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DECLARATION CONCERNING THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF

I, David John Hocking (full name)

solemnly and sincerely declare, in relation to the thesis entitled:

Documenting Scenes of Missionary John Grierson, the National Film Unit and New Zealand.

(a) That work was done by me, personally

and (b) The material has not previously been accepted in whole, or in part, for any other degree or diploma

Signature: __________________________ Date: 05.02.07.
John Grierson, the NZNFU and the Art of Propaganda.

David Hoskins

A Thesis submitted for the degree of

Master of Arts

At the University of Otago,
Dunedin,
New Zealand

Abstract

This thesis sets out to investigate the role played by the New Zealand National Film Unit documentaries in moulding perceptions of nation and culture, focusing on the period from 1900 to 1960. At its core, the thesis argues for a greater appreciation of the influence of New Zealand film documentary produced in the first sixty years of the 20th century precisely because such an appreciation uncovers films that represent a corpus of panoptic cinema. Such a panoptic cinema was fostered and used powerfully by successive governments, who utilised state-funded film production in the promotion of a surveillance culture that appropriated and represented sections of New Zealand society, such as Maori and the working class in the service of the state. Put another way, their on-screen representation was determined largely by the propagandist requirements of the state.

The New Zealand documentaries, newsreels, propaganda and training films, represent an evolutionary mission to mediate a ‘film truth’ that, despite different ideological stances throughout the period under discussion, collectively celebrate the achievements of the state. In other words, this film corpus served to maintain state hegemony. To locate such film production and its aesthetic origins, I have undertaken a contextual study of John Grierson and his documentary model that came to be exported to many parts of the British Empire, including New Zealand.

This thesis seeks to investigate this historical and evolutionary project that sought to record, educate, manipulate, promote and illustrate New Zealand for mass audiences within the context of commercial cinema exhibition. In the absence of any major fiction film tradition of the period under discussion, the documentary film is, I wish to contend, the single most important cultural artefact remaining of the various government sponsored film projects of the 20th century. It is also a resource little recognised beyond archival discipline and under-represented in general historical literature.

While various sections of the New Zealand community were unproblematically used on-screen by the state, such as the working class, women in the wartime economy, technologically progressive farmers, post-World War 2 immigrants from Great Britain, this thesis focuses on the manner in which images of Maori have evolved in New Zealand documentary during this period. The National Film Unit productions, despite their relatively brief time-span, lack of technical finesse and popularist tone nevertheless represent a form of panoptic cinema. The origins of such a cinema are to be found in the documentary forms developed by Grierson and form a link, not only to imperial strategies but also provide evidence of the role of New Zealand film production in the post-colonial construction of national identity.
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I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my academic supervisor, Dr. Vijay Devadas, Department of Media, Film and Communications Studies, University of Otago, for his wise counsel, extraordinarily fine editing and ever-insightful critique of my work.

Finally, I would like to dedicate such work as I offer here to my late mother, Evelyn Edmundson, who died during the writing of Chapter 3. Her warm encouragement of my academic efforts was received with the deepest appreciation by her son, and now sadly missed.
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Introduction

On December 28, 1895, August and Louis Lumière staged the first public film screening in the basement lounge of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. The film, entitled *L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat, L'* was simply a shot of one minute's duration showing a mail train arriving at the La Ciotat railway station. Audiences at the first showing were so impressed with the realism of the film that many ran from the theatre thinking the train would enter the room. Less than twelve months later, on October 13, 1896, Professor’s Hausmann and Gow introduced and presented a selection of short films during a performance of Charles Godfrey’s Vaudeville Company at the Opera House, Auckland. This first public screening of motion picture film in New Zealand marks the beginning of a chronicling of the landscape, structures, peoples and events of, and in, New Zealand throughout the 20th Century.

Despite the traditional suspicion of historians to equate film with an accurate, unmediated, recording process, the National Film Unit corpus remains something seldom referred to, in depth, in discussions of New Zealand film. One criticism of utilising film as a historical record is that of Dominick LaCapra who notes that film can sometimes be used as tool to historicise, but which is, ‘limited to plausibly filling in the gaps in the record’. Such a questioning of film’s ability to record without mediation has led to documentary film becoming an integral part of historical debate surrounding cinematic record. Scholars such as Robert Sklar (1988) and Robert Rosenstone (2006), for example, seek to utilise film resources as part of historical

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1 *L’Arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat, L’*. (Auguste and Louis Lumière, dirs., Lumière Films, France, 1895, 1 min.).
recording. In the context of New Zealand’s recording of the 20th Century and the moulding of perceptions of nation and culture, such a body of film represents a resource permitting an archival retrieval of historical information.

Film as document, however, cannot be viewed merely in the isolation of ‘this is the way we were’, as an unmediated representation of the way in which the nation and national culture existed. Chapter One proposes to return to the context of early literary and artistic traditions of mimicry, mimesis and the later Frankfurt School’s social and relational contexts of the visual for the purposes of demonstrating how such national cultures are formed through film. The New Zealand body of film — of documentaries, newsreels, propaganda and training films — represents an evolutionary mission to mediate a ‘film truth’ that, despite different ideological stances throughout the period under discussion uniformly celebrate the state. In Chapter Two the historical context of the state’s role in visualising both its mission and celebration of its achievements is explored through the Soviet tradition of propagandist cinema — its technical innovation, creative use of such devices as typage and montage and appeal to popular sentiment — which all impacted on the work of John Grierson and the early British documentarists. Grierson himself is profiled in Chapter Three, as is his role in developing a film form and production method that became synonymous with the term documentary. Chapter Four discusses the complex late-imperial relationships that enabled Grierson to export his documentary-style throughout much of the British Empire, which provided a methodological impetus to the idea of a New Zealand state-funded film product that operated for much of the first half of the 20th century.

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The earliest known surviving footage of New Zealand-made film is that commissioned by the New Zealand Government to record parts of a Royal Visit in 1901. From the beginning of the creation and exhibition of film in New Zealand there has been a recourse to a fictive, verdant landscape against which the state placed Maori as the exotic Other for tourist promotional purposes. However, this colonial construction extends far beyond mere picture postcard imagery. Maori are exhibited when and where the state required. Elements of an ethnographic record are present here, but essentially Maori emerge from the ruins of a national cinematic memory as both symbol of a presumed national unity and exemplars of a fictional Maoriland that the state attempted, through film, to utilise as a focal-point in the search for a national identity. State recourse to such strategies was particularly apparent in times of economic and social crisis. In Chapter Five the progressive nature of the Welfare State is explored in the early Government Film Unit films of the 1930’s against a constructed visualised primitivism of Maori culture. However, as Chapter Six notes, wartime imperatives necessitated the recourse to the tradition of the Maori warrior and the celebration of the feats of the Maori Battalion and symbols of the state’s assimilation myth. However, at other times images of Maori recede, and at times disappear, from the cinema screen, seemingly no longer required in the visual narrative of the state. Such folding and unfolding of imagery was not the fate of Maori alone: the celebration of integrity situated within the working class moves in and out of the film frame with a similar colonial, utilitarian zeal.

This manipulation of aspects of the cultural collective conjures a panoptic vision of a society mediated by state-funded imagery. Such a project as documentary film in New Zealand represents a mode of self-discipline on the largest possible scale: far beyond
the seemingly modest, at times even inept, production values of such films. In the absence of an independent film industry, the New Zealand cinema screen was realised at an early stage by successive governments to have the potential to connect audience engagement of a popularist medium and cinematic processes of ideological signification. What was required, certainly by the end of the 1930's, was an internationally recognised theoretical and industrial standard to legitimise the state-sponsored filmmaker as selective recorder and educational propagandist.

In this, New Zealand turned, as did other imperial outposts of the British Empire such as Canada, Australia and South Africa, to Grierson’s documentary model. Having defined a specific documentary form, Grierson set out to develop a methodology that conflated the public relations of British Government trade entities with the imperatives of the British Empire. For Grierson, imperial propaganda blended political ends with those of trade to form an imperial connectivity. Film was now an export commodity. With the acceptance of such a model, the New Zealand Government set up a state-funded and controlled National Film Unit from 1941 after a visit by Grierson to Australia and New Zealand. In a time of war Grierson asserted that state-funded film was the new mode of communication by which the roles of state and commonwealth could be defined. Within such a milieu notions of social reality could be formed: but whose social reality is this? Grierson claimed, during his 1940 visit, that he wished for New Zealand a film unit that could film the nation. The question that must be asked, as a response to Grierson, then, is whose nation is being celebrated here? This is the central question that animates this thesis.

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4 Grierson’s 1940 visit to New Zealand and his influence on the formation of a state-funded national film unit will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.
The extant body of New Zealand documentary demonstrates the transitory nature of images of membership in the filmed nation. After figuring so prominently in war, and on the home front, Maori are shifted to a post-war invisibility, only to re-emerge in the early 1950's as an indigenised locus of social problems to challenge the resources of the state. The election of a conservative National Government in 1949, and in a determined shift away from highlighting state social experimentation, returned the National Film Unit to a celebration of a landscape now recreated in the productive image of an economically progressive society. Themes, such as increasingly urbanised Maori, the changing nature of the working class, qualified women in the workforce, environmental problems of intensive farming, simply did not register on the New Zealand cinema screen — or, at best, fleetingly. However, the remaining body of the documentary film of this period, exhibits, I contend, not only a catalogue of state propaganda and the development of a culture of self-discipline, but also a rich source of information regarding attitudinal change within a society.

This film archive represents a body of work that provides an insight into the role of film in the early construction of a particular national identity in New Zealand and in the formation of a New Zealand documentary form. In this regard, it is somewhat of an overstatement to assume that an ‘authentic’ New Zealand documentary came into being, fully formed, in the 1970’s as has been suggested by New Zealand filmmakers, such as Gaylene Preston and Barry Barclay, in their various discussions of local film production in a late-20th century context. What I wish to suggest, therefore, is that such film practice in New Zealand has a much longer history than such views would

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suggest. In the absence of a large body of written history, the New Zealand documentary film archive clearly illustrates the importance of film as an agent of recording and initiating change.

The question of whether the documentary archive remains a collection of somewhat tainted ethnographic travelogues or representative of an insight into how New Zealand society has evolved over the past 100 years cannot be fully answered here. However, I believe, that they present a century in microcosm as they document the foldings and unfolding of the mythologies of nation.
Chapter One

Locating the Origins of a Cinematic Documentary Form

The moving picture is a far more powerful instrument for influencing thought than the printed word or the spoken word. For even the backward mind can grasp a picture, where it could not comprehend a newspaper article or remember a spoken message clearly'.

Sir Stephen Tallents.1

Any engagement with the medium of film is essentially an archival retrieval of stored information. The documentary film records events and functions, as Anne Brewster notes, ‘as a technology of memory’.2 For Brewster, the discursive structures and strategies of memory are produced by what John Frow describes as the ‘logic of textuality’.3 Brewster interprets the text as a ‘closed system and the past is a function of this system ... not conceived of an event outside the text. Rather, its meaning is determined retroactively and repetitively in the process of reading’.4 Brewster sees such poetics of memory as possessing the ability to ‘investigate the retroactive constitution of beginnings, the foldings, unfoldings and refolding of images, feelings and narrative fragments’.5

Film criticism is itself anchored in notions of language and a filmic inscription of writing that produces what William Rothman suggests is a ‘criticism that is rooted in experience and expressed in ordinary language’.6 Rothman looks toward a film critique whose form ‘continually turns in on itself, turns us to ourselves, aspires to make us mindful of who we have been, who we are, who we are capable of

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5 Ibid, p. 397.
becoming.7 Yet in the pursuit of such an aim, Rothman focuses on the documentary form as films: ‘discrete, privileged, timeless and ahistorical objects removed from any context of production, exhibition or reception’. 8 In this he strives to uncover an equation that is not at all random in its processes of folding and unfolding through the uncovering of auterist tendencies in documentary film. Such privileging of spectatorial reception implies a singularity of reading film as coherent works of art: ‘the exegete assumes knowledge of the intentions of each work [with] the role of exegesis to find all the inherent meanings in the text and produce ways of comprehending them in relation to all others’.9 In other words, Rothman removes documentary film from the critique of its constructive process and, as a consequence, denies film its intrinsic performativity; while striving to uncover auterist tendencies in documentary film.

However, his approach intersects with Brewster’s notion of ‘retroactive constitutions’. It is the camera and the ‘relationship between the documentarist and the subjects is a theme which unifies [Rothman’s] argument’.10 In the foregoing discussion, decontextualisation, such as that proposed by Rothman, is utilised in an attempt to counterbalance my own arguments regarding the contaminated space inhabited by film in general, and documentary film in particular, and the ‘duality of documentary as artifice and evidence’ as John Corner posits.11

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid. p. 2.
10 Ibid.
If the poetics of memory allow access to processes of remembering through forms of repetitiveness, the camera accesses a space at the intersection of art and record that is at once a capturing of a moment in time that is at its very instant of production already an artefact. While textual analysis plays a vital role in any investigation of film form, simply applying an historical or an industrial framework to documentary film fails to situate such films in a cultural context. Documentary film from its earliest examples moved apart from mere ‘reliable referentiality’, as Corner notes, to Michael Renov’s view that, semiotically, with such a film form, ‘at the level of the sign, it is the differing historical status of the referent that distinguishes documentary from its fictional counterpart’.  

The primary focus of the present discussion is an analysis of ‘realist’ documentary film as reportorial and expositional in the manner developed by John Grierson in Great Britain during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Grierson’s referentiality to the institutional context of his filmmaking avoided any sense of utilising film as a cultural artefact to subvert or marginalise that ‘referential axis’. Grierson’s disciple and fellow documentary filmmaker, Basil Wright, looked on the form as ‘not this or that type of film, but simply a method of approach to public information’. However much Grierson and Wright profess a simple approach to documentary film form in order to record what is before the camera, the terrain thus surveyed is not level nor is its mode of recording necessarily historically un-constructed. Rather, through an investigation of the wide range of approaches to documenting history (and social history in particular), the emphasis here relates to, as Tom O’Regan notes, ‘the patent

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14 Ibid. p. 142.
15 Ibid. p. 124.
discontinuities in film practices not only existing within the same period but also common across periods. Bill Nichols suggests these discontinuities arose at an early stage in terms of historical film production and perpetuated ‘a false division between the avant-garde and documentary that obscures their necessary proximity. Rather than a story of an early birth and gradual maturation ... documentary film only takes form as an actual practice in the 1920's and 1930's’.

For Nichols, earlier attempts to create a nascent documentary form were rather more ‘works organised according to different principles, both formal and social’. In interrogating such ‘folding and unfolding’ discontinuities, the opportunity presents itself to open up the possibilities of viewing film, and documentary film in particular, as ideologically determined in its direct recording processes. Grierson believed that observational cinema was an incomplete process, a ‘cul-de-sac’ that, almost by definition, does not point to the ‘ideal whole’. Implied here is an innate ideological stance assumed by a filmmaker regarding the nature of what the camera records and what it marginalises to a space beyond the film frame. Paula Rabinowitz states that

situated at the heart of this documentary project is a cinema of memory ... [f]ilming an essentially ephemeral event, a vanishing custom, a disappearing species, a transitory occurrence is the motivation behind most documentary images ... their meaning constructed in a web of interpretations we give them through technology.

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16 O'Regan, Tom. "Introduction' In T. O'Regan and B. Shoesmith (eds.) History on/and/in Film. Perth: History and Film Association of Australia, 1987, p. 2.
18 Ibid. p. 581.
19 Morris, Peter. ‘Re-Thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson’ In T. O'Regan and B. Shoesmith (eds.) History on/and/in Film. Perth: History and Film Association of Australia, 1987, p. 20.
20 Rabinowitz, Paula. ‘Wreckage upon Wreckage; History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory’ In History and Theory. Middleton, CT: Blackwell & Wesleyan University, No. 32, May 1993, p. 120.
Cinema has, from its earliest examples, had a close surface relationship with the things of its surroundings, exhibiting an extraordinary ability to capture and then recreate a realistic vision of everyday life — where it is and as it is. Nichols notes here that ‘documentary represents the maturation of what was already manifest within cinema with its immense catalogue of people, places, and things culled from around the world’.

Paul Rotha, writing in 1939, observed that early documentary escaped the bounds of fictional film to explore ‘wider fields of actuality, where the spontaneity of natural behaviour has been recognised as a cinematic quality and sound is used creatively rather than reproductively. This attitude is, of course, the technical basis of the documentary film’.

The passage from written document to visual documentary has its origins in the birth of film itself. Jack Ellis points out ‘[documentary] could be said to have begun with the birth of film itself. The filmed recordings of actuality in the experiments of technicians at the Edison Laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey might qualify’.

The birth of a ‘documentary’ film form combines three pre-existing cinematic elements — photographic realism, narrative structure and modernist fragmentation. Nichols suggests that none of these three elements in themselves lead to the birth of documentary film form. Individually and collectively they can be seen as multidirectional by negotiating a course that traces a documentary lineage by describing

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each of these elements in order to indicate their contributory role in the gestation of a documentary film form in the inter-war period.  

**Photographic Realism**

Tom Gunning has suggested that early (pre-1906) cinema was essentially a sensationalist ‘cinema of attractions’ in which the optical illusion of cinematic reality is received by the audience as a precise representation. This conflation of scientific analysis and carnival-like sensationalism on the one hand purports to offer recorded proof of aspects of the world with visual precision, while, on the other, ‘soliciting attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle — a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself’.  

Nichols notes that

Documents have long been regarded as factual elements of the historical record, free from the editorialising stratagems of the orator or the interpretive leanings of the historian. Documentaries, on the other hand, are the product of a persuasive, or at least poetic, intent to have an audience see and act differently. When John Grierson praised *Moana* for its “documentary value” (but not its documentary form) he acknowledged its value as a document of Pacific Island culture despite the fictional pretext of a coming-of-age story. The qualities of the document lurked amidst the fabrication of the fiction.

Early filmmakers sought to authenticate their visual narrative through recourse to the impression of photographic realism being based on scientific norms inherent in the

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   Flaherty travelled to Samoa to film traditional lifestyles of the islanders. He discovered, however, that they had ceased many traditional practices due to the influence of European missionaries, especially replacing older styles of clothing for more European garb. The island was a visual paradise unlike the formidable terrain of the Artic. Flaherty could not build either theme or scenario for his ‘documentary’ and, although the finished film is visually remarkable, it failed at the box office due, in part, to a perceived lack of tension between humans and their environment.
27 Nichols, Bill. 2001, p. 587.
written ‘document’. Audience reception of such strategy was contingent on the conviction that what was portrayed was authentic. As Nichols points out, however

[the] documentary potential of the photographic image does not necessarily lead directly to a documentary film practice. Neither spectacle and exhibition, nor science and documentation, guarantee the emergence of a documentary film form. Movements involve historical contingency, not genetic ancestry. Something more than the ability to generate visual documents, however useful this may be, is necessary.

The potential of documentary film to relay authentic visual narrative to an audience is, therefore, contingent on the audience remaining unaware of any technical or aesthetic mediation on the part of the filmmaker.

**Narrative Structure**

Narrative inherently directs audience reception toward fiction, yet it is a component of documentary despite its avowal of a documented visual authenticity. Here Nichols sees a fictional antecedence of documentary film as narrative being able to

make time something more than simple duration or sensation. Through the introduction of a temporal axis of actions and events involving characters or, more broadly agents (animals, cities, invisible forces, collective masses, and so on) narrative imbues time with historical meaning. Narrative allows documentary to endow occurrences with the significance of historical events ... [i]t restores the mystery and power of historical consciousness.  

Recourse to narrative technique permits arguments, observations and proposed solutions to not only be advanced throughout the film but also brought to some form of conclusion. The individual in such films is the exemplar for wider collective social concerns.

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Modernist Practices

In situating documentary film as an emergent form in the inter-war period, the contribution of the modernist avant-garde needs to be addressed here. The avant-garde allowed the close proximity of modernist exploration and documentary address. Few documentaries of the period utilised character development as seen in 1920's classical film narrative. Rather modernist approaches to film opened up the stresses inherent in the forms itself and the impact of social consequences of rapid urbanisation on individuals by placing them in a social context that permits a documentary examination. In seeking an artistic movement that 'combined formal innovation with social application', Nichols argues, 'documentary filmmaking would not have been possible as a discrete rhetorical practice ... without the capacity to disrupt and make new'. 29 It is this move within the modernist avant-garde tradition that Grierson utilises to advocate a 'creative treatment of actuality' 30 . The ability of the avant-garde to disrupt a sense of the received traditional vision,

subverts and shatters the coherence, stability, and naturalness of the dominant world of realist representation. Documentaries from the period between the wars cobbled images together with remarkable abandon; fully in accord with the pioneering spirit of the avant-garde ... [c]reative treatment turns fact into fiction in the root sense of fingere, to shape or fashion. 31

The move from reliance on the indexical document to legitimise fact to the singular address of the author, Joris Ivens suggests, is encapsulated in 'the personality of the artist alone which distinguishes him from both reality and simple recording'. 32 Such a recording process would require a perception of reality completely detached from

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. pp. 592-593.
traditional modes of pictorial recording. Suggested here also is a sense of filmmaking as a codified technical pathway to new realities. Dzigo Vertov, a constructionist avant-garde filmmaker of the period asserted in 1923 ‘[m]y road is toward the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus, I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you’.  

However, this polemical standpoint is not entirely the ‘fresh perception’ Vertov claimed. The world he suggested was ‘unknown’ to the audience had already been well documented through a medium already becoming recognised by its form if not entirely by its methodology. On December 28, 1895 Auguste and Louis Lumière staged the first public film screening in the basement lounge of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. Even at this early stage, documentary film synthesises reality with sensation setting it apart from contemporary actualités or newsreels.

In the same month, Felix-Louis Regnault films a Senegalese woman during the Paris Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale. In so doing he initiated the use of the camera for ethnographic research footage. By 1914 the mere recording of ethnographic or historical detail had developed into a form of a semi-fictionalised documentary form such as Edward Curtis’ In The Land of the War Canoes, a narrative dramatisation utilising Kwakiutl actors to portray re-enactments of headhunting. The intent of early documentary film form was, therefore, to name, record and, to a considerable degree, catalogue. Such an exercise of ethnographic cataloguing could

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35 In The Land Of The War Canoes. (Edward Curtis dir, USA, 1914).
not take into account any disruption to the surrounding social world of the filmed scene. By a singular reliance on the textual, the semi-fictionalisation of early documentary processes attempted to remove any sense of contextuality beyond that contained within the film frame itself.

For Nichols, 'modernist techniques of fragmentation and juxtaposition lent an artistic aura to documentary that helped to distinguish it from the cruder form of early actualites or newsreels'.\(^{36}\) Yet such a process invites a larger question of cinema itself: that of the extent of cinema's ability to mirror the textual composition of society both on an individual and a national level. As Denise Youngblood has noted, in this context,

> cinemas that make up a national cinema will reflect both from within and from without (centre and periphery). Reflecting from within the centre of culture, cinema becomes auto-reflexive, revealing the narcissistic trace of its heritage. Reflecting from without, cinema becomes individuated – an individuated reflection of, and even upon, the nation. In the first instance cinema normalises, in the latter it particularises. In its normalising process it shows its state of decline, in its particularising it reveals its ascendant role.\(^{37}\)

National cinemas have traditionally posited the viewpoint that the national identity they purport to project is the result of a coherence that suggests a rigid unity of identity. Any sense of ambiguity and contradiction is either not presented or subsumed within processes where the only valid identity is located within the coherent whole. Anything else is expressed as deviant. Madan Sarup, among others, argues that

> we apprehend identity not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time ... there is necessarily a process of selection, emphasis and

\(^{36}\) Nichols, Bill. 'Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde; An Extract.' http://www.uchicago.edu/research/inl-crit-Ing/issues/v27n4.nichols.html. (Accessed 1/05/2006)

consideration of the effect of social dynamics such as class, nation, ‘race’, ethnicity, gender and religion ... We ... link these dynamics and organise them into a narrative: if you ask someone about their identity, a story soon appears. Our identity is not separate from what has happened.\footnote{38}

For a national identity to be given a coherent validity, individual identities have to be incorporated into the schema of a public space. Such individual narratives construct both the individual and public sphere. The stories of individuals are shaped and reshaped by exposure to the public sphere. Likewise, such narratives can be shaped by individuals for the public sphere. As Sarup points out, such public shaping of the personal results in individuals becoming, ‘sites of cultural contest, and when they become public ... who is orchestrating them? Sometimes public narratives become powerful myths, and even though we know how they are constructed, they still have a powerful force’.\footnote{39} This ability for film to visually enunciate narratives that purposefully construct such subjectivities has been a major facet of cinema since its earliest incarnations. One such manifestation emerged from the early years of the 20th century in the Soviet Union. Here the state funded film in a project to visualise public narratives in a transformation into the mythology of the new nation

In early Soviet-era film there is an additional political rhetoric of social persuasion. In such film of the period, particularly the 1920’s, the techniques of classical narrative film and emerging documentary form conflate in a montage combining avant-garde impulse with a radical, educative purpose. Nichols notes Grierson’s response to the early Soviet constructionist film texts as an attempt to redirect documentary film away from a subjective political radicalism advocated by the modernist avant-garde as both

\footnote{39} Ibid. Pp. 18-19.
a repression of formal elements and an ‘adaptation of film’s radical potential to far less disturbing ends’.\textsuperscript{40}

The ideological nature of such documentation has, in itself a long history, yet it is a history of a disguised separation. As Nichols questions, ‘how is it that the most formal and, often, the most abstract of films, the most political, and sometimes, didactic of films arise, fruitfully intermingle, then separate in a common historical moment?’\textsuperscript{41}

The challenge posed by this question requires a revisionist separation of film mythology — from the relationship between film itself and a creative repression which, Nichols describes, ‘conveys the force of a denial, and what documentary film sought to deny was not simply an overly aesthetic lineage but the radically transformative potential of film pursued by a large segment of the international avant-garde’.\textsuperscript{42}

Opposed to an auto-reflexive stance of semi-fictionalised narrative documentary form, Vertov, in a 1923 manifesto (\textit{Kinoks-Revolution Manifesto}), called for a new style of cinematic reportage that strove to document real life. Vertov, in the manifesto, suggests the camera as not merely recording events but actually creating transformative meta-narratives. He stated his aims in the manifesto as such:

\begin{quote}
I am Kino-eye, I am mechanical eye, I a machine show you the world as only I can see it ... My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of a world unknown to you.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} Nichols, Bill. ‘Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde’. In \textit{Critical Inquiry}, Summer 2001, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 581-582.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, P. 580.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p.582.
\textsuperscript{43} Vertov, Dziga. ‘Kinoks-Revolution Manifesto’ in \textit{Kino-glaz}, Moscow, 1924.
Vertov attempted to remove from cinema, and documentary film in particular, the fictional techniques employed by literature and theatre. Vertov's cinema insisted on the reportage of truth. In 1922 he began filming a series of documentaries, *Kino Pravda* (literally 'film truth') foreshadowing both later newsreels and later documentary styles, including *cinema vérité*.\(^4^4\) Anton Kaes notes that film also acts as a medium able to present a mechanical-eye perception that destabilises the creation of national identity myths. He suggests that narrative fictions in film (just as in literature) do not exist in a vacuum but are part of a dynamic social and economic process; they do not simply reflect the society in which they arise but comment on it and thereby throw light on that which is hidden or repressed in that society.\(^4^5\)

Bill Nichols similarly points out that,

the radical potential of film to contest the state and its law, as well as to affirm it, made documentary an unruly ally of those in power. Documentary, like avant-garde film, cast the familiar in a new light, not always that desired by the existing governments.\(^4^6\)

As one who celebrated the relationship between the state and its citizens in a far less disruptive manner, John Grierson can be viewed as characteristic of the radical cultural shifts within the prevailing pessimism of post-WWI Europe. Peter Morris, in placing Grierson within this *milieu*, notes that this period

\(^{44}\) *Cinema Vérité*: literally ‘film truth’, was a film-style developed by some French film directors in the early 1960's. Their films depended less on stars, sets, props or large budgets, but rather extensive use of non-actors, small hand-held cameras and actual domestic/public locations for filming. One technique was to record actual conversations, interviews and opinions made by real people. The film itself was composed in the editing room. Such films have an unrehearsed sense where the characters relax and 'are themselves'. The ultimate goal here is to show life as it really is by the filmmaker using film as an artistic medium. The documentary element of such film is embodied in a project of enlightenment through the raising of a social consciousness, or political agenda – similar to the Grierson model, but without the contrivance of semi-narrativised scenes. Perhaps the most famous example of *cinema vérité* is Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*, (1961).


was one during which older intellectual ideas lost prestige and new ones took their place. It was a period in the arts in Britain that gave rise to such radically different approaches as, on the one hand, aestheticism, formalism, art-for-art's sake and the rejection of Victorian sensibility and, on the other, an approach that emphasised social purpose and the political role of the artist in a way that was almost messianic in spirit.47

A period characterised by a struggle between fascism and communism wrought a complex of conflicting political dogma that had, at its heart, according to Morris,

a central conviction that civilisation was in crisis and, if a solution were possible, it would have to be a total one ... a revolutionary shift away from notions of matter and reason ... the rationalistic foundation of individualism and the muddle in which liberal democracy had become mired. [They] became to see their role as rescuing society from itself, perhaps even despite itself.48

John Grierson's ideological stance can only be comprehended, and interrogated, within this broad intellectual ferment. Grierson's intellectual formation also included earlier influences such as a strong familial Calvinism and nineteenth century philosophies of Hegel and Kant among others. The enmeshing of such strands imbued his life's work with a specific, politicised philosophy that not only incorporated aesthetic questions but also those of a productive, organisational nature.

Yet, despite, or perhaps because of, this philosophical background, Grierson's view of the role of the state was essentially Hegelian and classical. He affirms that,

the State is the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured. Since the needs of the State come first, understanding those needs comes first in education ...[w]e need a vast new system of education by which people will be made aware of the needs of the State and of their duties as citizens.49

48 Ibid.
Grierson viewed film and documentary film form in particular, as a propagandist tool of a technocratically elitist state that 'could indeed know everything about everything and the irrational masses who, of course, could not'.

Grierson’s prime objective here was to enunciate a vision of national identity as defined by the state, and film provided the visual symbols for such a project. William Bloom suggests that, in such a manner,

national identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols — have internalised the symbols of nation — so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity.

Grierson’s objectives would always be played out in a politically-contested cinematic space because of the contradictory nature of the exclusive list of national symbols he privileged. Change, in this scenario, can occur — but only if the celebration of the state is perpetuated. Such a celebratory role could both develop and perpetuate national mythologies and changing national allegiances. Such a project could be adapted for use of the changing elements of empire and the relationships between Great Britain and her dominions.

New Zealand could well metamorphose cinematically from a bastion of the British Empire to view itself as the model welfare state because it had the state’s sanction to do so. That Grierson, a foundational figure in the development of documentary film, who gave it its intellectual and organisational template, is seldom mentioned at any length, or discussed in any depth, in critical and analytical works within film analysis in a contemporary New Zealand environment is, I suggest, rather surprising given his

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50 Ibid, p. 27.
A seminal role in the formation of a state-funded National Film Unit during a visit here in 1940. All the more extraordinary is the scant attention paid, in such contemporary critical film analysis, to the resulting film opus that this thesis expounds as a remarkably valuable archive of cultural artefacts. Jonathan Dennis pointed out, in 1981, that

eighty-three years after films began to be made in this country, the New Zealand Film Archive was born to collect and preserve them. Films may be vital artefacts and indispensable records but because of deteriorating film stock and widespread indifference ... of the three hundred and fifty-five Government films ... only about eighty are known to have survived. 52

The origins of such a silence within a local literary debate are not at all clear or easy to locate. It is, perhaps, in the ensuing investigation that some reasons may be found and discussed — for Grierson’s documentary model formed the basis for parallel state film units in Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia and, to a lesser extent, India. In each of these countries a considerable body of work exists that discusses not only Grierson’s methodology, but the interpretation of his views and practices in a local context.

In large part, Grierson appears, contextually, as a footnote in most New Zealand film chronologies. Dennis has noted that although the New Zealand Government in 1940 invited Grierson to New Zealand as the foundational leader of the British documentary film movement, the suggestions in his subsequent report were never fully implemented. Dennis observes that this seminal act of establishing a state-funded film unit was not the result of societal debate as 'no Act of Parliament was passed, nor Order in Council issued — the National Film Unit's birth stems from a Cabinet minute exercised by Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister, under his wartime

emergency powers'. In this first chapter, I have attempted to position Grierson within a wider socio-political environment before devoting a later chapter to both his intellectual formation and his importance in defining documentary film form — a form that, I contend in this work, he exported as a project of late-Imperialism, a visual component of an Empire already disintegrating and an exemplar of his own views of the role of the benevolent state and the receptive individual. No great debate or commissioning of wide-ranging critique regarding the importance of a state documentary film unit was part of the New Zealand filmmaking ethos. However the New Zealand visit by John Grierson saw the importation of his production model for filmmaking, and the beginning of a comfortable relationship between this model and the propaganda aims of the state. In Chapter 2, I examine the development of particular forms of documentary film — most particularly the early Soviet-era films that sought to sever connection with traditional narrative and theatrical forms. Grierson’s highly selective use of montage and voice-over techniques result from his exposure to the films of Eisenstein and Vertov, among others, and compliments his belief that film is an educative, propagandist medium, especially through the use of typage. The chapter also looks at Grierson’s time in the USA and the influence of Walter Lippmann and others on his philosophical world-view, ending with Grierson’s theories of standardised cinema production.

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Chapter Two

Documentary Film: From Soviet Montage to British Cinematic Bureaucracy

This chapter investigates the relationships between Grierson’s documentary style and the radical cinematic movements of early Soviet. I have done so in order to bridge the gestational moment between an historical mimesis, theatrical mimicry and the demands placed on such a cinema to reflect a new and revolutionary imperative to act as a medium of mass education and state propaganda. Soviet film innovation, production techniques and relationships between the state and the filmmaker enabled cinema to become a component of state apparatus. With the increased availability of films from the Soviet Union in Great Britain, Grierson was exposed to these innovative productions and saw the immense potential of state-funded documentary film as both a propaganda and educational tool.

The documentary film form claims to represent a reality that by-passes the mediating eye and hand of the painter by a process of mimesis, which in the 20th century came to be defined, in Michelle Puetz’ discussion of Michael Taussig’s view, as an adaptive behaviour (prior to language) that allows humans to make themselves similar to their surrounding environments through assimilation and play ...rather than dominating nature, mimesis as mimicry opens up a tactile experience of the world in which the Cartesian categories of subject and object are not firm, but rather malleable; paradoxically, difference is created by making oneself similar to something else by mimetic “imitation”. Observing subjects thus assimilate themselves to the objective world rather than anthromorphising it in their own image.¹

Mimesis is bound to a tradition of imitation of nature. In its original Greek tradition, *mimesis* means to ‘imitate’. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the imitative properties of *mimesis* as ‘a figure of speech, whereby the words or actions of another are imitated’. Mimicry, on the other hand, is described in the same source as ‘the action, practice, or art of mimicking or closely imitating ... the manner, gesture, speech, or mode of actions and persons, or the superficial characteristics of a thing’.

Within the Western aesthetic tradition, these two concepts have assumed a centrality in various attempts to develop theories of artistic expression: often asking the question, through literary means, of just how to represent surrounding nature. Mimesis, in particular, has broadly developed a twin meaning of imitation and artistic representation. In such a broad manner it has attempted to inscribe meaning within a wide range of scenarios relating to a ‘self-sufficient and symbolically generated world created by people can [in turn] relate to any given “real”, fundamental, exemplary, or significant world’. The 20th century view, particularly that developed by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, defines such activity in the context of social practice and a complex of interpersonal relations rather than just a simple making and re-making of observed models. Benjamin, for instance, suggests that any form of language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behaviour and the most complete archive of non-sensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.

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3 Ibid.
However, Benjamin’s assertion of a totalising loss of traditional painterly mediation suggests that film, for example, cannot be associated with a mimetic process, as Murray Smith asserts,

in the sense that in the act of comprehension the spectator or reader must appeal not only to knowledge of textual and artistic conventions (genre conventions, editing conventions ...) but also knowledge of the real world, in whatever way that is defined for particular audiences.6

For documentary film form to achieve any accessibility to comprehensive audience reception, it must, by the very industrial nature of its production ‘see characters as a central aspect of such a mimetic act ... when we engage in such a act ... we do so on the basis of knowledge developed in a much broader sphere than the merely fictional ... the institution of fiction is part of our social reality’.7

The legitimacy of documentary film production is contingent on audience reception of film itself as a narrated representation of reality. As Smith would have it, ‘the mimetic hypothesis is made in the context of and tempered by the knowledge that we are processing an artefact’.8 Two early Soviet films exemplify a processing of both history and future as cultural artefact in order to illustrate a present social reality. Despite Aleika, Queen of Mars (1924) being an early example of science fiction, earth-bound revolutionary concepts are espoused through recognisable characterisations of heroic soldiers, untrustworthy royal personages and the stoic characters protecting the revolutionary ideology from attack from within and without. In the same manner, Battleship Potemkin (1925) looks back to a 1905 episode in the

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7 Ibid. p. 54. In terms of audience reception of revolutionary, educative films, patrons in 1920’s USSR cinemas witnessed what Sergei Eisenstein described as the “work of art as a tractor ploughing over the audiences psyche in a particular class context”. Even in films as diverse as Aleika: Queen of Mars (1924) and Potemkin (1925) the ‘institution of fiction is part of ... social reality’.
8 Ibid.
Russo-Japanese War, yet utilises characterisations that are received by a contemporary Soviet cinema audience as a ‘narrated representation of reality’. Past and future have merged into the revolutionary exigencies of the present.

There is a creative tension present here between the text and the acts of reception and interpretation, yet none of the components is exclusive of the others. The early 20th century Soviet filmmaker and theorist, Aleksandr Rodchenko, wrote that

> Art has no place in modern life … With the appearance of photographs, there can be no question of a single, immutable portrait ... The photograph presents a precise moment documentarily ... Crystallize man not by a single “synthetic” portrait, but by a whole lot of snapshots taken at different times and in different conditions.9

Yet Paul Ricoeur suggests that film in general has the inherent ability ‘to suspend our attention to the real, to place us in a state of non-engagement with regard to perception or action ... [I]n this state of non-engagement we try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world’.10 Ultimately, in terms of the documentary film asserting its claim to ‘present a precise moment documentarily’, Smith suggests that ‘traffic between world and text, then, runs in both directions: we need experience of the world to ‘get into’ the text, but the text itself may transform the way we understand and experience the world’.11

Extrapolating from such a flow of traffic between the world and text any transformative action of a given film text is somewhat speculative. Extending Rodchenko’s polemic into the cinematic realm, Peter Kenez notes that, in reference to early Soviet realist film


11 Smith, Murray. 1955, p. 54.
clearly it was not the workers and peasants who demanded more 'revolutionary' films. Nor were the film directors themselves interested in devoting their art to serving the twists and turns of the Party line. Of course, it would be naïve to think that the Politburo decided on the course of necessary changes in the film industry and then carried out the decisions. However, events in this industry reflected the political struggle then devastating the country.\textsuperscript{12}

Stephen Prince notes, in this context, that cinema presents 'a screen world [that] is a systematic, artistic transformation of the viewer's personal and social frames of reference'.\textsuperscript{13} Rodchenko's claim to an absolute visual realism presents a challenge to the use of the term \textit{realism} with regard to film. Prince notes that any recourse to discussion of a filmic reality is problematic in that it is a 'slippery term, with meanings that can be difficult to pin down or with connotations that ill-fit the medium of cinema ... The difficulty that cinema poses for the term \textit{realism} is that the medium involves so much artifice.'\textsuperscript{14}

Within documentary tradition, the term realism is closely tied to that of Rodchenko's photograph through the camera's inherent capacity as an instrument of reportage and documentation. Prince warns against accepting any notion that an absolute form of reality and the documenting of a visual realism are one and the same. He notes that while the camera can be used as an instrument to capture events, situations, and realities that may be transpiring independently of the filmmaker, the camera is also an instrument of style. A filmmaker's choice about lenses, film stocks, and camera positions and angles alter the raw material of the event unfolding before the camera so that it becomes a cinematic event that has a stylistic organisation and design.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Prince, Stephen. \textit{Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film}. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. P. 253.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. Pp. 259-260.
\end{flushright}
While Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* claims to a realistic portrayal of an historical event, its formalism suggests a much older lineage in its appropriation of technical aspects of the 19th century novel and the theatre. Eisenstein's use of the device of typage is one example. Typage relies on the stereotyping of stock characters from a literary or theatrical tradition and cinematically are, as James Goodwin observes, 'culturally encoded and represent conventions and traditions through which reality has already been interpreted'.

Prince, notes at this point, that documentary films exist in a state of tension, caught between the camera's recording and transformative functions. The documentary filmmaker aims to report on an event that has occurred, yet, to do so, he or she must transform that event into cinema. How, then, does the concept of realism operate within the documentary tradition [and] are documentary films essentially like fiction films in that they speak a language of structure and style that is unique to the cinema?

While Prince asserts a difference between documentary and fictional film form, he admits that documentaries can resemble fiction films. Both require the filmmaker to confront the logistics of camera placement, shot editing, image continuity, and problems of inserted plot narrative. Complicit in this process, he argues, are two unique characteristics distinguishing the realism of documentary film from fictional film. He points out that audiences and most documentary filmmakers assume the existence of a non-cinematic referent, some person, event, or situation that exists prior to, and independently of, the film that is being made. This assumption does not hold for fiction films in which the characters are clearly made up for the purposes of the story. [A second point] is the perceived absence of fictionalised elements. These might include the presence of actors performing a role or a narrative structure which alters the time chronology of the event.

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18 Ibid.
Prince stresses ‘most documentary filmmakers’ — however, Eisenstein ruptured the technical role played by the ‘non-cinematic referent’. He saw value in recourse to theatrical conventions to document realism to enable a cinematic essence not located within an individual character’s emotions or a particular, individual shot. Rather it is to be found, as he puts it, ‘in the relationships between the shots just as in history we look not at individuals but at the relationships between individuals [and] classes’.\(^{19}\)

For Eisenstein, the technical and theoretical boundaries between documentary and fiction film are deliberately blurred when, as Prince suggests, ‘a filmmaker wants to offer a stylistic commentary on the events or people the film depicts’.\(^{20}\)

For Eisenstein typage provides such a bridging device between genres. Goodwin observes that

Eisenstein’s concept of typage is dialectical in its combination of actuality in type-casting with the conventionality in stereotyping... the influences on film characterisation came ... from his earlier interests in caricature, masked drama, and *commedia dell’arte*... the stereotypes and stock characters in these forms are culturally encoded and represent conventions and traditions through which reality has already been interpreted.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) Goodwin, James. 1993, p. 70.


An example from *Potemkin* illustrates this point. The character of Dr. Smirnov is played, in the film, by a non-actor with large, artificial whiskers — a device suggestive of the posturing of political power with an already received tradition of reception of the Captain in *commedia dell’arte*, the devious, political buffoon. Goodwin parallels this stage stereotype with its accepted role as a ‘type that derives from the history of Italy’s struggle for independence from Spanish domination and thus as a result of the people’s collective cultural production over a historical era’.22 The character of Smirnov can then be placed alongside members of the crew as exemplars of the ‘worker as hero’. Eisenstein utilises typage to portray the officers as representative of an oppressive class, the troops under their command as massed mechanicals and the sailors as ordinary people taken up in epochal events. The ruling class are inevitably portrayed as individuals and the ordinary people as a heroic collective. In this process of the individual being subsumed into a collective type, film becomes the vehicle by which modes of documenting the revolutionary imperative for mass audience reception are most efficiently conveyed.

![Battleship Potemkin (1925): Dr. Smirnov: typage for the oppressors.](image1)

Battleship Potemkin (1925): Dr. Smirnov: typage for the oppressors.

Recourse to typage allows Eisenstein to ‘orient the issue away from a matter of actuality as it is captured onscreen and toward a cultural basis in reality for

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22 Ibid.
understanding what the screen represents’. For Eisenstein it is the audience’s reception of an impression of the character rather than the essence of reality embedded in that character that is of greatest importance. In a theoretical bridge between visual art and the artifice of cinema, Gombrich suggests that ‘all art is conceptual in that it originates in the human mind rather than in the visible world itself’. A receptive tension remained a potent, political and creative force within early Soviet film. Goodwin regards such a process as creating types that enable characters to replicate actuality. An example from this viewpoint is the working class:

distinctive for its physical power, artlessness, and collective identity. From this ideal all other social groups — owners, managers, military, priests, the lumpenproletariate — deviate. The antecedent in Marx for such a typology is his Hegelian formulation that the proletariat realises the Idea within history.

This visualisation of a demarcated cultural grouping presumes a homogeneity that sees culture as an active, well-organised unity. David Novitz has suggested that there is a colligatory or collective function embedded within the term ‘culture’. He proposes that when this [collectivity] is grasped, it is plain that this word is standardly used to bring together different patterns of behaviour, values, beliefs and knowledge in different ways. And this in no way entails that the meaning of the word is in constant flux. What it is used to refer to may no doubt change, but its sense will remain unchanged.

Eisenstein’s typage, visualised as a cinematic evidence of specifically demarcated sections of society, standing in as exemplars for individuals is, in itself, contaminated by the need to demarcate a cultural viewpoint to suit political interests and to have that viewpoint received as the only logical outcome. Antonio Gramsci spoke of this as a hegemonic process where dominant classes pursue their own interests within a

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid. p. 71.
25 Ibid. p. 73
given community and have the rightness of such an exercise ordained by consent of the dominated classes. For Gramsci, such hegemony is absolutely necessary for stable government in capitalist societies, and it involves developing what Karl Marx has called ‘false consciousness’ amongst the dominated classes. This suggests that it would be difficult to isolate evidence which can disabuse people of a particular way of demarcating or seeing their culture … [resulting in] the impossibility of [in turn] recognising the dimensions and degrees of cultural hegemony within one’s society and no way at all of ascertaining its effects.27

The realism of the documented actuality is thus demarcated, cinematically, through recourse to type and type conveys a visual encoding that creates a seamless coalescence of the life of the masses with that of the state.

However, hegemonic principles fit similarly with their mirror political and cultural images. Peter Kenez points out

Soviet cultural policies [of the period] were equally ambivalent. The Bolsheviks considered enlightenment a helpmate in the struggle for socialism, and in their vocabulary “culture” was an unambiguously positive word. At the same time they jealously guarded their ideological hegemony. As time went on they discovered that cultural pluralism implied dangers. The ideas and values that some of the artists [including Eisenstein by the end of the 1920’s] transmitted contradicted the world view the Bolsheviks deeply believed.28

Goodwin locates a bridging theoretical stance in the work of Georg Lukács and notions of the typical. For Lukács ‘the destiny of a typical character is not narrowly an individual fate but the dynamics of the historical situation which the work represents. Character thus does not simply become a static symbol of class; it is an expression of the process of social development’.29 Early Soviet realism created synonymic chains that expanded viewer’s reception of that transition from class

29 Goodwin, James, 1993. p.73.
symbol to social development by identification of incidental class conflict transmuting visually into a mass movement of cultural struggle. However, despite Lukács’ assertion regarding the dynamics of historical representation, the debate here centres on just how the term realism is applied cinematically. As Bertolt Brecht remarked, ‘[r]ealism is an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such’.  

The realism embedded in the process of typage is here not a replication of the actuality of the historical characters or events but rather a presentation of a particular viewpoint on characters. As Bela Balazs notes, in this context, the director is ‘showing ... class and showing it immanently ...; showing not man in his social class, but social class in men’.  

For Eisenstein, as an exemplar of the early Soviet montage filmmakers, the realism offered by typage was one of a technical rupture that sought to disarticulate impressions of individualised story, of narrative continuity or historicity. Any semblance of accepted traditions of cinematic narrative could thus be reduced, through recourse to montage and typage, to the level of the histriette in the belief that this draining of the text could create a universality of reception; the common man replaced by common reception.  

With such a new technology, Walter Benjamin suggests, a new level of receptivity evolves, ‘among the fracture points of artistic formations, [and] one of the most powerful is film. Truly, with film, a new region of consciousness comes into being’.  

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31 Ibid. p. 72.
32 Eisenstein, Sergei. ‘Notes for a Film of Capital’, Maiej Sliwowski, Leyda, and Annette Michelson, October, No. 2, Summer, 1976, p. 16.
For Benjamin, the interruptive and disruptive capabilities of film montage potently focus on revolutionary film realism. As he points out,

[i]nterruption here has not the character of a stimulant, but an organising function. It arrests the action in its course, and thereby compels [the audience] to adopt an attitude vis-à-vis the process. In the midst of the action, it brings it to a stop, and thus obliges the spectator to take a position.34

If a new ‘region of consciousness’ enters the cinematic realm at a point of fracture from established visual traditions, then attempts at filmic realism run concurrently with a mediated rendering of an ideologically constructed reality. Andre Bazin noted that the conventions of cinema meant utilisation of realism as an aesthetic device

the service or at the disservice of realism, it may increase or neutralise the efficacy of the elements of reality captured by the camera ... One can class, if not hierarchise, the cinematographic styles as a function of the gain of reality that they represent. We can thus call realist any system of expression, any narrative procedure which tends to make more reality appear on the screen.35

This empirical stance involves a sense of play between the transient notions of real and reality. Louis Althusser locates this dilemma not as a confrontational play involving subjectivity and objectivity as an accepted constituent of such an empirical stance. Rather he sees a characterisation of knowledge defined through, and by, the object ‘of which it is knowledge’. He writes: ‘The whole empirist process of knowledge lies in that operation of the subject named abstraction. To know is to abstract from the real its essence, the possession of which by the subject is then called knowledge’.36 This essence suggests that, in such a cinema, the striving for a greater reality is, in fact, already at hand merely to be exhibited by technical process. However, Althusser’s stance points to a contradiction. It is not merely, as Bazin

34 Ibid.

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would have it, that a specific cinematic realism is produced in its own self-contained moment, but, as Colin MacCabe suggests, 'film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather [it] is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the positions allowed to subject and object) produce a certain reality.'\textsuperscript{37} There is no one discourse that, in and of itself, presents a filmic truth. Rather, sets of contradictory visual discourses are received by the spectatorial audience in equally contradictory ways. MacCabe points out that within any given film text such discourses 'may be different 'views' of reality which are articulated together in different ways. Most documentaries ... bind the images together by the verbal interpretation of the voiceover commentary ... the spectator must [therefore] be placed in a position from which the image is regarded as primary'.\textsuperscript{38}

For the spectator there is no possibility to engage in a process of verification of the validity of claims to actual reality in documentary film. There is, equally, no on-screen dialogue between sound and image texts possible for the audience. The spectator is now, both in terms of cinema and ideologically, the central focus of attention. The contradictory nature of the screen reality creates awareness in the audience of the discourses confronting them — in the sense that they are watching a highly stylised set of constructed positions that attempt to elucidate equally articulate ideological positions. For MacCabe these positions can only legitimately exist by 'depending on obscuring the relation between text and reader in favour of a dominance accorded to a supposedly given reality; but this dominance, far from sustaining a 'natural' relation, was the product of a definite organisation which, of

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
necessity, effaced its own workings'. This relationship, of viewer to text, is both compromised by constructed realities, and engaged in a process of identification with the on-screen social relations. While the viewer is aware of watching a film, it is the engagement of the viewer as part of a collective audience on which any perception of reality can be determined.

Through audience engagement with cinematic processes of ideological signification, documentary film can both illustrate philosophically and at the same time expand the potential of film form beyond established ideological borders. As Peter Morris points out, the European intellectual climate of the early 1930’s grew to maturity during the period of post-war pessimism, cynicism and disillusionment ... older ideas lost prestige ... [and] it was a period in the arts in Britain that gave rise to ... a rejection of Victorian sensibility [and] ... an approach that emphasised social purpose and the political role of the artist.

Into this milieu a tangential shift to the embryonic British documentary film movement and the rise of state-funded propaganda cinema through the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board, the General Post Office Film Unit, the Film Centre and Imperial Relations Trust forms the second part of this chapter. Although post-war cynicism would suggest that such shifts in uses of new technologies would create a climate of further rupture within established film production, it is more suggestive of a series of transitions that such technologies could develop for the purposes of the state.

The words of John Grierson, the most prominent figure in British documentary film movement throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s, form a bridging moment between the

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polemical cinematic production of early Soviet filmmaking and the application of radical film forms such as montage, typage and acted documentary scenarios to the bureaucratic imperatives of Britain — both in terms of domestic reception and that of the Empire. In terms of ideology there is a remarkable similarity in utterance between Soviet filmmakers, such as Eisenstein, and Grierson in terms of the appropriation of a film style for state purposes. For Grierson, speaking directly into the British environment, the echo of radical politics is used to create the suggestion that, even in the capitalist West, film provided a vehicle by which formalism could be avoided. In viewing film as art Grierson stated that

> [t]hey tell us that art is a mirror – a mirror held up to nature. I think this is a false image ... art is not a mirror but a hammer. It is a weapon in our hands to see and say what is right and good and beautiful, and hammer it out as the mould and pattern of men’s actions."\(^{41}\)

The difference between the Soviet imperatives, to solidify a nascent proletariat in collective cinematic typage, and contemporary British film documenting a similar sentiment is in its selectivity. When Grierson speaks of documenting ‘work’ and ‘workers’ he is, as Morris is at pains to point out, speaking of ‘some work’ and ‘some workers’.\(^{42}\) He observes that it is the omissions that create the greatest impression of ideological difference: ‘absent being any depiction of the group of workers to which Grierson himself belonged – the technocrat in government’.\(^{43}\) Such selective temporalities, Jonathan Crary suggests, echoes Benjamin, in that

> perception within the context of modernity, for Benjamin, never disclosed the world as presence. One mode was the observer as flâneur, a mobile consumer of a ceaseless succession of illusory commodity-like images. But the destructive dynamism of modernisation was also a condition for a vision

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\(^{41}\) Cited in Morris, Peter, 1987, p.27.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid. p. 28.
that would resist its effects, a revivifying perception of the present caught up in its own historical afterimages.\textsuperscript{44}

Grierson’s camera is, in essence, the kino-eye of the flâneur – intent more on locating types to represent meaning without the mass audience sensing any of its constructedness.

Locating Eisenstein’s cinematic production as an exemplar of modernism also creates a transitional reference point to other modes of films styles that lay claim to documentary realism. In the present chapter I have attempted to locate attempts at a striving towards a film form documenting realism within its particular historical moment. Annette Michelson, in ‘Film and the Radical Aspiration’, discussing a much latter manifestation of film realism (the radical film movements of the 1960’s), looks back to this earlier moment in cinema in order to locate a turn towards documentary realism in the historical moment.\textsuperscript{45} David Bordwell observes, of Michelson’s vision of the ‘radical aspiration’, that she ‘looked back to a historical moment in which formal experimentation fused with a commitment to social transformation … [she] believed that Eisenstein’s commitment to the double-edged radicality of the modernist project could inspire contemporary artists’.\textsuperscript{46} However, this early form of documentary realism, whether the radical, montaged ‘otherness’ of Eisenstein’s polemical film production or, the state-supported (and state-supportive) documentary style of John Grierson should not be seen as mere historical artefacts serving as foils to a dominant Hollywood style whose value lies only in a perceived contestation or rejection of such dominant film production. It is in the abstractions of Eisenstein’s

\textsuperscript{45} Michelson, Annette. ‘Film and the Radical Aspiration’. In \textit{Film Culture Reader}. P. Adams Sitney (ed.), New York: First Cooper Square Press, 2000, pp. 404-421.  
montage techniques, his reliance on the abstractions implicit within typage, that transitions can be made to other geographies of cinema production. His radical imagery functions, in Bordwell’s view, as ‘a kind of abstract commentary on the action, making the viewer aware of an intervening narration that can interrupt the action and point up thematic or pictorial associations’.

However diverse these two points of entry may, at first, seem to be, they both allude to a view of cinema set apart from its mode of production. For Eisenstein the entry point to a practice of cinematic realism was a working knowledge of theatrical and literary technique placed at the service of the Bolshevik Revolution. For Grierson it was an immersion in the political and educational philosophies of American academic Walter Lippmann during the early 1920’s. Lippmann argued that notions of Jeffersonian democracy, stressing the primacy of personal rights and decision making in the complex interconnectedness of the modern state were outmoded. Much of the traditional democratic structures had already broken down in the early 20th Century largely because, Lippmann felt, ‘the ordinary citizen could not be expected to amass enough ever-changing information to make intelligent decisions about … government regulations … or: the entrance into and prosecution of a world war’. Lippmann further expanded this view, which influenced Grierson in his later approach to documentary film, by noting that, ‘modern citizens, now in massive numbers, had become apathetic, indifferently or grudgingly allowing themselves to be governed by

47 Bordwell, David. 1993, p. 44.
48 Quite clearly there were other influences, philosophical and otherwise, on the formation of Grierson personal and professional ideology. Peter Morris suggests that neo-conservative influences such as Charles Mauras, Georges Sorel, Giuseppe Mazzini, Pierre Lassere, Vilfredo Pareto inflected at least part of Lippmann’s later work. While Grierson acknowledged encounters with some of this body of work, he remained firm in his confirmation of Lippmann’s influence in ‘crystallising’ his views, both on politics and the politics of film. This aspect of Grierson’s life and work is expanded in Chapter 3.
increasingly large, specialised, and powerful administrative machinery over which they had no control'. Grierson also noted that, through recourse to a documentary film form, 'even so complex a world as ours could be patterned for all to appreciate if we only got away from the servile accumulation of fact and struck for a story which held the facts in living organic relationship together'. However, the Grierson model, with its implicit coercive perspective and a cinema that narrates its own realism attempts to adopt a life as a cultural artefact. All human artefacts consist of materialisations of labour; they incorporate labour and realise its intentions. There is an interrelationship embedded within the filmic artefact which can be noted as a duality of use value, the artefact as the product of labour, and the artefact as utility. This later aspect — the ability to serve a need or collective practical purpose locates Grierson within his own ideological conception of film, one that is specifically dependent upon the institutional conditions of the marketplace. Grierson's 'Everyman' correspondingly transmutes into the standard referent embodying a standardisation of product and audience.

For Grierson to remain faithful to Lippmann's assertion regarding the end (or at least contamination) of Jeffersonian ideals of individual participation within a democracy, the over-arching educative power of film in creating the 'new society' would be in its standardisation of the individual. In this process Grierson, aligns himself with the Eisenstein montage model where typage creates the exemplar of class which, in turn, stands in for the individual character.

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50 Ibid.
51 Ellis, Jack. C. 2000, p. 22.
52 Horkheimer and Adorno state that film as a cultural product is thus constructed in terms of 'no independent thinking must be expected from the audiences [instead] the product prescribes every reaction'. Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. Dialectic of Enlightenment. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, p.137.
Grierson’s development of a standardised industrial cinema template is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, but his return from the USA provided him not only the environment in which to initiate a documentary style attractive to both audience reception and corporate largesse. Adorno observes, within this environment, modes of standardisation, such as typage, not just of character, but also of film itself. Such a process is not necessarily the result, however, of mass production techniques, such as those of Hollywood. He notes that, ‘the expression industry [contained within the concept ‘culture industry] is not to be taken literally. It refers to the standardisation of the thing itself ... such as [as specific type of film genre] ... and to the rationalisation of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process.’ In Grierson’s hands Eisenstein’s ‘double-edged radicality’ becomes an experiment in both stylisation and pseudo-individualisation which lead toward the possibilities of film as a tool of mass marketing.

In this chapter, I have attempted to place Grierson, the filmmaker, within his age through a discussion of some of the political and cultural flows that impacted on new technologies of film that allowed for, in turn, new pathways of mass education and propaganda opportunities. If Grierson spoke of a ‘new society’, it was one that was celebratory of the role of the state in the lives of its constituents. The influence on Grierson, of Eisenstein and other filmmakers from the early Soviet-era, was marked, not so much by a reverence for the political imperatives that brought such a revolutionary cinema into being, but a realisation that such new ways of making film presented a radical step forward in mass communication. However, in order to ‘place’ Grierson within such a new era, it is important to discuss Grierson’s early life and the

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influences beyond film that marked his development. The ensuing chapter looks at both Grierson's early life and influences, and the experience he gained from working within the early marketing arms of the British Government. It is in this environment that Grierson developed his documentary 'ideal'.
Chapter Three

John Grierson and the British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946

[The Empire Marketing Board] was to change the connotation of the word “empire”. Our original command of peoples was becoming slowly a co-operative effort in the tilling of soil, the reaping of harvests, and the organisation of a world economy. For the old flags of exploitation it substituted the new frontiers of research and worldwide organisation ... History is determined by just such buildings of new sentiment. It was clear that we had to learn to make our building deliberate.

John Grierson.¹

In order to place the various state apparatuses that played an integral part in the rise of the British Documentary Movement, and Grierson’s dominant role in both its inception and ongoing process of definition, within a somewhat confused marketplace, I wish, at this point to insert John Grierson as both an historical and iconic character into this marketplace. This chapter will attempt not only to ‘place’ Grierson in historical and filmic context, but also seeks to balance the accepted line regarding Grierson’s importance in the origins of documentary film in the early 20th century with revisionist views expressed within more recent critique.

Fragments of an Early Life.

John Grierson was born in the small Stirlingshire fishing village of Deanston in 1898. His birth date is of some significance in terms of cinema. Born the same year were, René Clair (in France), Sergei Eisenstein (in Russia), Joris Ivens (in Holland), Rouben Mamoulian (in Armenia), Preston Sturges, Leo McCarey, and Walter Lang (in the United States). I suggest that Grierson can stand among such notables of early

cinema despite the fact that he produced few films, in terms of the director as *auteur*, and directed only one documentary bearing his own name.

Grierson’s father was a Calvinist and his mother a free-thinker. The father was a Conservative and the mother an early Socialist. The young Grierson grew up in an atmosphere of learning and argument, his father being a schoolteacher, yet always against the background of the sea and the traditional lifestyle of the Hebrides fishermen. Grierson spoke later in life of three strands, learned in early life, that influenced his pioneering documentary filmmaking. He received his passion for rigorous, ongoing education from his schoolmaster father, an innate fascination with politics and a desire to see political action through public service from the influence of his mother, and a life-long interest in the arts. This last aspect was, in many respects, something he grew into, for it was not characteristic of his family. He spoke of the ability of cinema, even in its early forms, to delineate the rupture between new technologies and old traditions. He noted that, ‘The significant thing to me ... was that our elders accepted this cinema as essentially different from the theatre. Sin still, somehow, attached to play-acting, but, in this fresh new art of observation and reality, they saw no evil.’

The Calvinist tradition, into which Grierson was born, intertwined an abiding respect for the transformative power of education, the all-pervasive nationalism stemming from a Scotland of dependency and poverty which led to a strong, highly individual form of Socialism. The Scottish educational system of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was, in large part, the result of the foundational Calvinist, John Knox who

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insisted that there ‘would be a church in every parish and in every parish a school’.\(^3\) In an impoverished Scotland, this educative imperative led to the view that learning was empowerment for the individual and a worthy investment in the future of the state.

In 1915, aged seventeen, Grierson entered Glasgow University as a classics scholar. However, in less than a year he had enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve – as an ‘illegal’ since the minimum age requirement for recruiting was nineteen. He served for three and a half years in the North Sea and the coast of Scotland. Returning to University in 1919, he became immersed in both study and the politics of the ‘Red Clyde’. Grierson later commented on the influence this turbulent period has on his subsequent work,

> The Clydeside cult was the most humanist in the early Socialist movement. This was its deep political weakness, as Lenin himself pointed out ... while recognising this ... the over-riding humanist factor did not thereby lose its ultimate validity as the harder forces of political organisation have taken control of the thoughts we had and the sympathies we urged. ... what I may have given to documentary – with the working man on the screen ... was simply what I owed to my [teachers].\(^4\)

During this period Grierson associated with the Russian émigré, and later noted political analyst, Alexandre Werth. From Werth, Grierson became aware of the avant-garde artistic movements developing across Europe. Together they edited a volume of English translations of Russian poetry. At this time Grierson’s educational interest shifted from a focus on literature to one of political philosophy. Graduating with an M.A. with distinction in English and Moral Philosophy, Grierson lectured, for a time, at Armstrong College, University of Durham. Commenting on this time he pointed out that ‘it constituted of teaching Plato to a lot of old clerks and spinsters ... who

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\(^3\) Ellis, Jack C., 2000, p. 7.

\(^4\) Ibid. p. 12.
evidently wanted to know about Plato, but would have been better occupied raising hell about the sumps of the city, the malnutrition of its children, and its horrible schools.\textsuperscript{5} Despite his dislike of some aspects of his work at Armstrong College, Grierson was able to leave teaching after being awarded a Rockefeller Research Fellowship in Social Science. In 1924 he left for America and the University of Chicago.

**American Adventures: 1924-27.**

Grierson’s choice of the University of Chicago and its distinguished School of Social Science was not entirely arbitrary. He had become aware of the power of cinema as separate from its entertainment values. In 1933 he wrote

\begin{quote}
I have no great interest in films as such ... I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist ... [it] is to be conceived as a medium ... capable of many forms and many functions ... a professional propagandist may well be especially interested in it [as] it gives generous access to the public.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Grierson became attached to members of the faculty, including Charles Merriam, the pioneering political scientist, and Robert Park, the sociologist developing media studies as a legitimate field of academic study. Grierson became intrigued by the power exerted over the general, and in particular, the newly arrived immigrant, population by the influential popular press. As Ellis relates, Grierson noted that these newspapers,

\begin{quote}
With their headlines and photographs, their simplifications and dramatisations ... served as [an] informal ... means of leading young Lithuanians, Poles, Germans, Italians, Irish and Czechs away from ... the old country and into Americanisation of one sort or another. The news report of the European press had been shaped into the news story ... the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Ellis, Jack C. 2000, p. 17.

active verb was the key: something does something to something; someone does something to someone.\textsuperscript{7}

The writings of Walter Lippmann also became an important influence at this time. As has already been briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Lippmann’s concern was for a radical re-evaluating of the liberty of the citizen in the modern state and the need for a form of democratic education encapsulating the rights and privileges of the population and the responsibilities of the state. Grierson observed of his association with this writing that, ‘even so complex a world as ours could be patterned for all to appreciate if only we got away from the servile accumulation of fact and struck for the story which held the facts in living, organic relationship together’.\textsuperscript{8}

Although Grierson pursued an acute intellectual curiosity in the use of film as a mode to document reality and as an educative tool of the state, his stay in Hollywood during 1925-1926 coalesced such intellectual pursuits with the pragmatic economies of cinema’s industrial base. As Ellis points out

\begin{quote}
Grierson’s economic sense told him that if he could not control the essential process of star-making, there was no way to finance films through the established industry and its forms ... what would become documentary film would have to be modelled on other precedents and to look elsewhere for its support.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Moving to New York Grierson wrote film reviews, in particular for the \textit{New York Sun}. Reviewing Robert Flaherty’s 1926 film \textit{Moana},\textsuperscript{10} Grierson noted, famously, that, ‘\textit{Moana}, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, has documentary value’.\textsuperscript{11} This is the first recorded reference to a film as \textit{documentary}. In this Grierson also announces film’s ability to appropriate specific values to on-

\textsuperscript{7} Ellis, 2000, pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{8} Hardy, 1946, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{9} Ellis, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Moana}. (Robert Flaherty, dir., USA, 1926, 85 min.)
screen images. This set apart such film form from the established French denotation of travelogues and expedition films as documentaire. In Flaherty’s work, Grierson saw the mixture of realism of record and poetics of expression that formed the basis of his own negotiation with documentary form. Grierson left the United States in 1927 to return to Great Britain and his work with institutional filmmaking.

**Marketing the Empire on Film — From Revolution to the Market Place.**

The Empire Marketing Board (E.M.B.) was established in Britain in May 1926, by the British Government, as an organisation specifically founded to propagate the further development of official and commercial interest in the operations of Empire and to devise policies and programmes to ‘consolidate imperialist ideals and an imperial world view as part of the popular culture of the British people’.12

![Branding the commodity with Empire ideals.](E.M.B. Poster, 1926, UK Crown Copyright)

Through this project of advertising the empire to itself the existing and former colonies were explicitly shown their ongoing importance to Britain. As Tara

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Brabazon comments on this point, ‘the desire was to increase the breadth and scale of the ‘home market’, which was now expanded to encompass all the overseas territories of the empire. Not surprisingly, a confluence of ‘home’ and ‘overseas’ resulted in complex alliances … ‘home-grown’ produce could now come from afar.’

If the world into which Eisenstein produced his cinematic radicalism was one of a particular form of ideological ascendancy, John Grierson, arriving back in Britain after years in the economic and political explosion of a post-World War 1 United States of America, found a completely different scenario. As Jack Ellis points out,

\[\text{[the Britain he returned to was beginning its decline from the heights of imperial power. It had suffered terribly in the war, not only in loss of lives; as a result of the enormous costs, its economy was in serious trouble … economic unrest and militancy of the trade unions, especially the coal miners increased, leading to the general strike of 1926 … the social outlook was dour: a sort of stasis existed that would become more severe during the depression years of the 1930’s.}\]

Yet, despite this economic, social and political turmoil, British films seldom, if ever, portrayed the contemporary reality. Julian Symons observes, in this context, that

\[\text{the General Strike of 1926 never took place, trade unions did not exist and when sympathy was expressed for the poor it was not for the unemployed but for those struggling along on a fixed income … film makers ignored the changes occurring in the society around them and described a world where the social order was as fixed and mechanical as that of the Incas.}\]

In 1926 only five percent of films exhibited in Britain were actually British-made. The Cinematograph Films Bill of 1927 attempted to regulate for quota systems to ensure the making and screening of British films. However, the resulting productions, though guaranteed a screening outlet, were of poor quality. The thus-named ‘quota

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14 Ellis, Jack C. 2000, p. 31.
quickies’ were unpopular with both audiences and exhibitors and merely brought British filmmaking into further disrepute.16

Consolidating an imperialist world view. (E.M.B. Poster, 1933. UK Crown Copyright)

This direct, interventionist strategy laid down imperial trade relationships that were expressed succinctly in Grierson assertion that the E.M.B. ‘chang[ed] the connotation of the word “Empire”’. The attempt at a seamless reassertion of the old imperial relationship from Empire to nascent Commonwealth, in the inter-war period, did not necessarily end the idea of Empire. As Stuart Hall points out,

empires come and go. But the imagery of the British Empire seems destined to go on forever. The imperial flag has been hauled down in a hundred different corners of the globe. But it is still flying in the collective unconscious.17

In view of Hall’s later observations, the comments of the E.M.B’s founder, L.S. Amery, are apposite. Speaking of the formation of the E.M.B, he wrote,

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what we wanted to sell was the idea of Empire production and purchase; of the Empire as a co-operative venture... above all, as a co-operative venture between living persons, interested in each other’s work and each other’s welfare. Our task was not to glorify the power or wealth of the Empire but to make it live, as a society for mutual help, a picture of vivid human interest, as well as of practical promise.\(^{18}\)

While the original intention may have been a benign reaffirmation of imperialist connectivity through trade relations, Ellis reminds that

The broader purpose implicit from the outset ... was an enlightened effort to substitute for the decaying military and political ties of Empire the economic ones of Commonwealth. To achieve this goal, the E.M.B. had necessarily to inform public opinion about the Commonwealth and Empire and thus become the first government body in Britain to undertake public relations work on a large scale and to make wide use of all sorts of publicity media: newspapers, posters, radio, exhibitions, and films.\(^{19}\)

The founding Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board (E.M.B.) was Stephen Tallents, an acknowledged pioneer in the field of public relations. Elizabeth Sussex points to this expertise in that ‘the E.M.B. evolved new techniques in marketing, advertising and research, of which the formation of a film unit was only a minor part’.\(^{20}\) However Tallents’ view of film as a form of mass communication of governmental imperatives dovetails remarkably with the ideological background of the far more radicalised Soviet cinema of Vertov and Eisenstein. Tallents wrote of his ‘art of national projection’ in a publication entitled ‘The Projection of England’ (first published in 1932 and reprinted by Film Centre in 1955) that

the only sensible prescription is to pick out the best team that can be found, to put them to grips with their problem, and to leave them, free of undue pressure or interference, to follow ... the argument in which their own intimate handling of the material will quickly engage them.\(^{21}\)


\(^{21}\) Sussex, Elizabeth, 1975, p. 5.
John Grierson was appointed by Tallents, as a films officer at the E.M.B., on Grierson’s return from the USA in February, 1927. Having completed his first official, and sole directorial, film for the E.M.B., Grierson, with considerable flair, arranged a showing of the resulting *Drifters*\(^2\) to an elite audience including Sergei Eisenstein.\(^3\)

*Drifters* resembled, in essence, many of Eisenstein’s montage films of the period: the use of rapid inter-cutting of shots (not always relational), a typage of characters to stand in for individual character development and the choreography of the film using a through-composed orchestral score. The use of non-synchronous sound allowed for concentration on the visual montage and the resulting film, in Grierson’s view, meant he ‘was, in fact, creating the documentary film movement’.\(^4\) For Eisenstein and other Soviet film-makers the political imperative was the transmission of ideological education through a film medium. For Grierson, using similar techniques, the imperative was that of commerce.

![Follow-the-Flag](image)

‘For the old flags of exploitation it substitutes the new flags of common labour’. John Grierson

(E.M.B. Poster, 1926. UK Crown Copyright)

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\(^2\) *Drifters*. (John Grierson, dir., E.M.B., U.K., 1929.)

\(^3\) Sussex, p. 5.

\(^4\) Ibid. p. 8.
Grierson pointed to this, stating, ‘Sell the British public the idea that cocoa comes from one of our great colonies, the Gold Coast, and do it in … either five or seven minutes’.25

At this remove from the late-1920s, it is difficult to locate, with absolute clarity, the separation of practice and politics. If Grierson, like Eisenstein, wanted to show ‘life as it really is’ then one enters a somewhat contaminated site of production. Samantha Lay observes that the resulting attempts at social realism through recourse to such practices and politics tend to ‘occur outside of the text, which nonetheless influence the form, structure, content and style’.26 While both Grierson and Eisenstein were highly conscious of the pervasive influence of the traditional Hollywood style of unified production, their intent was to portray realism beyond that of narrative film form. However, as Lay notes, such filmmakers are

reacting to the way the world is constructed by the majority of mainstream films and the practices informing that construction … as they are commenting on aspects of contemporary social life. Furthermore, social realist texts often comment on, correct, or break away from previous conventions and practices previously regarded as ‘realist’.27

Grierson, through his work at the E.M.B., engaged in this evolutionary production mode, as Andrew Higson points out, through a reforming and sometimes revolutionary political spirit that have caused ‘British social realist texts [to be] propelled to varying degrees by a mission, ideal or goal which within the text can manifest itself as a kind of moral realism’.28

25 Ibid. p. 9.
27 Ibid.
28 Higson, Andrew. ‘Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the “Kitchen Sink Film”. In A. Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema.* London: Cassell, 1996, pp. 133-56.
There is a difficulty entrenched within a position that seeks to separate practice from politics as they are both components of cyclical, merging patterns. These components inform each other and borders between them are permeable; the politics of an individual filmmaker, for instance, can lead to a particular mode of cinematic expression. Such a specialisation limits 'or shapes the practice and production of texts and their place in the market'.\(^{29}\) For Grierson and his preferred documentary form this meant a conceptual social purpose that

meant they stood outside of the mainstream film industry in Britain, but Grierson's mission to educate and inform audiences through documentary allowed him to acquire an uncomfortable patronage from government. The lack of funds and resources encouraged the collaborative unit style of production associated with the documentary movement in Britain in the 1930's and 1940's. Their commitment to documentary 'truth', a sociological rather than an aesthetic commitment, is reflected in their practice, from the use of non-actors and 'ordinary people' to location shooting.\(^{30}\)

A point of difference can be located here between the Soviet portrayal of the masses as a heroic collective and the British view of the 'working man'. Elizabeth Sussex explains that, 'while giving the documentary movement every credit for putting workingmen on the screen ... the fishermen in *Drifters* [for instance] ... are shown from what would today be regarded as a middle-class, Establishment viewpoint'.\(^{31}\)

The films that the E.M.B. and Grierson produced during the late 1920's and early 1930's exemplify the ennobling virtue of hard work. Sussex concludes, in this regard, that the 'attitude in these films is ... that it is not part of the general purpose to get too close to working people as people, to reveal their pay or their living conditions, the

\(^{29}\) Lay, Samantha, 2002, p. 10.  
^{31}\) Sussex, Elizabeth, 1975, p. 42.
price paid to them or the price they paid ... so the honest hands and honest faces said it all.32

The role of Grierson, as the unashamed propagandist, the direct insertion of 'honest hands and honest faces' into his documentary films, and the resulting films hymning the imperatives of a benevolent, monopolistic State is a complex relationship between the filmmaker, benefactor and the film technology itself. For Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer this is a relationship constructing the integral systems of the culture industry. Seeing the imprint of capitalism in the operation of organs of technological and social differentiation, they observe that newer technologies available to Grierson enabled the visualisation of a

culture [impressing] the same stamp on everything ... yet the city housing projects designed to perpetuate the individual as a supposedly independent unit in a small hygienic dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary — the absolute power of capitalism ... the striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular.33

If any one trait can be said to be indicative of British documentary in the Grierson mould, then it is a lack of any motivation to respond to moral panic. Society is a carefully structured entity; the commercial interests of that entity are pursued for the benefit of those at the centre of the British Empire as much as those at its periphery. However, the importance of the fledgling documentary film movement was that, in its first years, it was not necessarily the films themselves (which were often small-scale and their small budgets showed this on-screen) but the environment such experimental filmmaking encouraged. Such experimentation could be undertaken in a state-funded entity such as the E.M.B. The British films may well have attempted to

32 Ibid.
secure a vision of Britain as the domestic hearth of the Empire but were, in their parallel desire to educate a mass audience, as politically motivated as the films of the radical Soviet cinema of the period. There is a perceived tendency for the individuals of Soviet Cinema to be grouped together as a type of unified collective. However, the reverse was also the case: Eisenstein and his contemporaries had surprisingly little commonality of expression. What was a unifying force was their commonality of purpose. Grierson and his fellow filmmakers, working under the auspices of various state bodies, created a body of film that documented a similar commonality. Grierson deployed documentary for the propaganda purposes of both state and empire. In this project he employed a form of industrial film production that aligned itself with the production of the same commodities that the film’s themselves sought to promote.

The E.M.B. had a short life span, despite its successful record as a marketing arm of government. In 1933 the Imperial Committee on Economic Consultation and Cooperation sanctioned the closure of the E.M.B. as the prevailing view was that it had achieved its goals of revitalising empire trade patterns and, in light of the prevailing economic strictures of the Great Depression, a fully fledged public relations unit was not feasible. However, the General Post Office, which had set up a film unit was enthusiastic about the potential of film as a propagandist and educative tool. Grierson was invited by Tallents, who had moved to the G.P.O., to organise the film unit along the same lines as that at the E.M.B. Grierson moved his production base seamlessly from film about empire trade and the place of an imperial ‘everyman’, to, as Tallents stressed, film

with its pictures of life in Great Britain and in so many parts of the Empire [the production unit of the E.M.B.] afforded the best possible setting for a special series of films depicting those postal, air mail, telegraphic and telephonic resources [all the responsibility of the G.P.O.] by which
communications are maintained within the United Kingdom and the rest of the Empire.34

However small-scale the film production of the E.M.B. and later G.P.O. productions were, they represented, in the words of Paul Rotha, a directing colleague of Grierson's

the first attempt to portray the working-class of Britain as a human, vital factor in present-day existence, to throw on the screen the rough labour of the industrial worker, the skill of the trained craftsman and the toil of the agricultural worker.35

The move of state-funded filmmaking to the G.P.O. allowed Grierson and his team to expand the scope and scale of their film production. Experiments with sound led to actual workers voices describing their jobs in *Cable Ship* (1933).36 In, perhaps the most critically recognised film produced by the G.P.O. Film Unit during this period, *Night Mail* (1936)37, Grierson assembled a remarkable spectrum of talent that included a synchronised sound track of specifically accented verse by W.H. Auden to music specifically written for the film by Benjamin Britten; all designed to precisely match the rhythms of the locomotive delivering the mail. These two films, among many others, set both the tone and pattern that was to remain a hallmark of Grierson's future cinematic work. Evocative sound would be privileged over speech, non-diegetic and diegetic sound allied to a blend of the visual narrative by a theatrical commentary. Roger Manvell, for one, described these films as 'the last great films of ... industrial romanticism'.38

By narrating the documentary in a rhetorical manner, Grierson moved the emphasis from work to the worker, from nation to a small corner of the factory floor,

34 Ellis, Jack C., 2000, p.71.
36 *Cable Ship*. (Alexander Shaw and Stuart Legg, dirs., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1933).
37 *Night Mail*. (Harry Watt, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1936).
diminishing the sharp focus that would have enabled a more critical engagement with both the characters and the issues raised by their lives and conditions of work. This perceived lack of engagement was, in part, the result of the film’s financial and bureaucratic contingencies. They were made, not for commercial release, but for specialised exhibition by government departments and instrumentalities. This marked a crucial turn in the films themselves becoming invaluable instruments of state machinery. After 10 years with various government agencies, Grierson left the G.P.O. to expand documentary horizons beyond filming government propaganda. Reflecting on this, Grierson noted that the move was inevitably directed toward ‘the vast operations of oil, gas, electricity, steel and chemicals, to the municipal and social organisations, and to the journalistic treatment of social problems’. Despite the large body of work produced at both the E.M.B. and G.P.O. there was no national advisory body to oversee production nor any form of consultancy facilities to documentary filmmakers. If, as Grierson asserted, there was now a ‘documentary movement’ then some form of centre or institution, providing access to networks, facilities, training, studios and so on, was required. The result was the formation of Film Centre Ltd.

The formation of Film Centre Ltd in 1937 was positioned as ‘a private company to carry on the business of consultants and business advisors on all matters relating to films’. Contained within this short extract is the pivot point for the expansion and export of the Grierson model of documentary film. Film Centre provided the base from which its associates could not only ‘produce or distribute films … but to advise sponsors, supervise production, make arrangements for distribution, undertake

39 Grierson, John. ‘The Course of Realism’ In Footnotes to the Film. Charles Davy (ed.), London: Lovat Dickson, p. 137.
41 Ellis, Jack. C., 2000, p. 110.
scenario work and research, open up new markets, and in general stimulate and guide the development of the [documentary] movement as a whole. Film Centre facilitated Grierson’s view of the exhibition of documentary film in a non-theatrical context to a broad audience. He stated that ‘the main future of documentary is where it is now: financed by sponsors in the name of public education’. In the turn from producing films promoting the export of commodities, Grierson, in effect at Film Centre, now produced film as a commodity for export. Since the mid-1930’s British documentaries had attracted some international attention which led to co-productions with the governments of Ceylon, Switzerland and Iran. In 1938 Grierson noted that we are supposed, in this country, to hold the secret of film propaganda ... several foreign governments have been examining the work of documentary groups, analysing their methods of distribution, cross-examining the people responsible, on how films can be fitted to different national purposes. Japan, Turkey, Egypt, Denmark, Brazil, Portugal, Belgium, among others, have made special efforts to convey the British experience overseas.

However, it was the relationship with the United States that most marked this international export network.

In 1935, a film library was founded at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and representatives of the library collected a selection of British documentaries for United States distribution. As a result, a series of Rockefeller Foundation fellowships enabled Film Centre staff to travel to the United States to gain first hand experience of the American scene and, more importantly for Grierson, to inform audiences of the British documentary. The Museum of Modern Art Film Library acquired some 13

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42 Ibid. P.111
44 The films include Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1934, 38 min.), Line to Tsihierva Hut (Alberto Cavalcanti, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1937.) and Dawn of Iron (John Taylor, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1938.)
British documentaries as the basis of an international circulating film library. Ellis writes of this period by referring to

an unpublished Film Centre report of October 1939 ... [which] reviewed the success of British documentaries in America ... These films of British life were being seen because Americans wanted to see them, requiring no solicitation from a sponsor ... to most American critics, education authorities and students of cinema, the documentary film is Britain’s main contribution to the motion picture.46

Concurrent with the flow of film to and from Great Britain and the United States, was an exchange of film personnel. Grierson wrote that, ‘a flow of students [of the British documentary genre], mostly from American universities and Washington departments, has come to London to examine the special possibilities of the film in public administration and social education’.47 Although some influences, in terms of film style, are discernable, the greater technical finesse of the American documentary films produced at this time set them apart from the British model. It is in the propaganda use of film by such government instrumentalities as the U.S. Film Service and the Resettlement Administration that similarities occur. In The Plough that Broke the Plains48 director Pare Lorentz restaged several scenes to create a greater effect in a film that had both a propaganda and educational role. The film’s dual role lauds the Roosevelt administration’s New Deal at the same time exposing the devastating problems caused by the misuse of agricultural land leading to the ‘Dust Bowl’. Characters are replaced by ‘types’ and, as also with its British counterpart, relied on a commissioned musical soundtrack and voice-over narration.

46 Ellis, 2000, p. 118-119.
48 The Plough that Broke the Plains. (Pare Lorentz, dir. US Resettlement Administration, 1936, 25 min.)
The resulting international marketing circuit, formed and developed by the Film Centre in the late 1930's saw Grierson travelling widely. Initially he travelled under the auspices of yet another body designed to develop the Empire relationships with the Imperial Relations Trust which was set up by the British Government in 1937, and had similar aims as the earlier Empire Marketing Board — to reinforcing imperial ties between Britain and the Dominions. Ellis observes that the Trust, 'viewed film as 'an eminently suitable medium'\(^{49}\) and through its advisory film committee it appointed Grierson as film consultant. Grierson now became not only the internationally recognised face of the documentary movement, but also the anointed expert who would export the film form to the Empire. At the end of 1937, Grierson was invited by the government of Canada to advise it on the possibility of expanding film activities within a governmental framework.

A Canadian government official, Ross McLean, in a memorandum to the Department of Trade and Commerce, emphasised 'that Canadian films, designed mainly to attract tourists, did not answer all the questions or fully arouse the interest of British audiences. What were needed ... were films on industry, community life, natural resources ... and ... Canada as a nation'.\(^{50}\) McLean went on to stress that for a dominion within the Empire, 'there is no sounder basis for the expansion of trade than the deeper and wider knowledge of differences in tastes and modes of life. These can be conveyed most effectively by interpreting in a wider sense the functions of the Motion Picture Bureau'.\(^{51}\) This Bureau, initially set up in 1914 as a pioneering effort in the promotion of trade and commerce, with special emphasis on encouraging tourism, was formally organised in 1921. Stressing the scenic wonders of Canada it

\(^{49}\) Ellis, p. 122.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
had produced hundreds of short, silent films, though by the 1930’s, its output had greatly contracted due to budget constraints caused by the Depression.\textsuperscript{52}

With Grierson as consultant, the template for all reports on state-funded film activity throughout the Empire would be developed. Grierson’s advice to the Canadian Government was

(1) that all government film work be coordinated by one agency; (2) that a film officer be appointed to advise the government on production and distribution; (3) that more persons with creative ability be added, temporarily, to the staff of the [pre-existing] Motion Picture Bureau; (4) that the scope of the Bureau’s production be widened.\textsuperscript{53}

On May 2, 1939, The National Film Act came into law, setting up the National Film Board of Canada. A comment by Grierson is apposite at this point. Its words would be echoed, in one form or another, in places as geographically diverse as Australia, South Africa and New Zealand — places, among others, where national film organisations were established on the Grierson model. He stated

the various considerations … represent a system of balance: all designed to protect creative workers on the one hand from administrative processes unrelated to the nature of creative work and creative people; and, on the other hand, from the sort of bosses which the democratic system must unavoidably sometimes ease into administrative power.\textsuperscript{54}

For Grierson, the important facet of any legislation setting up a state film unit was an inbuilt flexibility to enable the development of documentary in light of future developments: both technological and political. Interestingly, the United States Film Service was relatively short-lived due, in greater part, to Federal Governmental refusal to incorporate aspects of similar models from Great Britain and Canada.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{54} Ellis, p. 127.
Forsyth Hardy, commenting on the demise of a state-funded U.S. film agency, states, 'public institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library did what they could to make documentary as practised in Britain more widely understood ... but ... [the film] industry was not convinced that this new form of public relations would sufficiently serve their ends. The U.S. government was equally reluctant'. In October 1939, Grierson was appointed the first government film commissioner of Canada. Despite initial reluctance, and his attachment to the Imperial Relations Trust, Grierson accepted the post, despite, above all else, not being a Canadian citizen.

Chapter 3 has focused on the way in which Grierson developed links with both filmmaking networks internationally and government promotional, educational and propagandist requirements. Grierson's cinematic legacy in Britain was a library of nearly 400 films either produced by him or his staff members at one or other of the government institutions that funded his work throughout the 1930's. Grierson's imperial legacy was the various visits sponsored by the Imperial Relations Trust resulting in state-sponsored national film units in South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is this export procedure of documentary cinema as an operation of late-Empire, and its assumption by Britain's far-flung dominions as a part of a formative national iconography, that is the focus of Chapter 4.

Chapter Four

Grierson’s Cinematic Pilgrimages

If you think I do not feel I have been in the business of conditioning the imagination of mankind, you’re crazy. But then every god damn rabbi, every prophet, every priest before me has been in the business of conditioning the imagination of mankind. I derive my authority from Moses!

John Grierson.

By the time John Grierson was appointed film commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada in 1938 his methodological approach to documentary film had become generally accepted as the received traditional model. Henry Breitrose encapsulates this model of Mass Observation as ‘[an] inductive logic method of documentary: finding the general by accrediting the specific, constructing a whole from the sum of its parts, asserting the universal by the summation of the individual’.¹ To this Grierson infused forms of advocacy by assuming the posture of ‘creative actuality’. Brian Winston attempts to disrupt any sense of a seamless reading of the Grierson model, arguing surely, no ‘actuality’ (that is, evidence and witness) can remain after all this brilliant interventionist ‘creative treatment’ (that is, artistic and dramatic structuring) has gone on. Grierson’s enterprise was too self-contradictory to sustain any claims on the real, and renders the term ‘documentary’ meaningless.²

Winston’s rather trenchant view of the constitution of filmic reality attempts to problematise the relationship between subject and spectator. In claiming that there is little distinction between fact and fiction in film he points to what is the central posture of this chapter: the constructed nature of the medium as commodity.

Contemporary digital manipulation of the photographic image has rendered obsolete,

in the popular consciousness, the belief that the camera does not lie. In noting that it was ever thus, Breitrose points out that

it doesn’t really matter, because whether or not the camera lies, the filmmaker can ... the camera tends to lie and the audience tends to believe ...[and] inescapably, human intentionality, imagination, and intervention mediate the representation ...so the synthetic properties of film are irrelevant to its status as fact.3

Winston, however, observes that, even in early British documentaries, this critical point was contestable. In *Man of Aran*4, director Robert Flaherty created a representation of the picturesque lifestyle of the islander’s hard life which was, in terms of its construction as a record of the day to day struggles of the inhabitants, not a fiction. He states, ‘Flaherty applied his pioneering insight that entertainment narrative forms could be met by crafting a story out of the everyday. In short *Man of Aran* was a documentary’.5 Its placement, as Bill Nichols identifies, is in ‘the gap between life as lived and life as narrativised’.6 Flaherty’s work narrativised the islander’s within such a documentary gap even though, in terms of the characters within the narrative of the film, all the major ‘roles’ were in fact played by actors.7

A documentary maker versed in the Grierson tradition, George Stoney, reflected on the ‘poetic potency’ of film as a document beyond that of direct cinematic forms, and noted

I blush to think of all the agiprop dramas I “re-enacted” myself back in the late Forties and Fifties. Then, most of us were filming real people and situations and basing our plots on real events; but our ‘messages’ (and there was always a message) were being determined by our sponsors. We were working in a tradition of documentary set by John Grierson’s English and

4 *Man of Aran*. (Robert J. Flaherty, dir., G.P.O.Film Unit, U.K., 1934, 76 min.)
Canadian units which few of us questioned at the time. Today, most of those documentaries are considered stylistically archaic. Yet on second viewing, one often finds in them precise observations and flashes of insight.  

While the documentary films of the 1940's and 1950's may seem tradition-bound and formulaic — structured as they often are in terms of the problem and the solution, much of what has, in the context of 21st century critique, been deemed narrative fictions, such films (and their production) need to be viewed within the context of the limitations imposed by cinematic technologies of the time. Grierson, Flaherty and others worked with heavy and cumbersome 35 mm equipment that meant sound quality could not be guaranteed outside of a purpose-built sound stage. Documentary makers of the time had no other recourse than to stage, re-stage or rearrange the filmic reality.

Winston's critique of the Grierson documentary model requires interrogating the central criticism of his work: that these documentaries privileged a conservative, statist social integration that avoided any controversial engagement with social meaning. There are five major points to this revisionist stance on the Grierson tradition. The turn from engagement with the construction of social meaning was initiated by a marked concentration on individuals. The individual is seen, in this environment, as the major societal component and community is devalued as a collective instrument for social change. The individual is, in turn, aestheticised as is the subject matter around the individual. Winston refers to this as the 'prettifying aesthetics'. The constructedness of the form leads to a placement of the individual as the perpetual victim somehow validating such a position as a socially accepted niche.

From within this niche arises the problem-moment, which is then concurrently shown

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within a context where problems are always placed conveniently near a solution. Such a constructed ideology of vision within the Griersonian documentary tradition privileges a regime of empathy for the individual portrayed and a sympathetic reception on the part of the audience.

Man of Africa. (G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., Cyril Frankel, dir., 1953) The film of tribal mass migration as the result of soil depletion may assume a pro-ecological tone, but it fails to address the social and political issues accompanying such a calamity. Instead Man of Africa relies on a romantic tale to develop its narrative unity.

There are few, if any, traits of an analysis of causality regarding social malaise and no discernable anger exhibited at the processes that may have brought about such conditions. Grierson seems content to expose and highlight the calamities befalling the proletariat in a manner that can be viewed as exploitative. To such an approach, Winston asks what social benefit was visited upon these subjects ‘whose personal misery and distressed were exposed’.

However, despite the assertion by commentators, such as Winston, that the Grierson model killed off the early, radicalised montage tradition of biting social satire, the documentary oeuvre it inspired positions a view of reality that allows for particular creative separation. Such separations within the technologies of film suggest that ‘it is possible to have epistemological relativism but at the same time to have a good

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reason for selecting one description of reality before another'. Roy Bhaskar locates such a stance within the contradiction of knowing reality yet not knowing how much reality is actually known. He suggests that visual technologies have a 'progressive and accumulative character ... in which there is growth as well as change'. For all that the revisionism of critics, such as Winston, point to the flaws within the Griersonian documentary model, it remains a mode, albeit imperfect, through which to access historical claims to reality.

If the Grierson documentary camera is a less than a perfectly formed cognitive window on the world, it can only be authentically sourced through recourse to its contemporary environment. In Basil Wright's documentary, Song of Ceylon contemporary audience reception marked out the film as a beautifully visualised component of the commerce of Empire. The Grierson-produced film, on behalf of the sponsors, Ceylon Tea Propaganda Bureau and the Empire Tea Marketing Board, certainly does not attempt to re-constitute the subjects as exploited workers, nor interrogate why, as Gary MacLennan suggests, 'both the workers and the audience needed to understand how the workers were positioned within the exploitative totality that was the British Empire'. John Corner notes that documentary needs to balance discursive innovation and referentiality with a requirement, in light of the Grierson tradition of documentary production sponsorship, to steer beyond 'avant-gardism' in avoiding the possibility of a deliberate alienation of its ‘referential axis’.

11 MacLennan, Gary. 'On Winston's Claiming The Real' In Film-Philosophy, @ http://www.film-philosophy.com/portal/writings/maclennan2. (Accessed 22.6.2006)
13 Song of Ceylon. (Basil Wright, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1934, 38 min.)
The Griersonian documentary was, in its essence, as much a commodity for export as the industrial produce, tea and agricultural goods of Empire that made up the bulk of its subject matter. However, what invigorated the export potential of such films and the techniques involved was the inspiration of Grierson’s organisational ideology. His adoption of the state as omnipresent sponsor for documentary film was due, as Peter Morris points out, to

his Hegelian conception of the state [as] the determining factor in his vision of the role and purpose of the documentary film [and] it was logical ... for the state to support its production and dissemination ... but it was an Idealist conception of the state, not the state of political parties, practical politics and Cabinet government. Inevitably, Grierson’s vision of himself as one of the leaders of the new forces of thought and appreciation would clash with the policies of his political masters ... [However] the Grierson documentary was ... welcomed because it celebrated the state and encouraged identification with collectivity.16

Yet this methodological dependence on the totalising influence of the state as both sponsor and beneficiary of documentary imagery presumes a rhetoric that can be contained within the filmic medium. Bill Nichols states that this process is inevitably marked by its own excess and ruptures production constraints in that the attempted totality of vision within documentary film is ‘always referred to but never captured, history, as excess, rebukes those laws set to contain it; it contests, qualifies, resists, and refuses them’.17 If Grierson’s documentary model purports to capture reality and an Idealist project, does it not also enter into productions of discursive excess creating documents as history that stand as, Fredric Jameson notes, the ‘absent cause, it is always inaccessible to us except in textual form’?18

However it is this commodification of documentary film form that enabled its geographic dissemination as a late-Empire project. As Paula Rabinowitz has noted, ‘the documentary calls upon its audience to participate in historical remembering by presenting an intimate view of reality ... however, as filmic construction it relies on cinematic semiosis to convince its audience of its validity and truth’. The Griersonian tradition asserts its privileging of the right to screen the cultural nation rather than engage in the ideological forces that form and nurture such an assemblage. Toby Miller exposes a cinematic rupture inherent in the relationship between nation and state. For Grierson, in contrast, they are one and the same. However Miller points out that the national audiovisual space should focus on the extent to which it is open, both on camera and off, to the demographics of those inhabiting it. No cinema [operating] in the name of national specificity is worthy of endorsement if it does not attend to sexual and racial minorities and women, along with class politics. Is there a representation of the fullness of the population ... on the screen? If there is not, then such cultural protectionism is the smokescreen designed to privilege the dominant.

It is, however, this imbedded ‘cultural protectionism’ that marked the Grierson documentary form as a viable commodity for export and emulation, which participated in what Simon During calls the ‘import rhetoric’, both aesthetically and geographically from the core imperialist values of Great Britain and the dominions of the periphery. Grierson’s production model both required and nurtured the centralising influence of government sponsorship. The rhetorical template of such a documentary model was clearly designed to mesh seamlessly with the template of a centralised administrative core. Peter Morris stresses the importance of this point.

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when noting, in reference to pre-World War 2 Canada (but equally, as will be discussed later in this chapter), to New Zealand, that

[the country] was then going through a massive phase of centralisation under the guidance of a cadre of key civil servants. This group believed in state intervention in the economy, in central planning and a diminution of the power of the provinces ... power had to be concentrated in the hands of the only government that could achieve these ends — and at the disposal of the only civil servants in the nation with the vision and skills to make Canada the kind of country it could and should be ... Grierson's ideology would mesh quite closely with ... this group ... and much of his rhetoric during the war echoes the rhetoric of those other technocrats.22

Grierson's production model, which he inserted, in varying degrees, to the reports he presented in the late-1930's to the governments of Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand, always insisted on a centralised management and production structure. In this, structure reflected ideology in that the traditional hierarchical structure of vertical production with a clear chain of command was replaced by a horizontal arrangement where everyone involved in this lateral configuration reported to the head of production. Deane Williams asserts that the export of Griersonian documentary form was, in no small part, due to its perception as the iconic imperial film commodity. He observes that the visits Grierson made to various outposts of Empire were inevitably preceded by laudatory literature regarding the E.M.B. Film Unit and the prominence of Grierson to the discourse of realist film furthermore

for film communities outside Britain these essays often preceded the availability of the films Grierson had been involved in and invited a particular reception of the films. Not only were the films made by Harry Watt, Edgar Anstey, Basil Wright, Arthur Elton, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Robert Flaherty understood as 'Grierson films', they were often understood through the vision for them that Grierson proposed.23

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22 Morris, Peter. 1987, p. 29.
This cultural, evangelistic project of late-Empire was part of ‘the propaganda for an expanding empire [which] created illusions of security and false expectations that high returns would accrue to those who invested beyond its boundaries’. O’Brien’s observations of the economic imperatives of the imperial project in the relationship between metropolitan heart and the peripheral territories of the dominions of the British Empire are pertinent even at so late a stage as the 1930’s. With various dominion governments engaged in administrative centralisation, addressing cultural difference and sustaining established socio-political programmes, the Grierson documentary model and its inherent propagandist inclination was attractive to both the metropolitan centre and the peripheral colony.

Edward Said suggests that long after the geographic intensities of imperial networks have diminished there remain a system of powerful imperial linkage ‘that lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices’. Grierson’s visits to Australia and New Zealand in 1940 were not only attuned to the domestic cinematic requirements of individual state propaganda institutions but were specifically designed to reinforce imperial relationships in light of an unfolding war between Great Britain and the Axis forces in Europe. Such an imperative was inextricably bound to Grierson’s promulgation of documentary film as a communications component of the state. The visits to Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the period 1938-40 were in the context of concerns raised by the Imperial Relations Trust regarding the strength of imperial relationships on the eve of war. A previous visit to Canada in 1931, under the auspices of the E.M.B., saw Grierson required ‘to report

on the strength of the nationalistic spirit in Canada and especially the strength of the
English spirit in Toronto’.  

During the second visit Grierson was required to investigate not only the strength of
such ties to Britain but to enhance them towards the contributions required of the
Empire to the impending war effort and ‘to survey the possibilities of setting up a
film centre in each of these countries’.  

It is interesting to note here that the effort
was not expended solely on the Empire in that ‘the specific goal of Grierson’s
assignment was to set up a North American propaganda base to urge Canada and
(more importantly) the United States into and active partnership with Britain at war, if
war came’.

Williams adds that ‘it doesn’t seem unreasonable to assume that Grierson’s role in
Australia and New Zealand was not to be much different’.  

The colony was not
necessarily privileged over its dominion status within the Empire. The conferring of a

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26 Nelson, Joyce. The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend. Toronto: Between the Lines.
1988, p. 37.
27 Ibid. p. 43.
28 Ibid. p. 33.
29 Williams, Deane, 1999, p.3.
sense of nationhood via the medium of film did not necessarily create a separate
nation, apart from Empire, in Grierson's mind. Grierson states that his plan was for a
national film authority that would 'unite the country and serve national purposes
without advocating nationhood' However, at this crucial point, the Canadian
National Film Board was to operate not only in the interest of Canada but also as a
North American propaganda base, encouraging the United States to discard long held
isolationist policies and reinforcing Canada's partnership with Great Britain. Canada
was not seen, within this purview, as embodying a national validity apart from its
status as an integral part of the British Empire.

The result of Grierson's activities on behalf of the Imperial Relations Trust's existing
government documentary production in Australia, the Films Division of the
Department of Information (DOI), metamorphosed dramatically. It evolved from a
film unit dutifully lauding government programmes and engaging in a passive
celebration of the landscape for tourism purposes, to determinedly focussed wartime
propaganda. The DOI was

formed five days after the outbreak of war [and] was to coordinate and
censor all media information released in Australia dealing with the war ... and the Film Division of the DOI was intended to coordinate government
and commercial film activity and to mobilise the film medium for national
ends.

By 1940, the DOI was making small-scale newsreels from various battlefronts and
distributing them theatrically to emphasis 'not only the Australian war effort ... but
[placing] it in an international context, interspersing Australian footage with material

31 Shirley, Graham and Brian Adams. *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, 2nd ed. Sydney:
available from its overseas branches.\textsuperscript{32} Grierson’s \textit{Canada Carries On} newsreel series was exhibited throughout the Empire, though often only to government departments for training purposes. In New Zealand, the New Zealand National Film Board documentaries adopted a popular magazine approach to its \textit{Weekly Review} newsreels, also heavily promoting the war effort. This extraordinary increase in state-funded documentary film production arose from the exigencies of the onset of world war and the consequent need to ensure that propaganda channels were solely focussed on producing information for domestic consumption and engaging neighbouring countries in the confrontation the Empire now faced. Certainly the imperatives of wartime propaganda meant that all avenues of dissemination would be utilised to maximum effect. Paul Tiessen situates a cinematic origin for the Griersonian documentary in

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the American influence ... that was targeted as the enemy, the threat, the other. The unbridled capitalist product of Hollywood necessarily cut a broad audience swath ... with a sense of a new ‘internationalisation’ by offering a single, unifying, and visual language to all its viewers.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Using the model of new media formulations emerging in Britain during the late 1920’s, disparate groups throughout the Empire sought to establish public broadcasting models in an effort to create a cultural buffer between imperial principles and American media forms. In the early 1930’s, Canadian Graham Spry spoke of ‘Canadian radio for Canadians ... Britannia rules the waves — shall Columbia [CBS in the US] rule the wavelengths?’\textsuperscript{34} Like Grierson, Spry was a utopian and argued for media systems that could, and should, portray a dominion of

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
Empire taking part in the new internationalism. The state 'represented an idealism of civility and order, with the capacity to improve the moral and cultural lives of its Canadian audience, even the mandate to assimilate its 'ethnic' parts'.

The perception of State mechanisms capable of maintaining a resilient creative and critical cultural distance from the threat of hegemonic media production from the United States laid the groundwork for the importation of the Griersonian documentary. Tiessen speaks of this project exhibiting 'the country-wide defences developed by the widespread operation of mass-media screenings could be made to follow the ideological and cultural interests of a nation state.' While clearly predicated on a traditional view of liberal ideals, the Canadian environment was echoed in not dissimilar manner in Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. It is noteworthy that the establishment of state-run radio networks preceded, yet anticipated, the rise of state-funded documentary film units. In South Africa, Grierson's visit in 1949 was preceded by the establishment of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. In this case, and the Canadian before it, Keyan Tomaselli and Edwin Hees note Grierson's view of a public services media mistakenly assumed, 'a linguistically, ideologically and culturally homogeneous South African society; and ... fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the South African political economy'.

In both the Canadian and South African environment a long period of deliberation preceded the establishment of a state film unit — The Cilliers Film Committee reported to the South African government on the possibilities of a state film board in

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35 Ibid. p. 81.
36 Tiessen, 1993, p. 5.
1943, Grierson’s report to the government was received in 1954 and the National Film Board was established in 1964. Similarly, the Canadian government had engaged in a protracted exercise of reportage prior to the establishment of the National Film Board under the terms of the National Film Act in 1939. Grierson had presented his report in 1938 at the invitation of the Canadian government, though the final visit was a result of sponsorship from the Imperial Relations Trust.\(^{38}\) In 1950 yet another reformation of the Canadian board was undertaken with a revised National Film Act. Despite the consultancy and reportage of Grierson, the Canadian model was the only one to utilise major parts of the report in the practical establishment of a film unit. In the case both of the South African and Australian film units, both governments placed heavy reliance on the foundational figurehead represented by Grierson for the establishment of state film production to proceed in practical terms. As Albert Moran notes, in relation to the transformation of state film production in Australia, “to understand this change, we must begin with the 1940 visit to Australia of John Grierson, ‘the father of the British documentary film’."\(^{39}\)

The New Zealand scenario was somewhat different, in terms of legislative process, but the genesis of the New Zealand National Film Unit in 1941 was reliant on the anointing presence of Grierson. He had already visited Australia under the auspices of the Imperial Relations Trust and his 1940 visit to New Zealand was less about the stress placed by government on the report he produced, than the impetus such a visit would have on the production of state-funded documentaries. The 1941 report by Grierson to the New Zealand Government on the formation and structure of a national film unit was followed by the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser signing such a production

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system into law by an Order in Council under prevailing wartime legislation. There was little or no parliamentary debate and equally scant attention paid to Grierson’s report.\textsuperscript{40} Such parts of the report that remain recall almost exactly similar recommendations regarding administrative structure and production methods offered to the Australian government. The important proviso in both reports was that, in Grierson’s mind, editorial independence was important only in the sense that the successful promotion of government initiatives was the overriding consideration of any national film unit. During his visit Grierson saw the 1940 film, \textit{Rewi’s Last Stand}\textsuperscript{41} stating afterwards that

\begin{quote}
It was more important that New Zealanders should have produced that film than that they should see one hundred films from Hollywood. Not that good films were not made in Hollywood, for they were, but because in the film they had just seen, a nation had expressed itself.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Mita Merata points out that this view of Grierson’s, typical of his encouraging hyperbole during the visit

\begin{quote}
Unwittingly, or tactfully, overlooks the fact that up to that time, the idea of Aotearoa standing on its own feet with its own identity as a Pacific nation, was an absurdity. The country was still very much a British colony, firmly tied up in knots to Mother England’s apron strings.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Grierson’s methodological approach to both the production of documentary film and its highly specialised reception was firmly grounded in the bedrock of imperial ideals, despite his repeated affirmation of the vision of the commonplace as a marker for the benevolence of the state — something that could be translated into the socio-political agenda of any branch of the British Empire. This societal vision was dependent on,

\textsuperscript{40}Dennis, Jonathan. \textit{The Tin Shed: The Origins of the National Film Unit}. Wellington: NZ Film Archive, 1981, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Rewi’s Last Stand}, (Rudell Hayward, dir., NZ, 1940)
\textsuperscript{43}Merata, 1996, p. 43.
Noel Annan asserts, 'the forces of social control (religion, law, custom, convention, morality) which imposed upon individuals certain rules which they broke at their peril'.

The imperative for the New Zealand Government was a film celebrating the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Despite wartime strictures, the 1940 national commemoration had been successful even though it was essentially a celebration of European colonisation. The event was commemorated in a 50-minute film, *One Hundred Crowded Years* (1940), a production of the Government Film Studios in Wellington. The Labour Government had first leased the facility in 1936 and bought it outright in 1938 primarily to produce tourist publicity films for the overseas, and specifically, the British, market. With the onset of war in 1939, there was little production activity beyond some government war information newsreels. *One Hundred Crowded Years* was the result of years of intense lobbying by groups of filmmakers and government officials led by journalist J. Stanhope Andrews. The Government Film Studios had produced, in 1940, a film about wool production that presented a national landscape without human faces. Filmmaker John O’Shea pointed out, that at this period

Andrews knew the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, and the upshot of the general concern about New Zealand having little or no film identity (which would be valuable for troop and civilian morale) was the visit by the doyen of the British documentary movement, John Grierson, fresh from his triumph with the National Film Board of Canada. With the almost obligatory overseas precedent to buttress local arguments presented to the government, Fraser was persuaded to appoint Stanhope Andrews, producer of the film studios at Miramar, rename the New Zealand National Film Unit, and establish it as part of the Prime Minister’s Department with the

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45 *One Hundred Crowded Years.* (Cyril James, dir., Government Film Studios, New Zealand, 1940, 50 min.)
Producer having direct access to him ... the Labour Government committed the country, small though it was ... to funding film production.46

For the Fraser Government, a state-run documentary film unit would prove a useful propaganda apparatus to initiate and maintain a national consciousness of the validity of the tightly structured environment of both a wartime economy and an all-embracing welfare state that was ‘very much bound by committees, local boards, and, at times, rigid moral codes: a country which silenced freedom with law and ... [had] become a Community of Obedience, rather than a Community of Will’.47 The sheer weight of self-congratulation poured out by government-sanctioned celebration during the 1940 commemoration was not entirely free of criticism. Poet Dennis Glover complained that politicians ‘rose to the platform, hanging in every place their comfortable platitudes like plush, but no one remembered our failures’.48

In the gestational process of the New Zealand documentary film-form there is present a highly state-specific encoding of state imperatives in light of its mass audience reception, and a parallel connection to a national historic record. Rabinowitz points to this relation by noting that

history tracks the whole train of events connected with a country, society, person, thing ... but a document, whose obsolete definition encompasses teaching, instruction, warning, is lodged in an object which furnishes evidence or information. The relationship is clear — history relies on documents to support its narrative.49

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49 Rabinowitz, 1993, p.121.
While the New Zealand Government may have interpreted film as a useful instrument of propaganda, the wider context of the country’s relationship with Great Britain places a considerable strain on the medium to celebrate visually the connection with a triumphalist tone necessary to meet political expectations.

In a process attempting to formulate (or speculate about, at the very least) a national identity conformant with governmental imperatives, the documentary film documents the nation in order to support the hegemonic narrative. There are problematic resonances present within such a process in the New Zealand context as, contrary to the classical Grierson model, the New Zealand National Film Unit documentaries were specifically designed to be screened to and received by the cinematic mass audience. The sheer popularity of Unit productions, such as the Weekly Review, with mass audiences who saw the documentaries in the context of popular entertainment, created an unanticipated pressure to make plain the nature of the Great Social Experiment that the Labour Government had sustained since assuming power in 1935.

By 1941, John Grierson had, in the context of wartime New Zealand, come and gone — as he had in similar contexts in Australia and Canada, and later in South Africa, leaving the documentary template both in terms of production structures and the content and style of the films themselves. For the New Zealand Government, Mita observes the 1940’s was quite a busy time for film production, though none of it was in the production of fiction films, and almost all of it came out of the National Film Unit. The New Zealand Weekly Review fostered our feeling of character and individuality. The government prided itself on providing a progressive welfare state for its people, and academics said that this was the
finest social laboratory experiment in place anywhere in the world. This, along with the war effort, helped to develop a sense of our nation as community, a fine, multiracial, harmonious society. On those terms, the National Film Unit was an unqualified success.  

However, throughout the period of World War Two, and in its immediate aftermath, the National Film Unit documentaries' exhibited not simply an attempt by government at engagement in the exercise of illuminating a presumed national identity, but also a collective sub-textual challenge to a narrow vision of the national character. If New Zealand was to have a national identity, then it was to be engaged only at the level of national government. The cameras of the National Film Unit could only engage with those at the margins of society when such groups were seen to be 'playing their part' in a collective national struggle. 

In lauding the triumphs of governmental programmes, New Zealand documentary followed the Grierson model, but it also began, unwittingly, to elucidate a vision of those who occupied the margins of the Great Social Laboratory. The contestation of claims to Maori land, the urban poor, immigrant communities, trade unions and the problems of transition between wartime and peacetime economies were largely absent from New Zealand cinema screens. In this chapter I have investigated the Grierson documentary model as it was transplanted to the former colonies of the British Empire, in particular Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. As in Britain, the model served government informational needs well. In New Zealand, however, the difference was that the national film unit documentaries were part of the mass entertainment diet, showing in mainstream cinema chains as part of the popular programme. In Chapter Five, an analysis of the film production of the New Zealand

50 Mita, Merata, 1996, p. 43-44.
National Film Unit highlights visual omissions from the filmed national community in the context of both the Grierson documentary model and the socio-political upheavals of the late 1940's and early 1950's in New Zealand as related in documentary film of the time. In particular, I interrogate the turn from a cinematic celebration of the role of the state to a visualisation of a stylised Edenic environment remote from urban realities.
Chapter Five

New Zealand’s National Film Unit:  
Showing Forth the Works of the State

You see, over in England, we seem to see and hear a lot about New Zealand but never anything about the human beings that live in it. I knew about your mountains and glaciers, your tree ferns and your sheep country. I knew a dozen times over from your films how butter was made and a dozen times over that it always seemed to be called “Solid Sunshine”. I knew that you had a lot of Maoris who staged shows for rich tourists, and you had mud that bubbled and hot water on tap from out of the earth. I also knew that Taupo trout were the biggest in the world; but nobody had shown me so that I would remember it in the face of a New Zealander.

John Grierson.¹

On April 20, 1901, the New Zealand Government commissioned a film to be made documenting the visit to New Zealand that year of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. The visit was organised to express Great Britain’s gratitude for New Zealand’s contribution to the Boer War. This fragmentary source is now all that remains of the country’s first officially commissioned documentary film.² Included in the technically primitive (even for this date) sequence of tableaux scenes from the visit were accompanied with titles as, ‘The Grand Carnival of the Tribes’, ‘Procession along Lambton Quay through the Westport Arch’ and ‘Boer War Medal Presentation in the Octagon, Dunedin’. While there is nothing particularly unusual in the use of film to record and celebrate important national events, the date is significant. It is only the shortest span between the earliest public exhibitions of film by the Lumière Brothers in Paris in 1895 and the production of this film in 1901. Although lacking either production equipment or filming expertise, the resulting short film documents a major national celebration. The film also represents a distinct prototype for future

² Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to New Zealand. (Limelight Department. Salvation Army, Melbourne, Australia, B&W., Silent, 1901, 8 mins.)
documentary production by being funded through the auspices of the New Zealand Government in the name of the British Empire. The role of film and the State had already been initiated in the radical social reforms occurring in New Zealand in the 1890’s. In 1893, after strong pressure from the powerful Women’s Christian Temperance Union, New Zealand became the first country in the world to enfranchise women. The following year, the government introduced comprehensive labour and arbitration laws. 1898 saw Richard John Seddon introduce the first state pension for the aged. In the midst of such radical social reform the arrival of what, at that stage, was seen as a fairground attraction, had soon to become a potent tool in the reform process.

Groups such as the Temperance Unions and Salvation Army were beginning, certainly by 1900, to use the new medium of moving film. The visual medium provided a direct introduction of Temperance and Salvationist ideology into the popular consciousness. Early cinema provided a forum for social reform and the aspirations to improve the common good of the general community could thus be disseminated to the masses. It was not by accident that Joseph Perry’s Biorama exhibited Salvationist-made films with titles such as *The Drunkard* made by the now-prolific Salvation Army filmmakers who attracted large audiences ‘with lurid posters, the full force of the Salvation Army band marching through town, and a bright red petrol engine to power the Biorama’.

There had been small-scale films made in New Zealand before this. A.H. Whitehouse, described as ‘a travelling showman from Northcote, Auckland’, shot, with a newly

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imported camera, *The Opening of the Auckland Exhibition* on December 1, 1898. In
the same month he also produced *Uhlan Wins the Auckland Cup*. They were of
sufficient novelty to elicit the following response from the *Evening Post*, Wellington:
'compared with the others the operator, an Auckland photographer, has yet something
to learn, as his films are patchy and lack sequence, owing as much as anything to an
endeavour to get in as much ... as possible'.

Whitehouse went on to complete some
ten 1-minute films which he took to the Paris Exhibition of 1900. These miniscule
productions were designed more to supplement the meagre quantity of imported
topical films and *actualities* serving an expanding theatrical market. These newsreels
were part of a group of short-lived titles such as *Auckland Animated News, Empire
News*, from Dunedin, culminating in a much later series, *The New Zealand Animated
News*, in 1913.

Despite the social and legislative radicalism of the incipient dominion, New Zealand
audiences were visually linked to their position in the British Empire by newsreels
such as *Our Boys in South Africa* (1900) made by Charles Cooper and W. J.
McDermott. It was described as being 'a film that had audiences on their feet
cheering the British Forces, hissing the Kruger and demanding to see the best parts
again'.

A contemporary newspaper review of a 1900 Wellington film session states

The Opera House was again filled last night with spectators who waxed
enthusiastic over the American Biograph's fine exhibition of animated
pictures ... The pictures of the Queen in Ireland, the Prince of Wales at a
review, the panoramas taken from moving trains, and other wonderful
records taken upon land and sea, provoked hearty applause.

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4 Churchman, Geoffrey B. 'The First Film Productions in New Zealand', In *Celluloid Dreams: A
Century of Film In New Zealand*. Geoffrey B. Churchman, Stephen Cain, & Patrick Hudson (eds.),
5 Ibid. P. 8.
6 *Evening Post*, Wellington, November 23, 1900, page 5.
However, among all of the news of ‘home’, film did not dwell only on the activities of Great Britain. A mythical landscape already provided a backdrop to New Zealand film. In 1907 the New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department entrusted James M. McDonald, of the Dominion Museum, as the first government ‘kinematographist’. The privileging of exotic views of both landscape, and Maori, in his first opus included a Maori poi dance, racing waka and news of the day.\(^7\)

This somewhat ad-hoc production approach was to continue in an attempt to ‘announce’ New Zealand to the world with the government seen as the ‘most important source of production opportunities and finance for filmmakers in New Zealand. In fact, the largest number of films made in New Zealand has been made at the behest of the government’.\(^8\) Grierson noted later, in the Australian context, that because the film industry is a highly concentrated industry, it can be simply and easily mobilised in the national interest. The industry has expressed its willingness to give full cooperation to the government. It should be taken up ... the essential nature of the film business [being that of] light entertainment the use of its screens can be mobilised to give an orderly and regular service of information to the nation, at least during wartime.\(^9\)

Engaging in a specifically targeted form of projection, Grierson encouraged governments of the Empire to utilise both the distribution networks and the commercial cinema chains in the dissemination of state-funded documentaries to a mass-audience. Grierson, even in this later period, held to his foundational conviction that the non-theatrical field opened up the possibility that ‘there is more seating

\(^7\) Churchman, Geoffrey B. 1997, p. 49.  
capacity outside the theatres than inside ... [leading to] the development, through the non-theatrical field, of local leadership of opinion'.\textsuperscript{10} This stance presupposed the parallel existence of an already well developed film production and distribution infrastructure. For the New Zealand government, however, there was no such 'film industry'. From the first exhibition of a motion picture via a peepshow device, in Auckland by A.H. Whitehouse, of 'The Crowning Triumph of Photographic Art' to the initial visit, in 1896, of travelling film road shows throughout New Zealand,\textsuperscript{11} a considerable silent film opus was also created by visiting filmmakers. In 1912, for example, the French filmmaker Gaston Méliès made a series of one and two reel fiction features. Merata Mita notes that these films were almost entirely based on Maori narratives, 'heavily coloured by melodrama'. Titles such as as *Hinemoa*, *How Chief Te Ponga Won His Bride* and *Loved by a Maori Chieftess* resulted from the 1912 filming expedition.\textsuperscript{12}

The role of government in ethnographic filmmaking, even at this gestational moment, was already established. Mita encapsulates this role and its focus by noting

The photographic qualities of the Maori and the scenery were not lost on the New Zealand Government's Tourist Department. As early as 1907, James McDonald was given official status as a filmmaker when he was commissioned by the Department to film various scenic attractions. ...

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} These road shows seem to have been part of the established theatrical fare provided by the Australian J.C. Williamson Company and its New Zealand counterpart, Fullers. Short features produced of both European and American origin were screened throughout the country. However a parallel network of exhibitors developed in the major urban areas. In October 1896, a programme of short films was presented in the course of a performance by Charles Godfrey's Vaudeville Co. *Cinematographe Salons* were established in Wellington and Dunedin as the first 'cinemas' in the country. (Dennis, Jonathan. 'A Time Line', In *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Jonathan Dennis & Jan Beiringa (eds.), Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996, pp. 204-205


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[f]rom 1918 to 1923 ... he was employed by the National Museum ... to gather ethnographic material ... [recording] information on Maori tribal lore, arts and crafts, food gathering and preparation, and skills relating to a dying way of life. By now there was an awareness ... of the need to record and preserve.¹³

Film as a medium for ethnographic record called into question the discursive relationship evolving between documentary fact and cinematic narrative fiction. However, in terms of film, there was already the example of the Lumière actualities: films that blended a sensationalist reality with a narrative with ethnographic overlay. Felix-Louis Regnault’s 1895 film, for instance, of a Senegalese woman combined claims to ethnographic research and semi-fictionalised documentary form.¹⁴

The merging of a visual actuality and recourse to fictive narrative was evident in two of the films made by Gaston Méliès in 1913. Loved by a Maori Chieftess includes scenes where the blond, blue-eyed hero is captured by Maori to become ‘white man’s meat’, and later released by a young Maori woman; they fall in love and marry amidst great festivity. The films synopsis ‘suggests a dramatic linking of the emerging melodramatic style of American cinema and the dynamic stories available in exotic cultures’.¹⁵ A 1913 review of the film describes it as

of exceptional value as a scenic and educational subject ... with but one exception all of the characters in this play are Maoris and they all show that singular mimic gift which seems to be a heritage of all primitive peoples and always forms a welcome contrast to the more artful ways of our own white brothers.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.
How Chief Te Ponga Won His Bride, although based loosely on an historical incident in the Waikato, exhibits the same subordination of Maori as the exotic other, merged with a mythical historical place against an equally exotic landscape. Helen Martin and Sam Edwards note this trend as having a history of its own. They observed that this film ‘also underlines the filmic potential of the dramatic landscapes and indigenous stories which exist in the turbulent volcanic areas of New Zealand. These continue to be used as recently as Alison McLean’s award winning feature, Crush’. 17

Hollywood also became interested in the perceived exoticism of New Zealand and portrayals of Maori against a timeless landscape. In 1928 Universal Studios dispatched Alexander Markey to New Zealand to make a series of romantic melodramas featuring Maori. Mita notes that Markey ‘arrived on these shores with already entrenched ideas about racial superiority, and what his audience’s expectation of the romantic South Seas should be, ideas he immediately put into practice’. 18 However, Markey’s arrival was accompanied by a remarkable degree of abuse of the hospitality of Maori personnel working on the film sets. Mita suggests that this arose, in part, from an attitudinal problem within the American film industry itself. She points out that, ‘Blacks and Native Americans were vilified or portrayed as being racially inferior by American filmmakers’. 19 This insensitivity led to an inevitable retaliation on the part of local Maori to the point where ‘their resistance and subversive tactics caused the filming to become problematical, running over budget and being fraught with delays’. 20 Universal Studios replaced Markey and the filming was completed by an assistant director. Despite this, Markey returned in 1930 to film

18 Mita, Merata, 1996, p. 41-42.
19 Ibid. P. 42.
20 Mita, p. 42.
Hei Tiki. The convoluted plot takes place on the fictional Isle of Ghosts, filmed in and around Waihi, south of Lake Taupo. Essentially a love story between Mara and Manui, the film follows the exotic exploits of the two as both lovers and rival tribes are reconciled by marriage. Martin and Edwards note that the film itself is of little interest outside the drama surrounding its making. They observe that

Markey ... was helped to make the film with £10,000.00 of capital from New Zealand investors, a great many taonga or cherished tribal artefacts from Maori who participated in the film, and a great deal of unpaid labour from the many Maori extras who appeared ... When shooting was finished, Markey left for the USA with the film footage, many of the artefacts he had borrowed from Maori, [and] a great many unpaid bills.

Filmmakers like Markey engaged in narrative distortions to present an exaggerated exoticism to a Western audience. While Flaherty’s restaging of reality for narrative effect in such films as Nanook of the North and Moana can be regarded, for all their flawed reliance on narrative restaging, as at least poetic, the early New Zealand films, such as those of Markey, were exploitative to the degree that, as Mita points out, ‘in order to raise ... box office potential in Europe and America ... some of the early fiction films contain material which is culturally insensitive and in some cases downright offensive’. It is of note here that both audience and critical reception in the United States did not necessarily endorse the exaggerated narrative devices within such ‘exotic’ films. A 1935 review of Hei Tiki in the New York Times suggests Markey was

so impressed by the beauty of the land and the romantic history of the dwindling race of Maori that he retuned with a motion picture camera ...

21 Hei Tiki. (Alexander Markey & Zoe Varney, dir’s., USA, 1935.) The film was also marketed by it’s distributor, First Division Pictures as Hei Tiki: a Saga of the Maoris, and Primitive Passions. Although registered in the US as 7,300ft, no accurate running time is presently recorded.
23 Nanook of the North. (Robert J. Flaherty, dir., USA/France, 1922, 79 min.)
24 Moana. (Robert J. Flaherty, dir., USA, 1926, 85 min.)
and spent about four years on the North Island filming a staged drama of native life as it might have been before the coming of the white man. The picture is a disappointment, a sorry melange of antique melodrama, spotty photography and the sort of dramatic technique that one might expect from an untrained Maori ingénue. In view of Mr Markey’s purpose, one cannot understand why his camera should have ignored almost everything that might have shed light on the life of the Maoris. For all the conviction it carries, the picture might as well been filmed on Staten Island, or in Hollywood.

The purpose in focussing on these particular fiction films and the exoticised actualities is to explore the historical moment over which Grierson’s documentary model was laid. Film had already created a fragmented Maori myth — an othering of the indigenous beyond the contemporary to a pre-history where they can be viewed as colourful characters in travelogues and fiction films. However, the process was also one, as Mita and others have observed, of the privileging of a Eurocentric collective based around relationships developed within the British Empire.

Grierson’s governmental reports in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada all speak of an imperative to show the nation as peopled by individuals who in turn constitute the collective of Empire. In the 1940 Memorandum to the Prime Minister, Grierson informs Australia that state controlled film production could, ‘break down sectionalism and induce a national standpoint … and project to other countries a view of Australia as a powerful and progressive people …[and] contribute substantially to the ‘projection’ of the British Commonwealth of Nations’. Yet within the context of a projection of such a component of Empire, Commonwealth or any other such appellation, the Griersonian model fails to address the central question of just what culture[s], which peoples inhabit, in terms of cinema, become integral


27 Grierson, John. ‘Copy of a Memorandum from Mr. John Grierson’, Australian Archives, SP109/1, item 78/1/9, pt. B.
components of such a nation? Toby Miller notes that ‘it is hardly an empirical
audience arrayed in front of the screen as before a flag at a citizenship ceremony’. 28
Within both early New Zealand filmmaking and the later National Film Unit
documentaries, there is an element of omission that refuses to acknowledge the
existence of any images suggestive of an equality of relationship between cultures
disturbing a perceived balance between Pakeha and Maori within the nation. The
abusive relationship Mita delineates between Maori and the American filmmaker
Alexander Markey exemplifies the presupposition that audience reception of film
purporting to possess realist tendencies will be satisfied by a focus on the photogenic
elements the camera records of indigenous peoples and the landscape they are set
against. Mita points out that

the introduction of fiction and feature films brought into question not only
image, but also the representation of culture, customs and spiritual beliefs,
which would be used to entertain an audience. It was impossible for any
Maori at that time to comprehend the nature of feature film production or
the subsequent impact the films would have once they were exhibited. Nor
was it possible to tell whether Maori collaboration was able to influence the
director to maintain a semblance of authenticity when dealing with Maori
culture. The control was firmly in the hands of those behind the camera. 29

For Miller there is a resonance situated within Mita’s concerns of the state’s role as it
‘articulates the nation through the right to certify public historical memorials, decree
celebratory dates, and set educational agendas — in short, to instantiate materially the
supposed spirit that dwells in a people and reproduce it’. 30 The state’s prerequisite in
screening a national image is paradoxical although, Miller concludes

this spirit gives the state legitimacy, the state reserves the right to name and
monitor it. Nations are always coterminous with systems of government.

30 Miller, Toby, 1999, p. 94.
Even as the nation is manufactured, it is said to exist already, an authentic essence of statehood and peoplehood.\textsuperscript{31}

The boundaries of the nation are permeable and have an inherent history of myth-making that renders cultural boundaries equally vague.

This conjectural national space, articulated in the visual narrative of film, problematises the degree to which terms such as ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’, as Mita and Miller allude to above, could possibly be deemed valid in a dominion that had no authentic sense of existing apart from Great Britain. The imagery of Maori portrayed in early New Zealand film creates disconnectedness with the reality behind the camera lens. For Maori, notions of ‘nation’ are suggestive, in this context, with a unity. However, as C.K. Stead has observed

they (contemporary Maori) had no conception of a single ‘Māori nation’ … nor of a single state called Aotearoa. That Maori name for New Zealand appeared first in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. A common adversary has forged some kind of unity — but the idea of Maori nationhood is more European and intellectual than truly Maori; just as the strongest moral arguments Maori can summon against Pakeha are those of a European liberal tradition.\textsuperscript{32}

Michael Billig notes concepts of a nationalism that is multilayered have been often linked to an extreme, highly specific social geography. This process restricts movements within the politics of the nation to ‘exotic and passionate exemplars’ in the Griersonian mould.

Engagement in an exclusionary project links concepts of nation with questions of greater diversity of participation in national life. However disjointed this process may be, it serves in locating who and what has the authority to speak of nationhood.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ is suggestive of a far more fragmentary, organic process incorporating facets of ideological discourse folding and unfolding within the various strands of the nation. These strands of the commonplace weave together something of a nation’s sense of itself and place. Billig speaks of such a nationalism as a term ... introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced ... these habits are not removed from everyday life ... [d]aily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition.

The Grierson documentary model attempts to disrupt notions of a multifaceted nation and its forms of representation by privileging film as a way of articulating the nation. However, Billig notes that the challenge inherent here is the problem of reconciling the parts with the whole, of finding ways to represent a national unity amid the reality of the nation’s differences.

Billig, as Grierson did before him, recognises the power also inherent in any form of state-sponsored propaganda: who exactly it is who speaks to and for ‘us’? The nation is a powerful symbol, a powerful fiction, and a powerful abstraction, which diverse constituents will use strategically to define the community on their own terms ... different factions, whether classes, religions, regions, genders or ethnicities, always struggle for the power to speak for the nation, and to present their particular voice as the voice of the national whole.

Ernest Gellner suggests that that far from being a rigid formulation, the nation can only be defined through a binary transitional terminology involving a cultural and a voluntary nation. A ‘cultural nation’ develops where various parties within the nation

34 Ibid. P. 6.
35 p. 71.
'are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture, in
turn, means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and
communicating'. The second part of the nation-equation is the 'voluntary nation' that
exists only when individuals 'are of the same nation if and only if they recognise each
other as belonging to the same nation'.

Early 20th century New Zealand film production was an essentially photogenic,
promotional medium rather than an attempt at an organised documentary or archival
project. The fiction film, certainly in the pre-1929 silent era, was essentially devoted
to exploiting imagery of the exotic native and the verdant landscape. The
government-sponsored tourist films placed Maori against an indeterminate landscape:
one that cannot be placed in any present time, but rather in a mythical, historical
construction. Early New Zealand film, or, at least that catalogue which remains in an
archival-preserved state in the 21st century, conflates notions of national identity with
a sense of landscape as 'place' as part of a contrived or invented tradition. Peter
Gibbons notes that early New Zealand writers, particularly those of the 1890's and
1900's 'had hoped to develop a sense of 'belonging' to New Zealand by
incorporating indigenous subjects into their works, especially birds, the bush, and the
Maori'. The films suggest that such an idea as national identity is already a reality at
so early a stage as the 1920's. If the films represent a visual fiction they also suggest
invention of an Anglo-Celtic tradition at a remove from a pre-existing Maori history.

Eric Hobsbawm suggests this term, 'invented tradition', evolves from

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and
of a ritual or symbolic nature, which can seek to inculcate certain values and
norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity

37 Gibbons, Peter. 'Non-fiction'. In The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English, Terry
with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish
continuity with a suitable historic past ... stretching back into the assumed
mists of time ... insofar as there is such a reference to a historic past, the
peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely
factitious.\textsuperscript{38}

In the context of such an 'invented tradition', the 1940 film, \textit{One Hundred Crowded Years} is an exemplar.\textsuperscript{39} The film, begun in 1938, as a visual centrepiece for the 1940 Centennial celebrations of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, was specifically produced to be played continuously at the Centennial Exhibition in Wellington. Subsequently it was released for general exhibition to national cinema chains. A contemporary view of the film states that

New Zealanders have good cause to feel proud of the Centennial film, which thoroughly justifies its title, \textit{One Hundred Crowded Years}. This motion picture carries a story of New Zealand from old-time planning in London to flights of aeroplanes over modern cities in the 'Brighter Britain of the South'. The film was made by the Government Tourist and Publicity Department, by direction of the National Centennial Council. The result is so good that many people will hope that another national film will be undertaken at a favourable time.\textsuperscript{40}

The resulting film itself has been described as

beyond any shadow of a doubt, epic. It was a story in three parts: a salute to the pioneering generation; a cavalcade of progress from the gold rushes to the thriving nation of the day; and a depiction of the attributes of modern New Zealand that earned it the title of world leader in education, health, and welfare of its people.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{One Hundred Crowded Years}. (H. H. Bridgeman, dir., N.Z. Government Film Studios, 1940, 50 min.).
\textsuperscript{40} Review of \textit{One Hundred Crowded Years}, New Zealand Centennial News, No. 15, February, 1941, p. 6.
The film was never released commercially, receiving its premiere at the Tivoli Theatre, Wellington on November 28, 1940 before a selected audience including the Governor-General and Prime Minister. After the Centennial Exhibition, the government gave the film to the National Patriotic Fund Board, 'which made it available to provincial patriotic committees to screen as a fundraiser. Matinee sessions were held for school children and Sunday evening screenings for the general public'.

42 However, such limited distribution was less than successful. Renwick observes that the Sunday evening sessions caused some controversy as, for example, 'the Presbytery of Southland wrote to the Prime Minister reminding him that he had appealed to the churches to “strengthen the moral fibre of the people” but that to make inroads on the sanctity of the Sabbath “which is one of the bulwarks of our national life would undermine its moral strength”.

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From the opening title there is no doubt that this is a Government production: the Government Film Studios, New Zealand Government Tourist and Publicity Department and the National Centennial Committee all figure prominently. However, due to the lack, at that time, of a large enough body of professional actors, many amateurs filled in the crowd scenes and played minor roles as the historic tableaux unfolded. The film is, in essence, a tribute to early colonisation by settlers from Great Britain.

The opening scene is of 19th Century London and an extraordinary exchange between two men, only one being identified as Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield defends the colonisation process and states that, despite the protests of Maori, history will


validate his stance. Maori are portrayed as arriving on the countries shores, visitors in their own land, to sign the Treaty of Waitangi and a benevolent aura surrounds the tableau. Maori are swept into a process of ‘othering’, the camera suggesting they arise from the ground to which they will return; a suggestion that finds resonance in the colonial logic which maintained that the Other was not formed by culture. Camera angles privilege height in shots of colonists, while Maori are almost always shot from above, creating a sense of stilted physicality. Continuing a trend already well-established in earlier travelogues, the iconic figure of the settler as man against the landscape is apparent. The briefest reference to disputes over land ownership is visualised by Maori, in warlike posture, set against European honest toil and familial diligence. Maori are now portrayed as a threat. However this threat, like the land, can be tamed. The narration claims that the resulting Land War ‘was driving the people from their land’, Maori are now landless and marginalised, almost invisible in the film until the closing few minutes. The march of progress now propels the young country, in the style of a travelogue, into a renewed relationship with Mother England. According to the script, ‘refrigeration [was] the most important event in the last 100 years ... New Zealand can now feed a hungry England’. The audience is reminded that only through this trade in produce has the great social laboratory been initiated. The narration gravely intones, ‘New Zealand exists in the soil!’ The film concludes its 50-minute run with the words, ‘rushing forward a country from savagery to civilisation in one hundred crowded years’.

That the film is of its time presents a valuable insight into officially promulgated attitudes at the time. It also represents a remarkable fidelity to Griersonian documentary film: style in its recreations of both historical event and contemporary
life. Even the narration attempts, with limited success, the staccato of Auden’s poetic rhythms in *Night Mail*. The *Listener*, reviewing the film in 1940, suggested that ‘acting honours must go to the Maoris who assisted in various scenes … they prove born actors … [the film] has its faults … but at this stage of our emergence as a nation, any attempt of this nature is to be commended, and in any case …. Our next Centennial film is bound to be a lot better’. The filmic progression, as articulated in the film, of the nation from early settlement to a modern welfare state is archetypically Grierson. References are made in the latter part of the film to government programmes running the gamut of railway and road construction to education and health provision. The role of the state here is portrayed as paramount in the success of the nation in extensive reference to contemporaneous social legislation. The film is as much a celebration of the Labour Government as it is a commemoration of the country’s colonial history.

The role of a state-funded Film Unit can be viewed, in the context of the 1940’s, as part of an artistic awakening — yet, in its celebratory and propagandist tone, such a role set film production apart from such an artistic renaissance. The Labour Government had passed into law the Social Security Act on September 14, 1938 and the scheme that would enshrine the government’s determination to establish and maintain a fully state-funded welfare state. Tom Brooking, a prominent New Zealand historian, points out that for many historians … the Social Security Act [is] the most important piece of legislation in New Zealand’s history. With its passing New Zealand resumed its place as one of the most progressive nations in terms of social policy; only Scandinavian countries developed similar schemes at this

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44 *Night Mail*. (Harry Watt & Basil Wright, dir’s., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1936, 25 min.)
45 ‘Sixty Crowded Minutes’, In *New Zealand Listener*, December 13, 1940.

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time. The ... Act represented the high point of evolutionary socialism in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{46}

The purpose of such an Act, in creating the 'new' state, would be to endeavour to enrich the cultural life of the nation. A succession of building blocks in a national arts infrastructure began to give concrete form to this cultural expression of nationhood. In 1936 the Dominion Art Gallery and Museum were built in Wellington, the National Broadcasting Service was established in 1936, based on a state-run, British Broadcasting Corporation model, The Workers Educational Association and the Adult Educational Council came into being in 1938. In the same year the National Library Service was founded. All investment in social infrastructure saw the government take greater responsibility for a multiplicity of activities in a quickened search for a national identity distinct from a perceived colonial model. The period of the 1930's and 1940's was characterised by an emerging self-critical spirit in the arts as New Zealand attempted to define its position as a nation still encumbered with the self-serving mythology of 'God's own country', the better Britain of the South' and 'the Empire's outlying dairy farm'. Peter Simpson notes that in all of this

the arts made a crucial contribution to the new, self-critical spirit that emerged as the colony stumbled towards a sense of independent nationhood. Young artists of the 1930's and 1940's created images of the 'real' New Zealand, as distinct from colonial fantasy, and 'the condition of New Zealand' (poet Allen Curnow's phrase) became the burden of their song. Paradoxically, nationalism in the New Zealand arts took a negative and critical direction rather than an assertively patriotic one.\textsuperscript{47}

The increasing absence of the once visually omnipresent Maori was replaced by a new, or perhaps resurgent, Pakeha artistic presence. Now

whether in landscape painting (Rita Angus, Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston), music (Douglas Lilburn), poetry (R.A.K. Mason, Allen


Curnow, Denis Glover), or fiction (Frank Sargeson, John Mulgan, Robin Hyde), the emphasis was on a bitter realism, stripping land and people bare. Artists were obsessed with questions of Pakeha ... identity, and Maori in these years were largely out of sight and out of mind.\(^{48}\)

This was not necessarily a home-grown phenomenon. Just as Grierson was enlisted to anoint the formation processes of the National Film Unit, so too, the arts looked back to Europe for inspiration. Simpson points out that, “Painters drew on Cezanne and Picasso; writers on Hemingway, Eliot and Auden; composers on Benjamin Britten and Vaughan Williams. No longer a colonial culture, New Zealand was earnestly striving to be a modern culture — as defined in London, Paris or New York”.\(^{49}\) The formation of the National Film Unit in 1941 was followed, in 1946 by the National Symphony Orchestra, the government-sponsored Literary Fund in the same year and, in 1953, by the National Ballet. For all that these developments can be taken as signs of an independent artistic life mirroring that of the country as a whole, much of the development of government-assisted arts activity mirrored similar patterns in Great Britain. The construction of the cultural nation is a process differentiated from forming allegiances to the state, as Miller observes, ‘binding people together through culture is a concept derived from social and political theory and public policy as well as from news media and everyday life’.\(^{50}\)

The Griersonian connection can be further located in the linkages throughout the film with New Zealand being a peripheral component of the British Empire. Only through this referentiality can the relationships of the Imperial family be disseminated to a New Zealand audience. The process, as utilised in One Hundred Crowded Years, initiates an acculturated conversation between the centre and periphery of empire. One Hundred Crowded Years, despite its stilted dialogue, melodramatic acting styles,

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Miller, 1999, p. 94.
clumsy editing and a soundtrack consisting of poorly cut and recorded excerpts of classical music (at one point in a Bruckner excepts, there is the distinct click of the gramophone needle making contact with the record shellac) represents, visually, an attempt to narrate a collective metropolitan history into the reality of a nascent Eurocentric dominion and a virtually invisible Maori presence.

The linkages between metropolitan and periphery are clearly delineated, and in the addendum address by distinguished Maori leader, Kingi Tahiwi, of Ngati Ruakawa and Ngati Whakaue, new, resistant discursive material enters the colonial narrative. Tahiwi faces the audience and speaks directly to the spectator. He notes that while Maori serve proudly in the wartime struggle, it is equally important to remember there are internal struggles awaiting New Zealand at the peace. He not only observes, but admonishes, when he states

we (Maori) must retain our individuality in some things ... we must have our land development schemes through which Maori, working in their customary way could, could adapt modern farming to the community instincts of the Maori ... we must meet Pakeha at his own game.\textsuperscript{51}

The interpolation of the conflicting themes of a manifest destiny of European civilising influences bringing New Zealand out of a ‘stone age’ culture into the progressive modernity of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century set Tahiwi’s final address as a pivotal moment in local documentary production. It is apposite to observe here that not all activity during the 1940 Centennial was celebratory. The primary Maori contribution to the Centennial celebrations was the building of the Whare Runanga on the Waitangi Estate. This was to be a celebration of Maori integration into the life of the nation. The government had announced that ‘the fact that Maori were loyally working to the end of having the Whare Rununga on the Waitangi Estate completed in time for

1940'. As the Minister of Internal Affairs, William Perry, comments in 1936, this ‘shows that to them the centennial will be no occasion for mourning an alien conquest, but an occasion for rejoicing’.

The whare project was seen by many Moori as a reminder to the rest of the country that the Treaty of Waitangi had not been honoured. Leaders such as Princess Te Puea and Māori king, Koroki, boycotted the 1940 Waitangani commemorations because of the land confiscations of the 19th century. There was a general feeling that ‘the celebrations were’, according to a Waikato tribal leader, ‘an occasion for rejoicing on the part of the Pakehas and those tribes who have not suffered any injustices during the past 100 years’.

Among those who did attend the 1940 ceremony, Nga Puhi displayed red blankets as a protest at the compulsory government acquisition of what was described as ‘surplus land’. Sir Apirana Ngata reflected that, ‘I do not know of any year the Maori people have approached with so much misgiving as this Centennial Year ... In retrospect what does the Maori see? Lands gone, the power of chiefs humbled in the dust, Māori culture scattered and broken’. The task of the documentary One Hundred Crowded Years was thus not to document reality but to celebrate what Cheviot Bell, president of the New Zealand Founder’s Society declared, ‘the free entry 100 years ago of the Maori race into the great privilege of membership of the Commonwealth of peoples that we are proud to call the British Empire’. Although this production was begun before Grierson’s visit to New Zealand, it embodies enough of the production traits of his already acknowledged film style to raise the question: is One Hundred Crowded

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
to the validity of its claims to moral authority. Within this context public relations could be viewed as an instrument of propaganda.

However, after World War Two, the term propaganda was seen as part of the weaponry of the totalitarian regime. Jacqui L’Etang points to this post-war change of emphasis as a rupture of the ‘terminological hierarchy’. She notes that ‘as public relations began to professionalise [in] post-World War Two, it became important for practitioners to try and distinguish their practice from such notions in order to gain social acceptance’. Martin Blythe observes, in this context,

if New Zealand was British, then something else generally overlooked by the official historians: New Zealand has been offset by a ‘darker’ (and ‘feminine’) adversary — ‘Maoriland’ (its other names include ‘Moa-land’, ‘Kiwi-land’, and ‘Zealandia’). If New Zealand was British but not Britain (colonial but not imperial), then it was also Maoriland but not Maori-land. New Zealand shares in the double nature and fracture line that runs through all settler mythologies, repressed in the interests of national unity.

The newsreels and documentaries produced by New Zealand Governmental entities had embodied the precepts of public relations in the commodification of the landscape as the velvet against which the jewels of indigeneity could be placed and viewed as a place of the exotic other. Mita suggests that ‘as early as 1907, James McDonald was given official status as a filmmaker when he was commissioned [by the New Zealand Government Tourist Department] to film various scenic attractions.’

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The state-sponsored documentary film, such as *One Hundred Crowded Years*, I contend, is as much a public relations exercise in the pursuit of government propaganda. These travelogues, often marketed to a growing cinematic mass audience under the generic title of *Maoriland Movielogues*, provided the government with a public relations marketing tool in the struggle to develop a tourist infrastructure. The exercise created a mythology of the New Zealand landscape as being essential, set apart from elsewhere: part of the world not yet spoiled by European progress. As Nigel Clarke points out this process entailed an obligatory public relations exercise to undertake,

the invention of a distinct New Zealand nature. A nature that was so unique, so pure, primordial and enduring it would be capable of drawing in and anchoring all the peoples of New Zealand. So European New Zealanders, rather like settler Canadians, Australians, and South Africans, set out in search of a nature that was uniquely ‘ours’.  

This recording of a New Zealand landscape, as a commodity, is essentially a Eurocentric project. The concept of recording the landscape as a somehow separate, aesthetically ennobled space is markedly absent from traditional Maori sensibility. Francis Pound observes, ‘Maori did not paint landscape, nor feel the need to. Landscape, the pictorial attitude to the land … is purely an imported convention’.  

The filming of the New Zealand landscape was as much part of the notion of ownership of the exhibited land as the export of any other commodity. Thomas Mitchell locates a Marxian paraphrase embedded within this discourse. He suggests that this turn to a commodified landscape exposes a ‘social hieroglyph that conceals

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the actual basis of its value’. In the process of filming the commodified landscape, New Zealand visual mythologies absorbed, during the first half of the 20th century, the technologies enabling the inscription of film as cultural artefact. Mita points to this phenomenon when observing that from 1918 to 1923 [James McDonald] made a particularly strong thrust to collect and record film and photographic information on Maori tribal lore, arts and crafts, food gathering and preparation, and skills relating to a dying way of life. By now there was awareness by some Maori elders and scholars of the need to record and preserve.

The travelogues of this period, or at least the few still extant, exhibit the contradictory nature of such film: on the one hand allowing the state-funded mythologies of the virgin landscape to be utilised as a tourism promotional apparatus, and on the other, the unexpected and uncalled for exposition of an indigenous people recording what they believed to be a social order in a state close to obliteration.

The turn away from the exotic landscape to a dominant visualisation of the landscape as a marker of social progress can be seen in the development of the Government Film Studio’s newsreel production for the first Government from 1935. Two films illustrate this point – in particular the move of Maori from the ethnographic centrepiece of the exotic landscape to a position of near invisibility at the margins of the film frame. The shift from the earlier designation of Maoriland, the term used extensively in many of the government travelogues, to New Zealand marks a parallel shift from Pakeha as a colonial people who ‘set out to remake [the] country in an Anglo-Celtic form’ to the only visual embodiment of the nation. However, as Avril Bell notes, such primacy of embodiment belies a tendency to appropriate the

64 Mita, p. 40.
symbolism of Maori while marginalising their image to the edge of, and beyond, the film frame. Bell observes that

this tendency to appropriate Maori symbolism sits alongside the pressures for Maori to assimilate into the Pakeha 'mainstream'. The two seem quite opposed in that the demand of assimilation is ‘to be like us’, while the demand behind the nationalist appropriation of symbolism is to ‘be different and distinctive’. Together they equate with a demand for Maori people to assimilate to Pakeha values and ways of life, while Maori cultural distinctiveness remains, but reduced to national (read Pakeha) cultural property.\(^{65}\)

Encapsulated within such discourse, the idealised identity of both an indigenous people and a visual landscape both contrasts and collides with the indeterminate nature of the nation. Despite the visual narrative contained within early New Zealand newsreels and travelogues announcing a clearly delineated ‘march of progress’, there is a performativity apparent beyond the photo-play of the film. Maori, exiled to a position of exoticised other, are now removed from an equally exoticised landscape as the demands on the land and its symbolism change.

*New Zealand Marches On*\(^{66}\) was made as a general election loomed for the Labour Government. Rather than scenic wonders, the film depicts scenes of massive Ministry of Works programmes: expansion of roads, railways and irrigation and giant land reclamation schemes. The narration didactically focuses the audience on the strong government leadership that has empowered this progressive enterprise. A scene showing forth the rupture of the landscape discourse is the huge earthmover demolishing buildings that are now deemed ‘worthless and in the way of New Zealand’s unstoppable progress’. In terms of the government propagandist use of the film medium, a newsreel, made later in 1938 (and presumably closer to the election),


\(^{66}\) *New Zealand Marches On*. (Government Motion Pictures Studio, Wellington, New Zealand, June 16, 1938, no accurate running time extant).
housing scheme. Scenes of contented children enjoying the nutritional benefits of school milk, school dental care connect the national government into a seamless relationship with local communities and neighbourhoods – the collective at work and play. However, the break with the previous tradition of a Maori inclusiveness is particularly clear in the film narrative of the late 1930’s. Maori are now visually marginalised to thermal regions, engaged in carving, poi and haka demonstrations — mostly in and around Rotorua. The tourist connection remains, but any engagement in the progress of the nation is not their assigned role.

Raukawa’s words that conclude One Hundred Crowded Years point to the need to recognise an indigenous people’s rights to their lands and customs, but also to have the ability to access the benefits of the new culture find little resonance in newsreel footage of the time. A contemporary view of public relations suggests that government-sponsored film production knew well its role in the formation of the views of the collective about itself and its role in the life of the nation. F.H. Wood wrote, in 1936, that ‘publicity ... should ensure that the public will be able to contribute informed but constructive criticism’.

The Labour Government grounded the cinematic view of itself within a contextual social landscape by reference to the great social laboratory of the Welfare State as arising from the soil. Such a process of grounding the nation also locates the bedrock on which the genealogy of the nation can be located: grounded memory. Andrew Carter observes of this western culture prerequisite:

is it not odd that ours, the most nomadic and migratory of cultures, should found its polity, its psychology, its ethics and even its poetics on the

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antithesis of movement: on the rhetoric of foundations, continuity, stasis? But perhaps it is inevitable; for a culture that is ungrounded, movement, however integral to its survival, must always constitute a threat. If we were grounded, the cultural opposition between movement and stasis would disappear.71

John O’Shea, similarly speaks of early New Zealand film being ‘noble, clear-cut, and sympathetic glimpses of pioneer times with characters and events viewed through a Pakeha prism’.72

The selectivity of the government film in these two instances, 100 Crowded Years and New Zealand Marches On, juxtaposes the tautology of propaganda and public relations that foreground a shared national history that fitted the immediate necessity of re-election. Robert Rosenstone speaks of how such projects forget that history is not a natural process like eating, breathing, or sleeping — but a learned activity. We must be taught how to turn the past into history and how to read what we have done. A new medium like moving images on a screen with a sound accompaniment creates an enormous challenge in the way we tell and see the past — and think its meaning.73

The Government Film Studio newsreels and documentaries of the 1935-1940 period attempt to create a vision of history being an organic process capable of an ideological moulding shaping the destiny of the nation through benevolent, all pervasive governmental intervention. They seek to differentiate the New Zealand of unspoiled verdure in the early travelogues and establish a national vision rather than a vision of a nation. Even a random sampling of the existing films of the period show that New Zealand is inevitably positioned in a referential stance to Mother England.

However, in this legitimising process, the state marginalised Maori to a rural outland, beyond the possibility of a constructive engagement with the new urban progress. As the next chapter shows, the cultural artefact, drained of its significant indigeneity, is re-inscribed by the imperatives of a nation at war. In the mobilisation of the national consciousness, the Government refocused its film production from a public relations role in the promotion of the Welfare State to the defence of both the State, and the Empire. It is the 1940 visit by Grierson to New Zealand that anoints such processes with a legitimacy arising from imperial responsibility: a responsibility, in this case, of the periphery to its metropolitan heart. With it, Maori are assigned a new visual presence and are cinematically reclaimed, in imagination of the mass-audience, as warriors. Now they are no longer the warriors of the travelogue, inhabiting a mythical place of the distant past nor are the war landscapes on film their own. They are neither the essential components of colourful vice-regal ceremonial nor elemental tourism icons but the members of the so-called Maori Battalion and part of the creation of yet another mythology; one that could not have occurred without the propagandist exposure of the *Weekly Review* placing the indigenous warrior within the context of a national war effort.

In this chapter, the move by the New Zealand Government to establish a national film unit along the lines of Grierson’s British production model has been examined. Such movements have been placed in an historical context. The earlier travelogue style films, the foreign film companies, the exoticisation of both Maori and landscape led to a commodification of image that was suited to government marketing requirements. The importance placed on such images depended on contemporary needs. Assigning of revivified visual presence for Maori, in particular, became dependent on a kind of
use value, rather than an intentional portrayal of an inclusive nation. Although I have specifically utilised the Maori experience within the rise of New Zealand documentary film, the same could be said of the folding and unfolding of visualisation regarding the New Zealand working class as the moral bedrock of the welfare state. Class, as a marker of the nation’s wellbeing, virtually disappears with the outbreak of World War 2.

However it is the renewed use of the imagery of the Maori warrior as exemplar of a nation at war, the uses of censorship regulation and the realisation of the potency of filmed propaganda and the aftermath of world war on the problematic situation of state-funded documentary that concerns Chapter 6. The challenges of a peacetime now dominated by the Cold War and a changed New Zealand national landscape are reflected in the films of the National Film Unit — an organisation now tainted by political scandal, as is, Grierson himself. The now-uneasy role of such film production must negotiate a continued climate of self-surveillance both inside and outside the unit, leading to what I contend was the ultimate rupture of the Griersonian film model in its role of privileging officially-sanctioned discourse. Such a rupture the Grierson model suggested could happen, but always preferred didn’t happen.
Chapter Six

Resurrecting the Warrior: War and Beyond

Go get slaughtered and we promise you a long and pleasant life.

Michel Foucault.¹

The confidence personified in One Hundred Crowded Years celebrated, above all else, the romantic mythology of a seamless Pakeha integration into the landscape and governance of New Zealand. Maori imagery was, in filmic terms, reduced to a tourist commodity as evidenced in the earliest Maoriland Movielogues. The progressive process of commodification of indigeneity created a confusing visual dichotomy: was the indigenous commodity of the present tied to the actuality of an historical past or was it the product of an observational ethnographic project evolving in the present?

The Weekly Review, newsreels produced by the National Film Unit between 1941 and 1950 were the cinematic equivalent of print and radio news — though in a more popularist, magazine format. The Film Unit’s first producer, Stanhope Andrews stated, ‘in June 1941 the War Cabinet appointed me producer and manager, to organise a National Film Unit and to produce a Weekly Review of New Zealand activities at home and abroad. The terms of reference were broad enough to cover any eventuality. They were ‘to further the war effort’’.² The ‘war effort’ Andrews was referring to arose out of the fact that New Zealand had declared war on Germany and her allies on September 3rd, 1939, specifically timed to align itself with the same Declaration by Great Britain. The

text of the Declaration, cited below, irrevocably revives the Imperial relationship:

His Excellency the Governor-General has it in command from His Majesty the King to declare that a state of war exists between His Majesty and the Government of the Third Reich, and that such a state of war has existed from 9.30 pm., New Zealand Standard Time, on the third day of September, 1939.

Given this third day of September, 1939.
GALWAY, Governor-General. 3

Two days before this Declaration, the Censorship and Publicity Regulations were passed into law. The regulations set up a complex of authorities and boards to control and, where necessary, prevent the dissemination of media reportage of material deemed subversive and prejudicial to the prosecution of the war. Nancy Taylor defines, in particular, what a term like 'subversive reportage' would entail:

'Subversive reports' ... included four categories which remained operative throughout the war: reports intended or likely to cause disaffection towards His Majesty, to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces by land, sea or air, or with their recruiting, training, administration and discipline; or to disrupt their morale or the morale of civilians. 4

This impacted strongly on the content of the popular weekly cinema newsreels exhibited throughout New Zealand. No longer was government propaganda engaged solely in the exercise of saluting this or that newly completed public works project or a less than subtle warning of the consequences of voting for a party other than Labour. The newsreel instead became a technology of wartime disciplining and

3 New Zealand Gazette. Text of the Proclamation of War, N.Z. Gazette Extraordinary, 4 September, 1939.
surveillance. J.T. Paul was appointed Director of Publicity on September 2, 1939. Paul reported directly to the Prime Minister on all censorship matters without having recourse to parliamentary reportage and his powers were absolute. In 1941 Paul wrote,

In order to retain absolute control of what should be published in New Zealand in relation to the war I have refused to accept censorship restrictions in any part of His Majesty's Dominions as 'sufficient'. Cablegrams from the United Kingdom sometimes contain items that would not only be destructive to public morale but would be seriously disturbing to those people who have direct representatives engaged on the battle front.\(^5\)

The absolute controlling influence of New Zealand government censorship during World War 2 grew from the equally powerful influence exerted by the government-controlled film units, later to be incorporated in the National Film Unit of 1941. The 1939 Censorship and Publicity Regulations reflected the centralising process the Labour Government had initiated with regard to documentary film and broadcasting in general. The documents state that propaganda was to be prepared

\[\text{to secure that the national cause is properly presented to the public both at home and abroad. Various aspects of the national activities will have to be analysed and explained; enemy activities must be examined and criticised; and means must be devised to disseminate the national point of view in a guise which will be attractive and through channels which will ensure that it reaches persons who are likely to be influenced by it.}\(^6\)

The recourse to the popular state-sponsored newsreels of the 1930's became a potent apparatus to disseminate wartime propaganda. The visit of Grierson in 1940 and the formation of the National Film Unit in 1941 shifted the propagandist focus from celebrating the works of the State to the war effort. The cinema, far more than the print media, was already controlled by government regulation through the exhibition

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\(^6\) Ibid. P. 888.
tradition existing between the New Zealand Government Tourist and Publicity Department, the New Zealand Government Film Studios and Australasian distribution companies such as Pathé. The highly structured social economy of late-1930's New Zealand, has been described by Ian Conrich as a ‘country which silenced freedom with law ... [and had] become a Community of Obedience, rather than a Community of Will’.  

A press view of the stringent wartime government censorship laws. 

Into such a highly centralised milieu The National Film Unit’s first Director, Stanhope Andrews directed a propaganda weapon through which Paul’s formidable censorship regime could be visualised on the national screen.

The Weekly Review, the newsreel series that the National Film Unit produced from 1941 to 1950, was, superficially at least, not particularly sophisticated. A weekly

8 Simple Blackout Hints, No. 163. Cartoon by Gordon Minihinnik In New Zealand Herald, March 21, 1941.
anthology of three or four items mixed local and international news items with those of popular interest — always with a carefully inflected narration. They created a powerful visual portrait of New Zealanders at war and on the home front. In particular, they represented the Government view of an integrated society fighting for a clearly defined cause. Martin Blyth observes that

for a brief period during World War 2 and in the years immediately following, there are films made by Pakeha New Zealanders that, for a change, do not convert the Maori into ‘natives’ and do not lament their lack of ‘progress’. The Maori represented in the Weekly Reviews signify, above all, the pride felt by Pakeha New Zealanders for the Maori during those years. What, after all, was more worthwhile than bringing the nation’s two races together in a commitment to unity, identity, and racial harmony as a war of global proportions threatened to engulf everyone?9

This emergent integrationist mythology was directly linked to the extreme censorship directed by Paul at the behest of the wartime Government. If the nation was going to fight in a total war scenario, then all New Zealanders must be mobilised through a unified collective. The cinema was thus mobilised, as an arm of government, to create a visual nationalism, unified and committed to the war operations. The newsreel genre was not new, having been well developed and exploited throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s by various government departments. Blyth goes on to note,

the sense of urgency engendered by the war demanded a hard-headed realism set firmly in the present tense and that was the newsreel’s greatest strength. No place here for the timeless eternal or for striding manfully into the future ... tourism and ethnographic romances completely disappeared; there was no need to invite tourists to New Zealand in a world at war.10

The Weekly Review, created specifically for the domestic market, made much of the Maori contribution to the war effort: not as Maori as the exotic Other, but as Maori New Zealanders. The romantic mythology visited upon Maori as late as the

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10 Ibid, p. 79.
Centennial film, *One Hundred Crowded Years*, had, within three years become a celebration of the Maori warrior myth. *Weekly Review No. 112: ‘Ruatoria: Ceremony in Honour of Maori VC’*, shows the cinema audience Mr and Mrs Hamuera Ngarimu receive the Victoria Cross awarded posthumously to their son, Te Moananui-a-Kiwa Ngarimu, earned for his part in the attack on Point 209 hill at Tebaga gap in Tunisia in which he died.\(^{11}\)

*Weekly Reviews 112, 209 and 232* all encode the heroic deeds of the warrior. But the emphasis is now on the warrior as part of the collective war effort. Ngarimu's father, in *No.112*, proudly asserts that his son 'loved his country so well that he was glad to fight for it' while the narration intones 'today tribal differences and old quarrels have been set aside. Lt. Ngarimu is regarded as belonging not to one tribe but the whole Maori people'.\(^{12}\) However, for all the rhetoric of loss and sacrifice, the film still does not mention Ngarimu as a New Zealander — he remains a Maori, and apart. The othering processes are perpetuated even though Ngarimu’s role is now participative, yet without the reality of belonging. Despite Tunisia being no more than a vague shape on a world map for most New Zealanders, Ngarimu’s sacrifice conjured the imagery of there being a parallel reality where the nation can operate. Benedict Anderson speaks of print media allowing for the possibility of imagining the nation through the referent of the ‘meanwhile’ — somewhere the action of nation takes place beyond national borders, yet also of the collective ‘now’. Film, like print media in Anderson, opens up the possibility of connectivity between individuals viewing a

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\(^{11}\) *Weekly Review No. 112: ‘Ruatoria: Ceremony in Honour of Maori VC’. (NZ National Film Unit, 1943)*

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
singular visual text but not interpreted through a single site or medium.¹³ As Miller suggests,

the expressive interiority attached to such national sentiment legitimises public education, displacing oral language via writing. The idea is to span distance and difference in the very way popular culture binds people who have never met and do not expect to. Identity becomes transferable through literacy and a formal method of educating people.¹⁴

The legitimisation of Maori visual imagery in state film during World War Two was produced by a government accustomed to utilising Maori as a commodity to be incorporated in the filmed national narrative where necessary. For the duration of hostilities, the censorship regime, which prohibited anything but state-sanctioned news dissemination, also created imagery apposite to the war effort. Newsreel imagery defined the position of both Pakeha and Maori in terms of a New Zealand nation. Blyth notes that throughout cinematic expressions of contemporary national unity and pride, ‘there was no attempt made to place this in turn within ‘New Zealand’ as a whole. They were Maori and they were New Zealanders (Maori New Zealanders) rather than Maori or New Zealanders or differing tribes depending on the occasion.’¹⁵

However, Blythe’s reading of the re-emergent presence of Maori in the cinema is somewhat overly suggestive of an innovative and paradigmatic movement in the direction of government propaganda. The utilisation of Maori mythical imagery as an exemplar to express the collective effort of the nation was hardly a new phenomenon for cinema audiences. The difference with the wartime imagery and the

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¹⁴ Miller, Toby. ‘Screening the Nation’ In *Cinema Journal*, No. 38, No. 4. (Summer, 1999), p.95.

¹⁵ Blythe, 1994, p. 82.
ethnographically inspired fiction film and tourist oriented newsreel footage of the Maoriland Movielogues of the 1920's and 1930's was the state-sanctioned integrity now visited upon such imagery assigned to Maori during a period of the most stringent media censorship. The images audiences did receive were those designed by government and for the censored purposes of a state in wartime.

The processes of enculturation through the wartime newsreel was merely an extension of those visual norms already extant; having been successfully utilised by the Government in the establishment phase of the welfare state throughout the 1930's. Warrior representation, of both Maori and Pakeha servicemen was a facet of a panoptic cinema that, in its monotonous repetition of such highly specific imagery, created a circular programme — the projection, a mechanical kino-eye, received by the spectator and moving back to the source of projection. Foucault speaks of such processes as unthought, ‘in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality’.16 Robert Craig notes that a key to the application of Foucault’s unthought, ‘may be in the presence of absence, in moments of emptiness when we say nothing. For how can the unthought be articulated but through ruptures, the openings when emptiness creates the very conditions for discourse?’17 The images of the warrior in the Weekly Review Newsreels of World War Two have little or no cinematic voice. Their images exist in a parallel visuality: a ‘brother that is also his twin’ yet moving in a ‘meanwhile’ — a place that all can both relate to and admire, yet not embrace as their own.

Little recorded soundtrack footage of such a realm was exhibited throughout the war — perpetuating both the tradition of New Zealand Government film and of Grierson's British tradition, that rendered the characters onscreen mute. Rather they have ascribed to them, by a Film Unit narrator, the views that the audience expect: that of valiant endeavour in the face of the greatest adversity. For the Government, its censorship demands utilised the 'presence of absence' to speak of the 'we' on behalf of the state — in the extant 1940's newsreel footage, 'we' and the 'state' are one and the same. Greil Marcus attempts to define such a recreation of historical moment by asking:

What is history, anyway? Is history a matter of events that leave behind those things that can be weighed and measured: new institutions, new rulers, new winners, new losers, or is history also a matter of those things that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the mystery of spectral connections between people long separated by place and time? ... If the language they are speaking, the impulse they are voicing, has its own language, might not it tell a very different story from the one we've been hearing all our lives? ¹⁸

Extending the reclaimed imagery of the Maori warrior to the home front, film again creates the mythology but to control ramifications of another aspect of the Maori war effort.

The Maori War Effort Organisation (MWEO) owed its inception and formal organisation to the need for a support network to encourage recruitment for the forces and other war-related activity. Large numbers of Māori had volunteered for service at the outbreak of war and in October 1939, the government agreed to the formation of a Maori infantry battalion and on May 2, 1940, the 28th (Maori) Battalion left for overseas duty. It was based around a tribal structure in four companies. However, as with the Centennial celebrations and the 'Red Blanket' protests by Maori, there was

resistance to participation in the war effort. This trend was particularly noticeable in those districts where confiscations of land occurred after the New Zealand Wars of the 19th Century. An ongoing programme of conscription was not pursued regarding Maori as deciding eligibility was difficult because of the absence of Maori electoral rolls and only an estimated quarter of the Maori population was covered through Social Security legislation. All of this caused great official concern at governmental level. With the help of Paraire Paikea, Member of Parliament for Western Maori, a scheme was devised to co-ordinate Maori involvement in both conscription programmes and war-related activities. Perhaps the point of interest to the present discussion was the stress to Māori, by those organising the structure, of the far-reaching political potential of such an organisational model. Thus, on June 3, 1942, government approval was received to establish the Maori War Effort Organisation.\(^\text{19}\)

However, the degree of autonomy granted to the organisation and its remarkable success in fulfilling its aims were of increasing concern to the government. Claudia Orange notes the ongoing struggle to reconcile Maori aspirations of such an organisation with the government’s reluctance to confer a long life-span to such a grouping. She points out that

In 1943, Paikea asked that the timeframe be extended. He reasoned that as well as being essential to meet the country’s war-time needs, the MWEO had a key role in post-war Maori development. It had given Maori a new confidence: government had allowed the Maori people to organise in their own way, to move into the mainstream of economic and social life, and to assume positions of leadership in the wider community ... [however] Prime Minister Fraser ... wanted to avoid a rise in Maori nationalism... [and] the Organisation came to an end on January 31, 1944. Established and accorded special powers because of war needs, the MWEO had fulfilled its role.

Paternalistic patterns of government policy-making and decision-making were re-asserted.\textsuperscript{20} The irony encapsulated here is that almost all of this home-front activity went unrecorded in the \textit{Weekly Review}. Audiences continued to view accounts of heroism on the war-front, but little of the home-front activities of Maori. The ‘spectral presence’ was only present, in terms of the national consciousness, as a resonance only imagined, not heard. The censorship of government media could not allow for the possibility of a vision of nation beyond that of its own sanction. Even given that much of the National Film Unit film stock is not longer extant, the contemporary production titles give clear indications that no such coverage was exhibited to the public.\textsuperscript{21}

With the end of World War 2, the iconography within the \textit{Weekly Review} changed dramatically. \textit{Weekly Review} 232 proclaimed the return of the Maori Battalion to New Zealand.\textsuperscript{22} No longer part of a sophisticated war machine, the Warrior is again constructed as the indigenous Other. The poignant recording of the return of the Battalion shows scenes of waiata, hāngī, dance and the return to marae. The narration announces: ‘For the Maori people, this is the ship they have been waiting for’. Dignitaries from government, army and tribal leadership are present to honour the returning Warriors as a mark of national unity. Such a unity is exhibited as being amongst disparate peoples, rather than co-equal partners participating on both the national and international stage. However, as Martin Blythe points out,

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\textsuperscript{20} Orange, Claudia, 2000, pp. 3-5. \\
\textsuperscript{21} New Zealand Film Archive. National Film Unit Catalogue. \hphantom{http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/catalogue/simplesearch.htm.} \hphantom{(Accessed 20.11.2006).} \\
\end{flushright}
there is no attempt [here] to place [Maori] ...within ‘New Zealand’ as a whole. They are Maori and they are New Zealanders (Maori New Zealanders). These films are among the finest examples of the Integration Myth and even a kind of bicultural nationalism. The pride felt by Pakeha New Zealanders in the Maori contribution remains implicit: in the historical context when ‘being a New Zealander’ was obviously the prime value, this is simply accepted by the films and not problematised.23

The rupture of war having been brought to a close, Maori imagery transmutes into the duality of unthought — an echo, a resonance, but ultimately a return to that process of visual naming of the pre-war era: the commodified exotic. The Weekly Review films rapidly portray this return to a romantic historicisation. Weekly Reviews 321, 420, 458 are all examples of this repair of the rupture and the return to the exotic stereotype.24 Deductions of meeting houses, funeral orations for distinguished members of the Maori community and a return to the portrayal of Maori as bearers of knowledge of ancient crafts predominate. Such encoded visual archaeology is best viewed in Weekly Review 280 25 where none too subtle reference is made to the difference between Maori methods of hand-weaving of flax with Pakeha technology of mechanical spinning of woollen fibre. The return to earlier imagery of Maoriland is complete in Weekly Review 395 26 with Maori pictured against the verdant backdrop of Tutira Lakes. Were it not for the clearly signified production date and greatly improved film stock, it could well be taken by audiences that they were viewing archival footage.

23 Blythe, Martin, 1994, p. 82.
If the warrior myth was perpetuated during World War 2 from a need by the state to place the contribution of Maori clearly within the bounds of a strictly censored media control, the recourse to established stereotypes arose from the need to re-establish a tourism industry decimated by wartime travel restrictions. It would seem a logical extension, too, that New Zealand, wishing to encourage mass migration from the United Kingdom in the immediate post-war years would wish to portray a view of a country where assimilation occurred naturally against a verdant landscape. While this is somewhat conjectural, the commercial imperatives of government had always infused documentary production with its prime directives. However, an even greater rupture occurred with the election of the first National Government in 1949. New Prime Minister, Sydney Holland had long been a critic of what he perceived as pro-socialist propaganda emanating from the National Film Unit. Unit producer, Stanhope Evans noted in 1950 that, ‘quietly and skilfully the Film Unit was deprived of identity and became another department, or a branch of one’.27 The Government announced in July, 1950, that the National Film Unit would be transferred to the aegis of the Tourist and Publicity Department where it was to remain for decades.

The era being distinguished by a manifest paranoia of Communist infiltration and subversive left-wing activity within the media, as in all sections of the life of the state, the outcome for both the pioneer Grierson and his directorial counterpart in New Zealand were controversially parallel. The post-war period proved to be a time of considerable uncertainty for state-funded film producers, such as those in Canada and New Zealand. The propaganda functions deemed vitally important actions of the state during wartime, were seen as less important, even dangerous, in peacetime.

27 Blythe, Martin, 1994, pp. 85-86.
Grierson had left the Canadian National Film Board in 1945, though his influence remained strong as those he trained now took over management and productions roles. In 1946, the [Canadian] Film Board and its former head, Grierson, were peripherally implicated in the scandal surrounding the defection of a Russian cipher clerk, Gouzenko. He (Gouzenko) claimed deep infiltration of communists within the organisation. Gary Evans relates that

Grierson was forced to testify before the Royal Commission on Espionage in Government Service, on account of a former secretary’s association with Communist Member of Parliament, Fred Rose. Soon the Conservative opposition organised a hostile campaign in *The Financial Post* against so-called Film Board communist spies ... Shortly thereafter the Film Board lost the right to make training films for the Department of National Defence ... Film Board Commissioner MacLean refused to act on the recommendation of the government to fire 36 employees and he was effectively removed in 1950.28

For Grierson the scandal resulted in the United States Government banning him from entry on the advice of FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover.29 The progenitor and doyen, having developed a documentary style that created a visualisation of state programmes, propaganda and wartime patriotism, was now considered too dangerous an adversary to the work of government.

The ramifications of such a major regime change at the Canadian National Film Board were echoed in the contemporary New Zealand context. National Film Unit director, Cecil Holmes, made a series of technically adventurous documentaries for the Unit throughout the late 1940’s but he came to national prominence in late 1948

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when documents taken from his car while he was drinking with friends at Parliament Buildings on November 26, were made public. Russell Campbell notes that the documents found inside, implicating him as a Communist involved in militant union activity ... were released to the press three weeks later by the acting-Prime Minister, Walter Nash. The Labour Government seized the opportunity to discredit the industrial campaigns for pay rises being waged by the Public Service Association and other unions, and Holmes was dismissed from the National Film Unit.\footnote{Campbell, Russell. 'Holmes, Cecil William 1921-1994'. Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 7 April 2006. URL: http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/ (Accessed: 21/11/2006).}

In August, 1950, the final Weekly Review was released for cinema exhibition and the era of the national documentary as cultural institution can to an end. The Weekly Review was replaced by a variety of tourist publicity films, such as the New Zealand Mirrors, which were primarily aimed at developing a niche in the British tourist market, somewhat aligned in concept to the later Pictorial Parades. They blended conventional newsreel footage with special focus programmes, such as the Royal Visit of 1954.\footnote{Pictorial Parades 17 & 18. (New Zealand National Film Unit, Wellington, 1954.)} These productions proved as popular as the Weekly Reviews that preceded them, though an astute spectatorial eye would spot that many of the 'new' films were mainly re-edited materials from existing film-stock. There remained a large captive audience for such productions. In 1950, there were 638 cinemas in New Zealand and national annual ticket sales of 36,353,000.\footnote{Dennis, Jonathan & Jan Bieringa, (eds.). 1996, p.221.}

The transitional moment, in terms of New Zealand film production, I wish to suggest, is a short documentary of extraordinary significance. Amongst the plethora of tourist publicity, farming instructional film, coverage of Royal Visits, and sporting events, the National Film Unit documentaries began to exhibit a subtle change in tone. The
rise of the social problem documentary is, by its very nature of inquiry, diametrically opposed to the romanticism of the tourist film. M.K. Joseph, writing in 1950, set out a form of manifesto for such work when he asserted

to record is not enough, and so we exclude the newsreel and travelogue. True documentary records and interprets ... [it] begins when it shows, not the country itself, but how people belong in the country, and what they do with it ... Taking it a step further, documentary shows people in their relation to work. It is when we come to the wider social issues that a certain limitation seems to apply ... very seldom does the film in this country take the further step into the realm of social criticism ... yet there are fundamental problems crying out to be tackled — films on full employment and incentives, on the Maori in the cities, on the wharves, on the new needs of education.33

The warrior image transmuted into valiant battlefield activity, the extraordinarily successful home front war effort, and pan-tribal unity in a common cause were all captured and exhibited on film for mass audience consumption. By 1950, Maori were returned by government media production to the picturesque native of travelogue and a consequent blurring of the deeply entrenched social malaise of Maori: both rural and, increasingly, urban environments. Joseph’s was one of a number of calls throughout the late 1940’s to address such a predicament.

The documentary referred to above as a water-shed moment in New Zealand documentary is The Legend of the Wanganui River (1952)34. Essentially a tourist romance film that seeks to celebrate a stereotypical New Zealand landscape, director John Feeney presents a sub-text within the film that breaks with the existing film traditions. At the same time, P. J. Downey argued for a greater stress on stylistic sophistication when he noted ‘as long as the filmmakers concentrate their attention on

34 The Legend of the Wanganui River. (John Feeney, dir., Wellington: New Zealand National Film Unit, 1953, 16 min.).
delineating the face of the land they produce work that is beautiful and satisfying.\footnote{Blythe, Martin, 1994, p. 90.} Feeney, in *The Legend of the Wanganui River*, produces an aesthetically beautiful 16 minute documentary. The narrative is bedded in an historical romance of the ‘old’ Maori river legend told by an elder to his young grandchildren. However it is in the relating of the arrival of Pakeha that the film breaks new ground. At once the narrator’s voice-over changes tone with the words ‘up the river came the white man ... and the river ran with blood ... steamers now ply where once Maori warriors swept in hundred-man canoes, and to the bush valleys came tourists from other lands’.

The visual narrative on screen depicts overgrown paths, dilapidated, deserted marae and remnants of broken canoes. In a striking scene shortly afterward, an aerial view of the Wanganui River shows both river banks onscreen.\footnote{In accordance with the prevailing usage of the period and the published film under discussion I have continued, at this point, to use the name ‘Wanganui’ without its now accepted spelling of ‘Whanganui’.} The farmland (Pakeha) on one bank is cultivated for sheep grazing and the opposite bank (Maori) is covered with native forest. The imagery is somewhat less than subtle: the project of Pakeha modernity in claiming and taming the land in a geographic clash with the timeless bush land of Maori. The travel down the river concludes in the City of Wanganui. Here, despite the metaphorical difference of the previous geography, the film embraces the integrationist mythology showing Maori as no longer the producer of goods but rather the dock worker loading goods produced by Pakeha. The narration intones ‘and here, working alongside the Pakeha, are the river Maoris [sic] of today, some wearing their army berets from Tunisia and El Alamein’. However, it is the end of the film that is so remarkably different in tone. The narration ends with the fulsome ‘the earth mother sends out her river, out into the western sea, into the hands of the
sea-god, Tangoroa, and the winds of the ocean’. However, the river has also sent Maori to the very margins of the water. They are pictured uncomfortably placed at the meeting point of river and ocean with seemingly nowhere else to go. The imagery is that of a people flushed from their land and taken down river to work in the meat works and wharves of the Pakeha.

From existing film stock of the National Film Unit archive this would seem to have been the first instance of documentary to engage with any view other than a state-sanctioned assimilationist one. Blythe notes,

> analogically, this is also a narrative of how Pakeha raped the Maori, offset by the integration myth. The gods and demi-gods of the opening and closing legends stand in for history and the Christian God who oversees the nation’s soul. However the film seems to be fascinated not by the promise of New Zealand but by the loss of Maoriland. It has, overall, a narrative structure of the Fall not Utopia.\(^{37}\)

The tone of the Fall infuses much of the remaining National Film Unit production throughout the 1950’s. Such production was diametrically opposed to the state’s integrationist mythology and such a targeted visual critique problematised the exhibition of so obvious a cracked façade. Blythe sees a marginalising of other discourse here as well when he notes ‘the existence of the social problem documentary offers tacit recognition that the New Zealand historical romance, with its progress towards Utopia, always repressed other narratives — for example, the Fall of Maori (and other potentially divisive constituencies) ... the cracks in the integration myth are visible [here] where the ‘problem’ is first bluntly acknowledged’.\(^{38}\) The first, and perhaps, most influential of the social problem

\(^{37}\) Blythe, 1994, pp. 92-93.

\(^{38}\) Blythe, 1994, p. 96.
documentaries reflected very much in both intent and production values Grierson’s GPO documentaries of the 1930’s and 1940’s highlighting problems in the urban areas of industrial Great Britain.

*Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District* (1952) was made by the Film Unit but with the intensive involvement of local iwi under the leadership of Turi Carroll in conjunction with the New Zealand Government Health Department. As with so many Grierson films, the documentary is essentially a film within a film with traditional lifestyles filmed against the background of the making of a short film, *TB: How it Spreads*. The cinematic ‘voice of God’ technique, so reminiscent of the pre-war British documentaries, completely controls the narrative. There is less apportioning of blame in the film, rather a serious discussion of what was at the time a pandemic. The narration suggests that ‘it is not people’s fault if they have TB, but would be their fault if they passed on the disease to their children or grandchildren’. Carroll makes a final direct to camera appeal: ‘This TB is an enemy that kills too many of our young people, but it is not an enemy we need fear since we know we can defeat it by better housing, better feeding, and personal care’. The film, like the tone (if not the intent) of *The Legend of the Wanganui*, shows the first incipient trends towards an enunciation of difference rather than unity. Such an articulation, Stuart Hall suggests is a connection or link [between representation and practice, text and reader] which is not necessarily given in all cases as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has been positively sustained by specific processes, which is not ‘eternal’ but has constantly to be renewed.³⁰

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³⁰ *Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District.* (Wellington: New Zealand National Film Unit, 1952, 25 min.).

The renewal Hall speaks of, in cinematic terms, is demonstrably present within New Zealand documentary film from the earliest travelogues of the *Maoriland Movielogues* and the resultant ethnographic confection of what Blythe refers to as *Maoriland*.

David MacDougall argues that dominant film conventions inherent in the ongoing series of *Weekly Reviews*, *Pictorial Parades* and special edition documentaries of the New Zealand National Film Unit make some societies appear accessible, rational and attractive to the viewer, but applied to a society with a very different cultural style they may prove quite inadequate and inarticulate ... and no amount of [narrated] external explanation or contextualisation may make much difference ... this is not simply a matter of the cultural gap between filmmaker and subject or subject and audience ... cultural incompatibility is more embedded in the representational system itself, including its technology ... film has a psychological plausibility which tends to naturalise many of these conventions into invisibility.41

Such invisibility was also a feature of the Griersonian documentary 'style' as he urged New Zealand to produce a greater 'creative treatment of actuality' through its own particular variety of newsreel documentary. But the consequential New Zealand documentary style remains difficult to define in any such precise terms, and particularly within the purview of a high culture debate. As Blythe notes it helps to remember that in the years after the war and throughout the Fifties there was an enormous increase in high culture discourse on the state of the arts and culture in New Zealand. While painting and literature received excellent coverage, there are ... only a few articles of film criticism *per se* (mostly in the periodical *Landfall*), and those few deal with national Film Unit documentaries and documentary aesthetics in general.42

42 Blythe, 1994, p. 89.
Maurice Shadbolt wrote, in 1958, that the film opus of the director of *The Legend of the Wanganui River*, John Feeney, 'cannot be considered in isolation from the New Zealand literary mainstream. In his use of myth and symbol, and his exploration of the strange New Zealand landscape, his work is close in mood to, for example, the mysticism expressed in the essays of Holcroft, or the poetry of Brasch'. It is Shadbolt's reference to a New Zealand landscape as 'strange' that is apposite here. Despite the attempts at a social realism form in the post-war documentaries, the National Film Unit remained umbilically attached to the established tradition of an exoticised system of representation.

In the social problem documentaries made throughout the 1950's, the National Film Unit created a body of work that speaks against the tone of previous generations of film. While still asserting a national character from an assimilationist stance, voices within the filmic text begin to question, expose difference or, at the very least allude to Foucault's *unthought*: Maori are now placed beside the viewer, still in that 'unavoidable duality' but now 'articulated through ruptures'. Such a moment introduces discursive elements beyond that of Shadbolt's 'strange landscape', rather, presenting a visual narrative that sets forth scenarios that exhibit far less of the stoical social cohesion of the welfare state documentaries of the previous Labour administration. There is now a confusion of the already established blending of tourist romance, ethnographic record and propagandist documentary forms. The New Zealand portrayed in the late-1950's Film Unit documentaries remove Grierson's 'voice of God' official, State authority. Instead there is now a discourse emanating.

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43 Shadbolt, Maurice. 'John Feeney and the National Film Unit' In *Landfall*, No. 47, September 1958, p. 226.
from the subjects own perspectives. Where the marginalised images of Maori were exhibited in John Feeney's 'Wanganui' documentary, with Maori clearly removed from a land of traditional habitation to the very edges of the seashore, the late *Pictorial Parades* permit, however limited, the possibility of the audience hearing both the voice and the perspective of the Maori subject.

In *Pictorial Parade 114: A Visit to Motiti*, the ethnographic intent is established from the outset because the young Pakeha student is travelling to the island in order to complete research on a Social Studies project: 'to live with a Maori tribe on an island'. However, rather than the Pakeha perspective being ascendant, the short film allows for an alternate view as Maori speak of their life and culture with an authenticity and clarity not noticeably present in previous Film Unit documentaries. However simple the plot may be, in *A Visit to Motiti* the narrative change of emphasis represents a paradigmatic sea-change from that having gone before. Richard Chalfen notes that codes of narrative expression are, inevitably in the medium of film, linked together. Writers such as Edmund Carpenter would suggest that such documentary forms are part of a 'media [that is] so powerful, that they swallow cultures. I think of them as invisible environments which surround and destroy old environments ... media play no favourites: they conquer all cultures'. However, Chalfen posits the view, incipient though it may seem to be in *A Visit to Motiti*, that there is a

heterogeneity of indigenous film expression rather than an amalgamated homogeneous one. One reason is that storytelling, in a broad sense ..., comes in many shapes and forms. I find that socio-cultural diversity plays itself out in a diversity of 'tellings', whether in the literal sense of 'stories'

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44 *Pictorial Parade 114: A Visit to Motiti*. (New Zealand National Film Unit, 1961)
or the more general sense of narrative performance and communication behaviour.\textsuperscript{46}

The importance of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century New Zealand documentary archive, at least that which is still extant or has a referenced context, is New Zealand had little by way of a tradition of official nationalistic histories. Blythe suggests that aside from period updates of the Condliffe-Airey \textit{A Short History of New Zealand} and A.H. Reed's non-academic \textit{The Story of New Zealand} stylistically and generically, both these histories had their roots in the imperial era. They are historical romances — 'chronicles' — divided into broad groups of events and shuffled through in chronological order, and with a specific economic and political focus. Other historical writing of this period was equally specialised — military, regional, and so on.\textsuperscript{47}

No other archive provides such a remarkable overview and socio-historical contextuality. The National Film Unit continued to make documentary films throughout the 1960's and 1970's, however it is the 1960 film, \textit{The Maori Today}\textsuperscript{48} that reflects the last, and most extreme, example of government paternalism toward images of Maori. By the 1950's all reference to the policies of the Welfare State and their reception by the working class had been erased in Film Unit documentaries. However, in terms of Maori, the cinematic exposure of the plight of Maori failure to become a successful facet of the assimilationist myth prompted a number of documentaries exploring that failure and apportionment of blame.

\textit{The Maori Today} was made, extraordinarily, for the promotional purposes of the New Zealand Government Tourist and Publicity Department. It was one of a series of documentaries made to show how social problems within the country were dealt with by government and exhibit on a world stage the success of public education, health

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The Maori Today}. (Wellington: NZ National Film Unit, 1960, 15 min.).
and agricultural schemes. Maori are clearly identified as the Other — seemingly incapable of bridging the cultural gap between themselves and Pakeha. The film suggests that the problems that do exist may be unsolvable. In Griersonian mode, the narration suggests that the state supports the ideal of integration with the words, ‘Maori or European, it makes little difference … a man’s work can’t be measured by the colour of his skin’. The rhetoric of the assimilationist myth, however, becomes confused within such a catalogue of failure.

The acknowledgment of the cultural contribution of Maori to the nation consists of passing reference to oratory, song, dance and carved art — reasserting the imagery of the Maoriland Movielogues of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Traditions of the past are soon dispensed with as irrelevant because, ‘the past is revered but for members of the tribal committees, today’s living is the concern’. The film dwells on social ills afflicting Maori: poor farming practice, tragic health statistics, the inability of Maori to adapt to urban drift, and, in particular, the criticism of traditional modes of Maori land tenure. The comments regarding poor farming methods run counter to the statistics of wartime agricultural production by the Maori War Effort Organisation. The March 1943 statement by Mr P.K. Paikea to the House of Representatives, summarising current activities of the Organisation are worth, in the context of The Maori Today, produced only 17 years later, quoting in detail. Paikea announced that

when the Maori War Effort Organisation was formed, it was decided that tribal committees should be set up throughout New Zealand, the functions of these committees being to stimulate production … and to direct and control manpower in order to assist essential industries. At present there are 121 tribal committees in the Northern Maori Electorate, 135 in the Western Maori Electorate, 102 in the Eastern Maori Electorate, and 23 in the Southern Maori Electorate — a total of 381. I desire to give an indication of their activities. They have put into production, for purposes other than their own immediate needs, 4,933 acres of land, and it is estimated that, on a
conservative basis, the land will yield 126,700 bushels of maize, 475 bushels of beans, 3,403 tons of kumaras, 4,992 tons of potatoes, 206 tons of mixed vegetables, 440 tons of pumpkins and 5,400 pecks of peas. In addition the Maori people have collected approximately 20,000 lb of dried seaweed. Since Japan entered the war, this seaweed has been much in demand.49

The film's real motivation in all of this criticism, in remarkable denial of the actual contribution of Maori agricultural practices, seems to have been a determined effort on the part of the Maori Affairs Department to encourage the consolidation of small land holdings into larger, government supervised conglomerations.

However, as Blythe observes, 'the film may be distinguished, if for no other reason, because it represents the first full-scale cultural survey — in film — of the social and economic conditions of the Maori, and regrettably it is a negative one'.50 In the recording of the evolving life of the nation, as seen by the cameras of the National Film Unit, here is an example of voices of the margins speaking back against the state who funded the film's production in the first place. Rather than a promotional film on the benevolent role of state intervention in the life of its constituents, The Maori Today presents a rupture in the official discourse, something the Griersonian model suggests could but would prefer didn't happen. There is no celebration of the state's role in the welfare of its people and the film remains a record of both the state-affirming role of the New Zealand National Film Unit documentaries and a channel through which the social ills of the nation were able to be expressed.

The film represents a cinematic end to the commemoration of integrationist, assimilationist and exotically 'othered' mythologies so entrenched in New Zealand

film production of the previous sixty years. The final moments of the film’s narration present a closure to the study of the work of the National Film Unit. If New Zealand documentary film had begun the 20th century by celebrating the mythologies and exoticised characters of Maoriland, then The Maori Today illustrates the Fall, a Paradise Lost, a final chapter in the creation of New Zealand’s filmic artefact. The narration concludes with the words

[Maori] will always be sought after when brawn is needed, but to carry respect in the community they must also be in demand when skill is necessary, otherwise all [Maori] 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 with them.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to examine the film archive of what remains of the productions of the New Zealand National Film Unit from World War Two until The Maori Today of 1960. The concluding film and date may seem arbitrary, yet The Maori Today marks the end of films that may be included in the ‘social problem’ genre. The resurrection of Maori imagery during World War Two, and the consequent ‘placement’ of such imagery in a peacetime environment was reflected in the films themselves. The National Film Unit survived its own crisis of identity with changed political imperatives and a markedly changed production environment. The Grierson model, itself a target of much change, withstood such challenges. However, the remaining film archive, fragmentary though it is, allows for archaeology to be instituted into the origins, technologies and ideologies of the film production. The films represent a technology of memory which allows one to investigate the retroactive constitution of beginnings, the foldings, unfoldings and refolding of
images, feelings and narrative fragments. These fragmentary filmic echoes resonate with a spectral presence: only imagined, not heard.
Conclusion

If *The Maori Today* represents a moment in the evolution of New Zealand documentary film production, it also represents the closing of an era of the manner in which the camera constructed New Zealand. From the 1970's onwards, imagery privileging a dominant Pakeha culture, an overwhelming 'British-ness', evolved. Russell Campbell notes this shift when he observes:

> From the start, dominant (Pakeha) culture has represented the Maori as *they*, outsiders to the New Zealand norm, objects of ethnographical (and more recently sociological) research or the tourist's curiosity-seeking. In film such representations have sometimes been respectful, sometimes demeaning... but have always carried a Pakeha perspective, owing principally to the exclusion of Maori from positions of influence within the film and television industries.¹

Throughout the period of the 1970's and 1980's, documentary film became a vehicle for a variety of emergent protest movements. *Patu!* (1983) exemplifies this break with convention.² Yet it remains, however distantly, reflective of Grierson's theoretical vision of documentary film in that it is still 'the creative treatment of actuality' as Grierson had alluded to earlier. *Patu!* as a film is a highly charged political statement occasioned by the events surrounding the 1981 Springbok Rugby Tour of New Zealand and can be judged as having a particular supportive bias towards the protest culture of its time. However, just as state-sanctioned film can be justifiably accused of propagandist tendencies, documentaries, such as *Patu!*, presenting an oppositional viewpoint, can also utilise such a bias to present an alternative view to that of the state. As Merata Mita, director of *Patu!* observed in 1983, 'I felt it was necessary to counterbalance the official and institutional comment about the tour with this point of view from the streets that involved over half of New Zealand.

² *Patu!* (Merata Mita, dir., New Zealand, Awatea Films, 1983, 84 min.).
Zealand by the time the tour ended’. Mita set out, in *Patu!*, to accomplish what Grierson had claimed for his documentary form many years before. However, for Grierson, the celebration of the works of the state remained the focal point of documentary film.

Documentary has claimed for itself the innate ability to tell the audience more about the observed than the observer. However, as I have contended throughout this thesis the reverse is also just as valid an interpretation. Histories, personalities, the confluence of cultural strands, political and social upheaval have all been components of New Zealand documentary from its earliest productions. Yet, all have been transfigured before the requirements of the state to ascribe specific values to images. The processes of recording such national imagery, however, are not necessarily reliant only on the improved digital technologies of the 21st century. At a time when documentary again sets out to discuss questions surrounding social homogeneity and cultural diversity, it is as well to reflect on the archive of film that had, as its core business, attempted to perform similar tasks in different circumstances. The processes of surveillance exemplified by the National Film Unit documentaries remain, however, more sophisticated than their on-screen presentation may seem. If the cultural politics observed in the older films reflect a celebration of a Eurocentric vision of a settler culture with forms of indigenous visuality represented as commodified cultural addendums, they also represent a reference point for contemporary discussions of the composition of New Zealand society.

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While the old state-sponsored documentaries sought to elucidate such institutional membership, the state they celebrated was always the unifying component. Such a manipulation of selective aspects of the cultural collective is highly suggestive of a revivified visual panoptic technology. This thesis has argued that, although the origins of film in New Zealand extend as far as the late 19th century, from its earliest examples, such film has formed a symbiotic relationship with the state. I have attempted to explore the Grierson documentary tradition through its claim to record actuality while mediating such recording processes with the requirements of state and corporate sponsors. In the preceding chapters I have also referred to earlier theatrical traditions of mimesis and mimicry which in turn were utilised by early Soviet filmmakers to exemplify type over individual.

It is, perhaps, this process of draining the individual of cultural significance in the cause of a celebration of the collective that is the central facet of Grierson’s documentary form. Though he claimed to want to show the dignified ordinariness of everyman and everywoman, it was his camera deciding whose images were privileged onscreen. In the metamorphosis of such a documentary tradition to a New Zealand context, its inherent processes of selection permitted the State to utilise the type, rather than the individual, as being representative of national homogeneity. Such homogeneity bases itself on qualifications of membership and the New Zealand National Film Unit documentaries, particularly those of the 1950’s, focus clearly on what constituted barriers to such a national collective. Maori, along with the working class males, women in the workforce and the children of social disadvantage, became problems in a mass media presentation of such homogeneity; they became the Other. While Pakeha types evolve throughout the period of the films under discussion, Maori types remain steadfastly beyond any form of membership in the collective.
Only in a national crisis were Maori again brought forward in film to exemplify the warrior nation in wartime. The value, beyond that of important national historical artefact, of such film is its extraordinary ability to act as a panoptic device in the construction of the nation.

Without the archive of flickering black and white footage, present-day attempts to engage in archaeological processes of the ‘folding and unfolding’ of national imagery could not take place, or at the very least, remain incomplete. It is this incompleteness, perhaps, that Maori Television wishes to redress, in its take up of the National Film Unit documentaries as part of its mainstream documentary programming.
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The Use of Film in this Thesis

Because so much of the film stock discussed in this thesis is now lost or is only partially restored, I utilised what remains to give as best an overview as I could. The work of The National Film Archive continues to be of great importance in both the preservation of what film stock remains and the promotion of the early New Zealand documentary film tradition to a wider audience.

Film from Grierson's periods at the Empire Marketing Board, the General Post Office Film Unit, the National Film Board of Canada and productions from the New Zealand Government Film Studios and National Film Unit that utilised the Grierson documentary model have been viewed for research purposes. Where complete film footage no longer exists, contemporary reviews and recollections of those who took part have been used.

Where production can be attributed to a particular director, it has been so referenced. However, many films, particularly those from the New Zealand National Film Unit, did not note the director's name. As a consequence, no ascription is noted within this text. Similarly, running times of extant archival footage varies somewhat. I have endeavoured to reference running times as accurately as possible. Where no clear indication of timing exists, I have omitted such detail.

As much New Zealand newsreel footage was re-edited for later productions, especially the Pictorial Parade's only fragments of those earlier films still exist. Where possible, however, I have given as much technical detail in the film referencing as I could discover. All film referenced was viewed either on VHS tape or DVD.
Filmography

* Aelita: Queen of Mars. (Yakov Protazanov, dir., 1924, USSR, 120 min.).
* Broken Barrier. (John O'Shea, dir., Pacific Films, NZ., 71 min.).
* Battleship Potemkin. (Sergei Eisenstein, dir., 1925, USSR, 75 min.).
* Hei Tiki. (Alexander Markey and Zoe Varney, dirs., USA, 1935.)
* Hinemoa. (Gaston Méliès, dir., Méliès Films, France, 1913.)
* How Chief Ponga Won His Bride. (Gaston Méliès, dir., Méliès Films, France, 1913.).
* In The Land of the War Canoes. (Edward Curtis, dir., USA, 1814.).
* L'Arrivé d'un train à La Ciotat, L' (Auguste and Louis Lumière, dirs., Lumière Films, France, 1895, 1 min.).
* Loved by a Maori Chieftess. (Gaston Méliès, dir., Méliès Films, France, 1913.).
* Man With A Movie Camera. (Dzigo Vertov, dir., USSR, 1929, 68 min.).
* Moana. (Robert J. Flaherty, dir., 1926, USA, 85 min.)
* Nanook of the North. (Robert J. Flaherty, dir., USA/France, 1922, 79 min.).
* Patu! (Merata Mita, dir., New Zealand, Awatea Films, 1983, 84 min.).
* Rewi's Last Stand. (Rudell Hayward, dir., N.Z., 1940.).
* The Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to New Zealand. (Limelight Department, Salvation Army, Melbourne, Australia, 1901, 8 min.)

* Empire Marketing Board.
* Drifters. (John Grierson, dir., E.M.B., U.K., 1929.)

* General Post Office Film Unit.
* Cable Ship. (Alexander Shaw and Stuart Legg, dirs., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1933.).
* Dawn of Iran. (John Taylor, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1938.)
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<tr>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Director(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Man of Aran.</em></td>
<td>Robert J. Flaherty, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1934, 76 min.</td>
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<td><em>Night Mail.</em></td>
<td>Harry Watt, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1936.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Song of Ceylon.</em></td>
<td>Basil Wright, dir., G.P.O. Film Unit, U.K., 1937, 38 min.</td>
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<td><strong>New Zealand Government Film Studios.</strong></td>
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<td><em>New Zealand History in the Making.</em></td>
<td>(Government Film Studios, N.Z., 1938.)</td>
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<td><em>New Zealand Marches On.</em></td>
<td>(Government Film Studios, N.Z., 1938.).</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>One Hundred Crowded Years.</em></td>
<td>(Government Film Studios, N.Z., 1940, 50 min.).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New Zealand National Film Unit.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pictorial Parade</strong></td>
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<td><em>Pictorial Parade 17.</em> (1954).</td>
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<td><em>Pictorial Parade 18.</em> (1954).</td>
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<td><em>Aroha.</em> (Michael Forlong, dir., Wellington: NZ National Film Unit, 1951, 18 min.)</td>
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<td><em>The Legend of the Wanganui River.</em> (John Feeney, dir., Wellington: NZ National Film Unit, 1953, 16 min.).</td>
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<td><em>Tuberculosis and the Maori People of the Wairoa District.</em> (Wellington: NZ National Film Unit, 1952, 25 min.).</td>
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<td><em>The Maori Today.</em> (NZ National Film Unit, 1960, 15 min.)</td>
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