduct of government in society should be built. He implied that “pure” objective knowledge could and should be generated and separated from subjectivity, bias and certain interests through establishing neutral intelligence and information agencies. In the face of the “necessities” and problems of the modern political economy, the impossibility of “the omniscient citizen”, and citizenship based on the transcendence of bias, ignorance and irrational, selfish urges, additionally a specifically productive and “positive” form and operation of knowledge and power was needed for “the rank and file”. Not the conditions and abstractions of modern capitalism were to be reshaped, but the “average citizen” (whoever that may be) needed to be re-formed in order to be able to function appropriately and efficiently within the political economy. Such productive knowledge could advance the necessary uniformity and hence (democratic) governability of the population.

Grierson’s documentary programme was developed to “fill the gap” Lippmann had diagnosed and thus set out to appeal to and shape the intuition and imagination of popular audiences, while rendering the subjectivity of an embodied vision at once disposable, governable and constantly re-adjustable regarding the multiple and layered demands of the political economy. The task for popular audiences, and by extension public discourse, was not to discuss and contemplate what might be considered to be true, good, beautiful or

necessary. The task set out in Grierson's documentary programme was to advance a certain general "uniformity of free will" through an appeal to, and formation and patterning of, certain preconceptions, stereotypes, morals, and modes of identification and subjectification.

In Grierson's programme it was crucially not the realm of ideas, reason and consciousness that defined the potential and effectiveness of film, but its move beyond ideas and ideologies to the "subconscious", the realm of preconceptions, condensed "images", emotions and intuition. This was considered to be the territory in which what is material and sensually perceptible (actuality) intersects with subjective cognition, interpretation, evaluation and imagination (in Lippmann's terms "the pseudo-environment") to form a vision of what is and should be real. Hence, this vision, in order to be functional and productive, was not to be a result of audiences simply sensually perceiving and making sense of a series of moving images (such as in newsreels or actualities), popular audiences rather needed to be strategically engaged so that they could be re-formed through film. Hence, this vision relied upon a specific mode of realisation, employing a politically motivated technology of teleological transcendence, while claiming "the real".

This "real", in Grierson's programme, could be rendered ascertainable through the strategic arrangement and recording of certain material surfaces of the historical world, while subjecting these processes to a certain logistics and strategies, together with "creative" film production techniques and certain purposes and values that were to be invisibly encoded into the films. The resulting films were to advance an impression of "realism" and "autonomy" within popular audiences.¹ Hence, filmic visions of the real resulted from and relied upon certain modes of realisation by which an assumed a priori universal, general and abstract totality ("the Absolute") could be rendered intuitively ascertainable, thereby advancing a presupposed telos. Several techniques were to be employed to advance the internalisation of a certain order and patterns that would condition how "ordinary citizens" act upon their selves and others. In other words, appropriate liberal democratic government at once relied upon the authority of a variety of experts and leaders, scientific procedures

¹ Aitken has noted: "Although he [Grierson] recognized that film interpreted reality, and was not mimesis, he did not believe that the average spectator should share that recognition and believed that a convincing illusion of reality was essential in order to make the narrative as powerful as possible." Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, 70.

and certain institutions. At the same time, however, “ordinary citizens” needed to internalise appropriate ways of self-government and this could be advanced through the use of “imaginative” media, particularly documentary film, given its ability to create an impression of realism and transparency in order to shape the visionary faculties of popular audiences. Thereby universal values and an imagined “greater good” – in short, “utilitarian and humanitarian progress” – could be concerted and advanced.

This documentary programme came to be of particular significance in New Zealand through Stanhope Andrews and was subsequently inscribed into the practices of NFU film production as well as into its institutional organisation as the film production wing of State publicity. Publicity came to project productive and “positive” knowledge as a part of the wider Information Services that were established in 1935 in order to provide certain information of political, economic and statistical relevance for the government. The publicity apparatus was after the war repeatedly expanded, further rationalised and harmonised, thus advancing a coherent and uniform voice and image of the State as well as the nation at large.

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the dispositive of how “the real” was rendered perceptible through film had decisively shifted in New Zealand. By the end of the 1930s film had been governmentalised as a technique of propaganda and civic education, moving from being comparatively “descriptive” and “literal”, and being marked by what Tom Gunning has termed the “view aesthetic”, towards documentary film and visions of the real. New techniques, strategies, discourses and architectures gradually came to shape the production of visions of the real, legitimised by the imperative to produce effective film that would further the governability of the population during war. The knowledge imparted through film became less a result of disparate and disjunct or chronologically arranged views, and relied less on audiences interpreting and making sense of images. Instead it became a matter of the functions that images came to be assigned within realist filmic discourse and by extension within broader calculations of how democratic government and economic conduct could be advanced.

Where early filmic views implied power in the sense that filmmakers strategically selected what was given to be seen and sought to shoot attractive and photogenic images of certain events and landscapes, thus to a certain extent controlling what was sensually perceptible through moving images, documentary set out to control and direct more than just the light

reflections that are registered on the retina of the eye during screening. Crucially, it set out to render the subjective, interpretative and imaginative power of vision calculable, disposable and hence governable. In this sense, subjective visionary faculties of audiences were at once objectified and disembodied by rendering them calculable and subjecting audiences to an ensemble of techniques and strategies by which their performance could be advanced.

The vision of citizens could thereby be modernised according to the various demands that the political economy placed upon the population in its multiple functions as, for instance, workers in industrialised occupations; members of a “race” in need for “adaption and adjustment”; responsible, productive and well-adjusted citizens of a democratic nation-state; or safe, skilled, educated, healthy, hygienic and disciplined agents in general. This thesis has claimed that such a vision was to advance a corporate New Zealand in which each citizen would discipline her- or himself with reference to her or his various functions within the political economy and thus be normalised to assist in the concerted progress of society as a whole. Hence, documentary film set out to shape popular audiences/citizens through the cultivation of a certain vision and the preconceptions, stereotypes, judgements, values and biases encoded and implicit in its configuration. Griersonian documentary did not conceive an ideal autonomous subject that envisions the real; the subject was instead to be subjected to a vision which it should embody, a vision in which the subject envisions itself as autonomous and free, thereby producing a “free will” to act upon the self and others in the process of realising a “better” future.

It has been further argued that these functions of Griersonian documentary film found their expression in various ways within the New Zealand context. It was the task of neither NFU documentary or State publicity in general to address controversy, ambiguity or to advance “open” (political) discourse or the reflection upon what might constitute a “greater good” or “progress”. Nor would documentary critically engage with certain themes or simply encounter or observe certain events. It was to be used for “positive suggestion” and to advance the proper functioning and modernisation of the nation in various ways. Thus NFU documentary came to reiterate and advance a universal and de-limited normative vision of “the greater good” and “progress”, while subsuming alterity and heterogeneity under the banner of (national) identity.

Multiplicities of historical events and experiences were thus subjected to a normative framework of selection, arrangement and interpretation, and placed in the service of governmental reason. The very conception and practice of State publicity as a promotional means for State agencies, policies and a focus on the production of useful, integrated and normally functioning citizens did not facilitate procedures that would have aimed at distanced enquiries or the facilitation of (political) discourse in or through film.² Neither did the frequent conflation of the concepts of propaganda, civic education and public relations aid such procedures, nor the subsumption of film production into imperatives of economic efficiency.

Documentary films by the NFU were, to varying degrees, and in various ways, normalised, homogenised and optimised projections of the real. In filmic visions of the real, New Zealand's population is imagined as an overall well-integrated "community". Existing problems are to be found in the areas of industrial and agricultural production, technological progress, housing, electric supply, and the management of natural resources. In terms of social problems, women became a focus of NFU film production during wartime in order to advance national productivity, while after the war the three problematic groups signified through films were children, workers and Māori. Existing problems were to be resolved through State agencies, planning and administration, the scientific endeavour of experts, the application of modern technology and mechanisation, proper education and discipline, the cultivation of motivation, pride and responsibility, and the unquestioning co-operation of all classes of society.

Despite some identifiable "deviations" of filmmakers from State publicity policy – a detailed history of which is yet to be written – films by the NFU, implicitly and/or explicitly promoted a homogeneous vision of New Zealand as a harmonious, co-operative, overall uniform, modern, civilised, progressive, democratic, classless, humanitarian and egalitarian nation. New Zealand was additionally portrayed as having exotic and interesting features such as scenery and landscapes, "the ancient Māori" of Whakarewarewa, sporting and outdoor activities, and plenty of pleasurable moments and experiences in the touring of the country. This vision advanced affirmative national identification, empathy and responsibility while

² See also Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations*, 74.

being permeated by a set of governmental strategies, for which, in the words of Grierson, “a more harmonious social structure” was “a fighting instrument”, while “social responsibility” was to be “the ultimate law of a nation”.³

NFU film production and State publicity, conceived of in terms of propaganda, civic education and public relations, implied a politicisation of vision. “Politics” here refers to a politics of purpose and policy that was to advance a desirable and smoothly executed government. In other words, film production by the NFU was inextricably bound up and traversed by “imperatives” for an economic conduct of the population (as well as overseas audiences), as was the case with Grierson’s programme.⁴ Hence, NFU documentary set out to (re-)produce the ordinary, normal and desirable by favouring intuition, recognition, identification and affect over critical elaboration, exploration and reflection.

In this sense, politics, the art and science of government, was at once visible and masked within NFU films. Politics was present in the institutional organisation of the NFU within the executive of the State, as well as in the purposes and projected effects for which films were made. In addition, politics were present in the policy-statements of politicians appearing on the screen or in the promotion of State agencies and policies within the films. At the same time, however, politics remained invisible. While film had become politicised as a governmental technique, it was frequently reiterated that the “educational” purposes attached to film production were to remain implicit and disguised in the films themselves.

Film production at the NFU had from the beginning been envisioned as having a subtle, imperceptible and affective impact on popular audiences. In this sense, politics, in reference to the production of visions of the real, referred to the art and science of the *execution* of government, not to a process by which collective decisions are being negotiated and made subject to public discourse. This was never a function for neither NFU film nor Griersonian documentary. Crucially, certain values, purposes, norms and ends that film was to serve and advance were already defined before specific films were made and hence the “documentary” potential of the camera became a function of strategies to advance the appropriate government of the population which was to “realise” assumed universal

³ Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 87.

⁴ As Grierson claimed, “I have ... been concerned with a theory of education and with the problem of so galvanizing the imagination of democratic citizenship that it would be inspired to efficiency and effectiveness.” Grierson, *Eyes of Democracy*, 130.

humanitarian values, economic “necessities” and “objective” and factual knowledge. These aspects were rendered into a form deemed suitable and attractive for popular audiences who implicitly and/or explicitly were considered to be less qualified to make accurate and unbiased judgements and decisions about such issues and concerns or would have likely impeded efficiency, quick decision, and the agency of the State.

The NFU’s very first official production, *Country Lads* (1941), can be seen as an early example of such imperatives. It strategically compiled and arranged stock footage of various temporally and spatially disparate past events into a filmic narrative – not to make these events visible as such, or to remain faithful to their chronological unfolding – but strategically transcended and arranged these in order to mobilise the population for warfare by advancing specific processes of evaluation, identification, empathy and affect within the conceptual framework of the nation.

With the end of the war, the purposes of the NFU were reconsidered and readjusted, and State publicity and with it film production were now to serve “peacefare” in terms of civic education and public relations. While film production at the NFU continued to calculate and advance a specific vision of the nation and its population, by the late 1940s a visionary realist film aesthetic and most “creative” film techniques had been established. These included the (re-)construction of events and settings; the strategic placing of people in the frame and the timing of movements; rehearsals; the detailed scripting and planning of documentary films; the research and anticipation of suitable film footage; the use of strategically selected “talking heads”, frequently in the form of experts, politicians and “role-model” citizens; an all-knowing commentary that transcends and evaluates images and provides logical coherence; conventions of feature film production such as dramatisation and continuity editing; shooting in a studio environment; and the use of sound effects and orchestral music to provide and advance a certain mood and ambience and to build up suspense. Hence particularly NFU documentaries came to be marked by a rather fluid passage between actuality footage and its strategic arrangement and optimisation. These techniques and strategies continued to be employed in various ways during the 1950s, while film production at the NFU lost its ideological and idealist undertones prevalent in the prior decade and was succeeded by a more “pragmatic” and technological approach.

However, not only the production of a specific vision was subjected to imperatives of economic efficiency, but also film production at the NFU. With the normalisation and rationalisation of State publicity after the war, a harmonised “corporate identity” and “brand image” of the New Zealand State came to be of importance. The NFU was made increasingly accountable and its value had to be measurable and justified in terms of capital revenue. The NFU was thus increasingly commercialised and inserted into the hierarchical structure of the public service within the executive of State government and became further subjected to technocratic procedures of rational scientific management, which increasingly removed decision-making authority from NFU personnel towards administration processes, a hierarchical organisation of check and control procedures, and State policies. At the same time, however, film production and its control was technically increasingly decentralised in that it was subjected to complex processes of mediation and supervision in which no single agent could solely control the production of visions of the real, but was assigned a specific, limited function in the film production apparatus, hence increasing the commutability, efficiency and specialisation of NFU personnel.

This thesis suggests that the modelling and projection of a generalised, homogenised and optimised vision of ordinary, normal, desirable and typical New Zealand life through NFU documentaries was neither a coincidence in the march of time, nor simply an effect of idealising desires for social harmony. With Lippmann and consecutively Grierson and Andrews, the formulation and projection of “realist” images and films became subject to governmental reason. In this sense, the stereotypical projection of New Zealand and its population through NFU documentaries, beyond the intentions and beliefs of single agents, might be referred to, in the words of Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley, not as “an error in perception but [as] a strategy of social control” through the production of “generalised images” that created “readily identifiable frames (or tropes)”, which “impose[d] a thematic coherence on people or events to which audiences can relate”.⁵ As Lippmann had argued, the achievement of co-operation on a “mass” scale relied on “an intensification of feeling and a degradation of significance”.⁶

⁵ Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley, *Recalling Aotearoa: Indigenous Politics and Ethnic Relations in New Zealand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71.

⁶ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 47-48.

As a result, vision became subject to processes of generalisation, typification, abstraction, normalisation and homogenisation, while being de-localised and de-centred from the materially bound coordinates of time and space of an embodied observer. Vision was modernised and re-ordered so as to be able to function within the abstractions and layered and varied imperatives of the modern political economy. The above mentioned processes can be seen to be epitomised in major NFU documentary films like *The New Zealanders* (1959) or *The Maori Today* (1960). In such films the concreteness and specificity of moving images had been appropriated up to a point where, as in the instance of *The New Zealanders*, the claimed subject of the film, a plurality of people framed within the concept of the nation-state, was given the status of illustrating statistical data through a transcendental and homogenising narrative. This narrative crucially relied upon the schematic and generalising claims and evaluations of the commentary, which the images could neither sufficiently support and evidence nor render visible.

In effect, the camera, to varying degrees, came to function less as an instrument with which to encounter or observe and record actuality, and more as one with which to “shoot” and arrange images in order to advance a certain vision of New Zealand. That is, knowledge and vision were less the result of an attempt at a disinterested and non-interventionist filming of certain events. Instead certain techniques and strategies were brought to bear upon the making of films, thus increasing the availability of desired film material and the control of what could be envisioned. With a film like *The Coaster* (1948) it was precisely known in advance what the final film should look like – it was pre-planned down to a third of a second before shooting on location even began.

Such practices employed at the NFU render the term “documentary” problematic. If one regards a filmic document to be established and marked by, and the authenticity of film images to be warrantable through, an undirected, non-interventionist and disinterested filming of actual events *in front of* the camera – leaving the formative and mediating aspects performed *in* the camera and during the editing process out of consideration – then the term “documentary” is largely inapplicable and may even be misleading. NFU documentaries might thus rather be termed “monumentaries” in that they were strategically designed to address and model an observer by being “impressive”, producing lasting effects in order to

shape the future,⁷ while seeking to render this purpose largely imperceptible, masked by the impression of, and pleasures generated by, filmic realism. This is not to claim that certain images of NFU documentaries do not provide valuable and even authentic insights into past events, but such an evaluation is complicated by the fact that NFU documentaries, particularly after World War II, were marked by a fluid transition between observational footage and footage that was strategically realised for the camera and inserted into filmic narratives that served governmental purposes.

In this sense, the Griersonian documentary programme legitimised and advanced an inability for popular audiences to distinguish between the actual and material and its strategic formation and transcendence, between the material surfaces that the camera could record, and what marked the “surplus value” encoded into the films in order to realise a world, since these aspects were indivisibly interlaced throughout the screening and arranged on the same plane of cinematic experience. With Griersonian documentary the world projected on the screen became a politically motivated empirical-transcendental doublet which claimed the real. This real was neither entirely determined through images that resembled and were motivated by material referents, nor through the transcendental and formative techniques that ordered actuality and resulting images into a filmic vision. Whereas earlier film had in certain ways, but never neutrally or objectively, extended the field of vision beyond an embodied and subjective observer, with Griersonian documentary this “extension” was turned into a governmental apparatus that was to strategically and productively condition how target audiences envisioned, that is sensually perceived and imagined, what is and should be real.

The few who commented and elaborated on the functions and effects of film during the 1940s and 50s in New Zealand were aware of the mediating and formative aspects of documentary film. It was widely taken for granted by those promoting documentary that it had a purposive and teleological function and interpreted its subject matter. Thus documentary less served to “document” actuality, but was in tendency “propagandistic”.

⁷ This distinction between “documentary” and “monumentary” is indebted to Pandel’s differentiation between “document” and “monument”. See Hans- Jürgen Pandel, *Quelleninterpretation. Die schriftliche Quelle im Geschichtsunterricht [Source Interpretation. The written Source in Historical Education]* (Wochenschau Verlag: Schwalbach, 2003): 12-18. Drawing on Pandel, a “document” can be defined by its absence of markers or traces that imply a concern to strategically impress and model a future recipient, whereas “monuments” are strategically created and arranged to control and predetermine their interpretation, and thus set out to shape a future recipient.

And this was precisely the main reason why the NFU initially came into being – to further the war effort. However, the contradictions, ambiguities as well as political and ethical implications inherent in such an approach to filmmaking were generally not regarded as problematic, at least as long as film was employed for “appropriate” and “positive” ends and was in “the right hands”.

In 1948, Robert Allender wrote “It is unusual to find a New Zealand cinema-goer who considers [NFU] productions with analytical detachment.” This assessment was followed by a declaration of the value of NFU films for “self-contemplation” about the identity of the nation in that the films functioned like a mirror, providing for a certain pleasing and narcissistic identification and vision for its population, as long as the mirror was not perceived to be distorting:

We are now experiencing the first excitement of self-contemplation. Throughout our history we have been an obscure people, seldom noticed by anyone, least of all by ourselves ... At the same time we have looked in the glass and found the reflected image not half as displeasing as we expected. Like a child using a mirror for the first time, we want to look again and again and for the present we are resentful of strangers telling us that we are other than we see ourselves. At this precocious moment the National Film Unit has been born. We are pleased that we have found another looking glass, unreceptive only when we think we perceive that it distorts for the satisfaction of an outside agency – the hostile body, ‘the government’.⁸

Allender suggested that NFU films advanced a certain uncritical narcissism. While there seems to be a certain “truth” in this claim, this thesis suggests that it is not really important and even impossible to make such general claims about the effects that the films may have had. While this study has pointed to the modes of realisation of visions of the real projected through NFU documentaries, and “the politics of the real” that permeated their production, this has not been done to provide a “critique of presence” by claiming that NFU documentaries were largely fictions, myths or even counterfeits of the “really real”. This study has rather been concerned with how vision was to be set in motion in order to be

⁸ Allender, "The National Film Unit," 320-21.

affirmative, productive and functional within the political economy in operation, thus agreeing with Jonathan Crary's assertion that

whether or not one had direct perceptual access to self-presence is intrinsically irrelevant within modern disciplinary and spectacular culture. What is important to institutional power, since the late nineteenth century, is simply that perception function in a way that insures a subject is productive, manageable, and predictable, and is able to be socially integrated and adaptive.⁹

As traced and argued throughout this thesis, this was precisely the overall purpose of the existence of the NFU – it was not established to provide an unmediated, neutral or “objective” access to historical actualities. This study has shown how a vision of what is and should be real became a central object and end of governmental strategies by ordering, cultivating and directing vision towards a desirable future, whose realisation relied to a considerable extent on the agency and subjectivity of popular audiences. Thus an attempt has been made to render visible how vision came to be ordered, functionalised and set in motion. After all, the vision that NFU films shaped was directed towards a desirable future, a vision that is now a part of the “fore-history” of the present and how individuals perceive and create a sense of their selves and the world. In the New Zealand context, it is suggested that the establishment of the NFU was a defining moment when heterogeneity cinematically became subject to the normalising power of institutional projections of “progress”, social integration and economic conduct through typifying, homogenising and generalising modes of realisation that functioned to increase the uniformity and governability of the population.

In this sense, what seems to be an important legacy of NFU documentaries, and this is supported by accounts of audience reactions at the time, are less their specific content, but the general “impressions” they generated and the ways in which popular audiences/“ordinary citizens” became subject to and the subject of a certain (filmic) vision. In a difference from earlier filmic views, this vision is marked by its de-limitation, in that it is panoptic and further de-localised and de-contextualised from a body anchored within the material world. It is further marked by its homogenisation, in that it identifies and governs heterogeneity within singularising, totalising, synoptic and schematic classificatory systems

⁹ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 4.

that advance the impression of coherence and similarity, in which the specific commonly functions as a part or expression of the general or universal. Moreover, this vision is disciplined since it is set in motion in order to be able to meet the multiple and shifting institutional demands of the modern political economy; its subject is hence capable of integration, (self-)adaption and appropriate behaviour. Vision is also normalised in that it is set up to conform to and draw upon general patterns of recognition, identification and orientation, allowing the normal functioning of modern subjectivity and the multiple operations it has to be able to perform efficiently.

With this in mind, one could begin to re-evaluate how Griersonian documentary film functioned as a specific “democratic instrument”. It was produced by the NFU under various imperatives of efficiency, effectiveness, affirmation and non-controversy, with regard to specific desires, norms, values, purposes and policies, and by making use of interpretative, transcendental, formative and optimising techniques while advancing the impression of realism and autonomy. One would also need to take into account that film operated as one-way “communication” and few had access to production equipment and facilities, or the funds to produce films and achieve wide distribution. Furthermore, in New Zealand NFU films were commonly received by “captive audiences” such as pupils or they were received in darkened cinemas, screened before the main feature film and after audiences had stood up for and listened to “God Save the King/Queen”. Audiences were arranged in rows, their senses directed upon the screen while remaining ideally silent, thus minimising their distraction of attention towards the screen. They witnessed a constantly changing succession of images and sounds whose reception was directed through the projection of the film as well as the perspective encoded into it, without the ability to pause the film to provide time for reflection, ask questions or counter specific arguments and values expressed. Hence, this thesis suggests that the functions and implications of Griersonian documentary film for and within democratic government indeed need to be re-evaluated and one should also trace how it continues to shape the present.

Paul Swann has argued that the British Documentary Movement

played a key role in encouraging the British government and big business to adopt what was widely perceived as the most effective and sophisticated form of mass persuasion as part of their general information policies. In a very real sense,

it could be argued that even now government and commercial information policy in Britain and much of the West owe a lot to this experience.¹⁰

If one looks at Griersonian documentary not as a movement, a genre, a specific body of films, nor as being defined by a certain style or mode, but as a programmatic approach to film and media production in the service of the field of propaganda, civic education and public relations which is historically permeated by certain discourses, architectures, strategies, techniques and practices, then it seems that much of that strategic governmental programme has moved into the present. However, it has been further rationalised, professionalised, multiplied and optimised. It can be found in, but is certainly not limited to, the heterogeneous ensemble of publicity, public relations, advertising and promotional strategies that within the hyperactive attention-economy of contemporary capitalism “necessarily” seek to efficiently create certain projected effects within those being addressed and targeted, while rendering the investments, purposes, strategies and techniques employed insensible in favour of a strategically appealing and impressive surface of images and slogans. How such practices have come to shape “democratic government” and how they provide for a specific vision needs to be further considered, researched and made subject to public discourse.

Today New Zealand is imagined as “100% Pure”, a marketing campaign designed to appeal to and capitalise on anticipated and measured desires of potential tourists by cultivating a specific vision that ideally results in their touring of the country. The official website of the “brand” New Zealand claims: “Our research tells us that our target market is seeking not just a destination to look at and drive through, but one to experience with heart and soul.”¹¹

If one wants to trace how it is possible that such vacuous and generalised slogans like “100% Pure” strategically set out to realise a vision of what is and should be real, then one needs to engage with the historical development of the strategies and modes of “realisation” and how vision was subjected to processes of modernisation through the calculations and projections of institutional power. By doing so it may be possible to trace and describe how, in a profoundly technologised and mediated world, the perpetual and multiplied flow of

¹⁰ Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement 1926-1946* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 179.

¹¹ “100% Pure,” accessed 13 May 2011, <http://www.newzealand.com/travel/trade/marketing-toolbox/working-with-us/brand-and-licensing-terms/brand-and-licensing-terms.cfm>.

strategically optimised, de-contextualised and attention-catching images and sounds have advanced an increasingly destabilised, fragmented and decentred subjectivity. It is a subjectivity that is constituted through a vision that is floating and unfocused, marked by its inability to discern between the material and the metaphysical, the authentic and inauthentic, the genuine and non-genuine. Griersonian documentary, amongst the programmes of people like Lippmann, a decisive influence in the formulation of neoliberal democratic government, and those of Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee, the “fathers” of modern scientific propaganda/public relations, would need to prominently feature in such an historical enquiry into the modern governmentality of vision.

Furthermore, the contemporary marketing and branding of New Zealand as “100% Pure” may serve as a reminder that the substitution of discourse as an *event* with marketing and promotional strategies, public relations and management techniques as well as imperatives of economic efficiency has come to decisively shape the arrangement and practices of the contemporary political economy and public discourse. The techniques and strategies have multiplied and shifted, and been subject to further scientific rationalisation, professionalisation and sophistication, however, they, in conjunction with a certain governmental reason, undoubtedly continue to be decisive in the shaping of a vision of what is and what should be real, far beyond the measurability of empirical effects and the surfaces that images render visible.

Filmography

The Filmography details the names of films or filmstrips, who filmed or directed them, as well as the place of production, the production company and year of release. However, this information could not be traced for all films, and particularly NFU films were usually released without crediting the directors and other filmmakers involved. The Filmography is divided into three sections and each section lists films chronologically by year of release. Further information and synopses are available for many New Zealand films through the online catalogue of the New Zealand Film Archive as well as through Archives New Zealand.

Early New Zealand State Film Productions

American Fleet at Auckland. Filmed by James McDonald, 1908.

World's Sculling Competition on Wanganui River. Filmed by James McDonald, 1909.

New Zealand's Thermal Wonderland. Filmed by James McDonald, 1910.

Tutange of Patea. Filmed by James McDonald. Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1912.

Work of the New Zealand Medical Corps. Filmed by Henry A. Sanders. New Zealand Government, 1917.

Seeing Sights of Paris before Football Match. Filmed by Henry A. Sanders. New Zealand Government, 1918.

Arrival of New Zealand Troops at Cologne. Filmed by Henry A. Sanders. New Zealand Government, 1919.

Slums of Wellington. Filmed by Cyril Morton. Wellington: New Zealand Government, around 1920.

Glorious New Zealand. Filmed by Bert Bridgeman. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1925.

The Breakfast Egg. Filmed by Bert Bridgeman. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1926.

Tall Timber: The Timber Industry of New Zealand. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1927.

Strawberry Time: In New Zealand's Winterless North. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1927.

Maori at Rotorua. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1928.

Highway: Roving the Urewera, New Zealand. Wellington: New Zealand Government Publicity Office, 1930.

Kamate: Among New Zealand's Maori People. Wellington: Filmcraft, 1934.

Romantic New Zealand – The Land of 'the Long White Cloud'. Filmed by Bert Bridgman, Cyril Morton and Charles Barton. Wellington: Filmcraft, in co-operation with the New Zealand Government and Tru-Colour Films Limited, 1934.

New Zealand Marches On. Filmed by Ronald M. McIntyre. Wellington: Government Film Studios, 1938.

Spinning Wheels. Wellington: Government Film Studios, 1938.

Help in the War Effort. Wellington: Government Film Studios, 1940.

Help Win the War. Wellington: Government Film Studios, 1940.

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