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The Legacy: John Grierson, Basil Wright, and the Films Division

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Abstract
This essay looks at the early history of documentary cinema, and the making of the social-realist documentary as a genre. It looks centrally at the figure of John Grierson, who though influenced by Russian film-makers, went on to carve a style of social-realist film-making where documentary cinema was deployed for national-building and nationalist ideology in the British context. The essay then goes on to look at the way in which the Griersonian documentary would go on to influence the film-making of other documentary film-makers such as Basil Wright who formed a part of the British Documentary Film Movement, and those documentary films that would be made by Films Division, India in the later decades.

Keywords: *History of Documentary Cinema, Nation-formation, Nationalism, Grierson, Films Division, India*

This essay focuses on John Grierson's central role in the institutionalization of documentaries and his efforts at balancing the diverse pulls of the use of documentaries for state propaganda and for shedding light on ordinary people and their problems. It explores the way the British documentary movement addressed the aesthetic issues related to documentary even as they advocated a commonsensical approach to nationalism. The continuing relevance of the Griersonian discourse is not merely because of its problematic claim to "reality" which has been severely criticized by scholars like Brian Winston but also because of its inevitability to any discussion on "documentary and the nation."[i] Grierson's assertion of documentary as a pulpit and the documentarist as a propagandist has its resonance in the ways in which documentaries have been appropriated by the state machinery all over the world. I will, therefore, explore the influence of Russian filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Dovzhenko, and Dziga Vertov on Grierson in the context of the specificity of cinema's role in nation-

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building and ideology.[ii] Nonetheless, the British documentaries of the Griersonian school differed aesthetically from the Russian films and their ideological underpinnings of a socialist nation.

Though documentary-realist tradition has been integral to the concept of British national cinema,[iii] Griersonian social realist documentaries of the 1930s are critiqued for having obfuscated class and social disparity in their generalized depiction of a problem and the affected people as waiting for their "plight" to be solved by the state, and thus endorsing a socio-political strategy of "rule from the above by constant adaptation and concession below."[iv] Grierson was, however, committed to the profound social role that the film had to play and was determined to "bring the citizen's eye in from the end's of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose …*the drama of the door step*" (Italics mine). But being an official of the Empire Marketing Board, Grierson had "to bring the Empire alive" as well: He wanted to use cinema "to bring the day to day activities of the British Commonwealth and Empire at work in the common imagination."[v]

Therefore, this paper will engage with Grierson's preoccupation with the theme of the nation and his investment in cinema's potential for public education, and the way his imperatives inflected the practice of the major filmmakers of The British Documentary Film Movement, particularly Basil Wright, and the Films Division of India. Toward this end, I will be focusing on *Drifters* (John Grierson, 1930), *Industrial Britain* (Robert Flaherty and John Grierson, 1933), *Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright, 1935), and *Night Mail* (Basil Wright, 1936), i.e. the initial phase of the British Documentary Film Movement between the years 1928 -1933 when Grierson joined the Empire Marketing Board as a director and later became the film officer/producer till 1933, and the intermediate creative phase between 1934 -1939 when the EMB was dissolved and the General Post Office took over the running of the film unit and Grierson was appointed head of the new G.P.O.

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Film Unit.[vi] It is important to note that the films of Humphrey Jennings, which focuses on the influences on/of the British Documentary Film Movement, continued the legacy of the movement when he made documentaries on British life during the Second World War.[vii]

Filmmakers like Wright and Jennings could make use of the space created by Grierson as an enterprising and resourceful producer for documentaries. Grierson's efforts in Britain in the late 1920s to get the State to sponsor the documentaries through its various councils and departments underscored his emphasis on the persuasive and the rhetorical potential of the medium. However, his initial collaboration with Robert Flaherty and the influence of Russian formalism indicate his predilection for the poetic approach and montage, as exemplified by the formal style of his documentary *Drifters*.[viii] Later, his support for films like *Song of Ceylon* and *Coalface*, which pursued an experimental and poetic style with respect to both images and sound, worked against his own paradigm of propaganda documentary with a simple problem/solution structure: *Coalface* does not provide an easy solution by the State to the worker's problems and *Song of Ceylon* undermines the Empire and its colonizing ambitions—the apparent coherence of the film which has four distinct parts masks an ideological dissonance.

This contradiction in the Griersonion theory and practice, between the concept of an ideal welfare state and the socialist impulse of the representation of the lives of ordinary workers through a poetic or an "imagist" style, enabled the ruptures through which his protégées could work against the dominant ideology of their own sponsors. This accounts for the current interest in Grierson, as recent theories on realism in documentaries have been focusing on the "organizing logic" and "voice" of the documentary, as espoused by Bill Nichols,[ix] which works through contradictions and subjectively organizes the diverse materials through various elements like narration and montage. It relies "on the inherent

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capacity of the viewers to engage with the everyday contradictions of their life" and infer the “real." For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I would draw attention to the ideological and aesthetic aspect of the “organizing logic” in the films of the British Documentary Movement which, while relying on the didactic, omniscient voice-of-god narration for coherence, also used the dynamics of montage: the defined south-to-north travel of the mail with the postal workers rushing from London to Glasgow was juxtaposed with the fragments of the pristine, pastoral, and pre-industrial landscapes of the countryside in *Night Mail*. By positing the elements of the regional/ rural/ cultural over the national/ industrial/organizational, *Night Mail* invites its audience to reflect on the larger themes of community and nation, a topic of particular interest to an independent nation like India which was in its infancy and preoccupied with nation-building after its traumatic birth in 1947.

This paper, therefore, will discuss the influence of the British Documentary Movement, particularly Grierson and Wright's films, on the documentaries produced by the Film Advisory Board of the colonial British government, and later the Films Division of India when it was setup in 1948 immediately after India's independence. Anuja Jain in her meticulous research on the Films Division from 1940 to 1960, details the history of the Film Advisory Board from 1940 when it was setup and later its colonial legacy through the Films Division.[x] Jain also focuses on the significance and influence of Grierson on the Films Division.[xi] For instance, films like *Drifters* and *Night Mail* impacted the technique and aesthetics of the Indian documentarians like Ezra Mir and N.S. Thapa.[xii] While scholarship surrounding the influence of Soviet realism on Grierson is not new, this essay's intervention is in claiming the influence of filmmakers like Alexander Dovzhenko and Dziga Vertov, and films like *Turksib* (dir. Viktor Alexandrovitsh Turin, 1929) not only on Grierson but on Wright as well, and thereby shedding light on the

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sources of inspiration for experimental filmmakers like Pramod Pati within Films Division.

Grierson, Flaherty and Eisenstein: *Drifters, Industrial Britain* and the Nation

The pragmatic side of Grierson, his ability to persuade and tackle bureaucracy and navigate through the corridors of powers, was demonstrated very early in his career by his astute choice of herrings as the subject for his debut film *Drifters* (1929). Grierson was aware that the key to finance for the film was held by Arthur Samuel, the financial secretary to the Treasury, who had written a book: *The Herring: it's Effect on the History of Britain*.[xiii] As Grierson believed in Flaherty's principle that "the story must be taken from the location, and, it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location,"[xiv] he could bet on his documentary on the herring industry as he had direct experience as an apprentice.[xv] For the cinematic rendering of the script, Grierson relied on his knowledge of the cinema that had come "partly from the Russians, partly from the American westerns, and partly from Flaherty of *Nanook*."[xvi]

Drifters, produced by New Era Films for the Empire Marketing Board and shot during the summer of 1928 was unique in the history of the British Documentary Movement for its use of established technicians like Basil Emmot, who was one of Britain's eminent cameramen, and Robert Israel, who was known for his musical scores for silent films. Grierson knew that his strength lay in his theoretical and analytical side rather than the technical.[xvii] When the film was finished in the summer of 1929, its unusual length of 50 minutes excluded it from the conventional types of feature or short film.

Grierson's weaving of the herring fishermen with the marketplace led to a film which drew from Flaherty's expertise of the "naturalistic observational style" to find the drama in the seemingly mundane and Eisenstein's theory of montage to dramatize realistic material and to posit the working man as the "hero". *Drifters* and *Industrial Britain*

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(Grierson and Flaherty, 1930) are concerned with the themes of proletarian culture and the issues of people living in rural region. These rural workers of a small production unit interact with each other and establish a social relationship through their work, which is showcased as an honorable ritual.[xviii] The local and the intimate moments of the workmen's life are juxtaposed with the expanding nature and the challenges it poses on the sea. The industrial motif in these films is not defined by the advanced large-scale industry which relies on mass-labor, but by a sparse production unit with limited workers, like the small crew of the filmmaker himself. [xix]

According to Aitken, the most important aspect of *Drifter*'s compelling dramatic structure is its "theme of individual's struggle against nature."[xx] The details of manual labor like hauling the nets and stoking the boiler are juxtaposed with the intricacies of the fishing industry: fishing in the deep sea, processing, packaging, and distribution. Men and machine form one organic unity as exemplified by the shot in which a man stoking a boiler withdraws a shovel of coals from the furnace and casually lights up a cigarette from it.

However, there is a departure from this unity between men and machine in the end when the focus shifts to the institutions of commerce and distribution and the film alludes to the commodification and degradation of labor. The anti-capitalist and socialist thinking of Grierson, as found in much of his writing, is exemplified by the super imposed image of the fish at sea over the scene in which the fish is being barreled at the market.

The scenes at the market are quite different in their ambience from those at the fishing boat; the marketplace is a limited social space marked by chaotic movements and commercial activity, unlike the communal space in the boat where working-class men dramatically struggle against nature. Nevertheless, Grierson emphasizes the unity of

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manual skills necessary within modernity, "showing deep sea fishing as part of a larger system of interconnection, involving production, marketing and international distribution." [xxi] It is this dominant theme of modernity, which makes drifters resonate with the Social Realist films of Russia, particularly the *General Line* (1929), and enables our reading of the film as European along with being British. The sea and the boat with the working class men who are unbound by borders and their struggles against nature recall the "romantic naturalism" of Flaherty, particularly in his *Man of Aran* (1934). They also recall Bert Haanstra and his *And there was no more Sea* (Netherlands,1955) which had fishing and the sea as its main theme to redefine Netherlands and the liminal space of Northern Europe.[xxii]

Drifters also underscores Eisenstein's influence on Grierson as he aims for the "overwhelming impression" on the spectator through "the use *of* tempo, rhythm and composition."[xxiii] *Drifters* was premiered on Sunday, November 10, 1929, when it was screened together with Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).[xxiv] It was exactly three years after its New York opening in which Grierson was involved in the translation of the inter-titles of (the same print of) *Battleship Potemkin*.[xxv]

However, unlike in Eisenstein's *General Line*, modernity is not unconditionally endorsed in *Drifters* since the tension between tradition and modernity is built right from the fist title card:

> The Herring fishing industry has changed. Its story was once an idyll of brown sails and village harbours - its story now is an epic of steel and steam. Fishermen still have their homes in the old time village - But they go down for each season to the labour of a modern industry.

Grierson plays out this conflict till the end when the catch is delivered to the highly modernized marketplace, and uses the Russian-style montage to undergird his own

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ambivalence concerning the commercialization of the fishing industry. Grierson had to navigate through the diverse pulls of the inter-connectedness and harmony—of man, nature and technology—and the positive portrayal of the working class experience. These imperatives were not always compatible due to the inequality in society, and therefore, in *Drifters* we find interesting tensions and contradictions when it comes to its take on the socio-economic situation of the fishermen: Are they to be endorsed or critiqued? This question, which is at the heart of European modernity, was posited with the help of the dynamic juxtapositions between the community in the boat and the commercial activity at the market place; central to Grierson's philosophy was his "conviction that cinema, as a characteristically modern medium, could make a decisive intervention into the shaping of western modernity." Grierson's theory and practice was significantly influenced by Bela Balazs, the Marxist film maker-theorist from Hungary, and operated within a defined modernist paradigm. In the context of modernity in Grierson's films, Annette Kuhn has read his early documentaries, as an appeal to return to the pre-capitalistic mode of production.[xxvi] *Drifters* thus evokes questions related to the conflict between man and machine and the ambivalence between its poetic visuals of the celebration of the pre-capitalistic and the dynamic montage sequence enabling the representation of the rhythm and movement of the chaotic activities at the market place.

Chronologically too, Grierson's ambivalence concerning the commercialization of labor posits *Drifters* between his investment in overt Russianness in terms of the representation of the geopolitics of space and the distinct socialist euphoria of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and the technology-driven, studio-oriented classical Hollywood's preoccupation with the coming of sound in *The Broadway Melody* (1929), and *The Cocoanuts* (1929). [xxvii] Grierson's love-hate attitude towards Hollywood prefigures the complex relationship between the Europeans and Hollywood, as

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exemplified by the Cahiers-, Fassbinder/Wenders-, and the von Trier-Hollywood relationships.

Grierson's outspoken attack on the commercialization of art and the greed of Hollywood began when he started writing about films for the press in the mid-twenties in the US, where he went to study at the University of Chicago in 1924. Later in his theoretical manifestos, Grierson asserted that the documentary alone, when compared with commercial or the amateur "art" film, offered a space wherein technical and aesthetic experiments became possible.[xxviii] However, his deep admiration for directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Joseph von Sternberg, Chaplin, William Wyler, Ernest Lubitsch and Erich von Stroheim, and his critical analysis of Marx brothers *Cocoanuts*, *Animal Crackers* and *Monkey Business* resonates with the passion of Bazin and foregrounds the cinephile in him.[xxix]

Hollywood as the standard reference helps define other national cinemas and their significant film movements, for instance, Weimar Cinema, or the French New Wave, or the New German Cinema, or the Cinema Novo of Latin America. *Drifters* was defined by Paul Rotha, the staunch critic of Grierson's work, as "the preeminent" film of the British Documentary Movement, and its uniqueness lies in its being the first film to posit realism as unique to British cinema and being the harbinger of the British realist tradition, as opposed to the fantasy-driven American feature film, which sees the British Documentary Movement, "Ealing comedies ... Free Cinema, and British social realism essentially as parts of the same tradition."[xxx]

While scholars have understandably focused on Flaherty and Eisenstein in tracing the influences on Grierson, it would be productive to think of others. Grierson's rhetoric against art cinema and the works of Vertov, particularly against *Man With a Movie*

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Camera (1929), which he should have seen only after he completed the production of *Drifters*, sheds light on their omission of Vertov as one of the major influences. But by the same coin, Grierson's predilection and high praise for the Russian director Dovzhenko, and his film *Earth* (1930) in particular, begs the question of its influence on the later films of the British Documentary Movement. In a similar vein, *Turksib* (1929) too, could be argued to have influenced the Griersonians after *Drifters*.

Drifters impact on Indian documentarians, however, is palpable. For instance, *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village* (1946), photographed and directed by Krishna Gopal for the Information Films of India, the government body under British rule which prefigured the Films Division, juxtaposes the quotidian lives of the ordinary fisher folk--children, housewives and husbands--with the fishermen on the sea. The history of Bassein as housing a fort on the west coast during the Portuguese rule is intercut with its being a colorful fishing village in contemporary times where the entire family is involved with fishing and celebrating it as a way of life. Thereafter this organic structure expands to include the secular and musically rich culture of Bassein. The frenetic market space in *Drifters* is replaced by the culture-permeated domestic/public sphere in Bassein to juxtapose the details of the fishing and catchment processes at the sea. *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village* as "a Central Office of Information film," like *Drifters*, does not address the socio-economic exploitation of the fisher people in its preoccupation with community building and propaganda/advocacy on behalf of its sponsors for harmony.

John Grierson and the Aesthetics of the British Documentary Movement

The Britishness of *Drifters,* however, is complicated by its imagery and movement, which not only recall the tempo and rhythm of *Battleship Potemkin* but the “symphonic form” of Walter Ruttman’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great city* (1927);[xxxi] the third major influence on Grierson, apart from Flaherty and Eisenstein, was Ruttmann. The dramatic

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rhythm appropriated from Potemkin is tempered by the drama inside the boat which recalls the naturalistic style of Flaherty. *Drifters* also invokes the poetry of Ruttman's *Berlin* through the visuals of the sea and the birds as the backdrop to the struggles of the fishermen against nature.[xxxii] Grierson also acknowledged the influence of the avante-garde filmmakers on his work: After watching *Rien que les Heures* (1926), Grierson offered Alberto Cavalcanti a job in Britain. Fernand Leger's seminal film *Ballet Mecanique* (1924) prefigured the ballet of machines in *Man with a Movie Camera* and *Drifters.* Grierson, therefore, calls for the understanding and evaluation of *Drifters* in the larger context of European avant-gardism and its umbilical ties to a non-fiction genre like "documentary," a term that was coined by him when he wrote the review of Flaherty's *Moana* (1926). [xxxiii]

The first half of *Drifters* in its visual poetry of the borderless landscape avoids the "flagging" of elements as defined by Mette Hjort, which is quite evident in the later films of the British Documentary Movement.[xxxiv] More than the "topical" theme of Britain as a nation, it addresses itself to the "perennial" theme of the alternative to the American cinema in Europe which, resonating across geographical boundaries, has been central to the discourses surrounding the production and reception of cultural artifacts.[xxxv] However, this perennial theme in *Drifters* is encapsulated within the topical one of the European nation and modernism, as exemplified by the way Grierson shifts gears in the last segment of the film to focus on the marketplace and emphasizes its interconnectedness and inevitability to the labor of men, and showcases their frenetic and mechanical activity as an extension of the mechanistics of the trawler parts—organic unity of men and machines being the leitmotif of the film.

In this context, it would be productive look at the parallels in India. As noted by Indian Cinema Historian B.D. Garga,[xxxvi]

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> [Ezra Mir] initiated a programme that included several films on agriculture, industry, communications, public health, handicrafts, art and architecture. Agriculture was and still is central to India's economy ... [W]hen films on essential problems--tackling locusts, floods, droughts, irrigation, tillage and manure--were shown to the farmers, their response was invariably enthusiastic. *The Winged Menace* (1944), *Soil Erosion* (1943), *School for Farmers* (1944), *Conquest of the Dry Lands* (1944), *Tube Wells* (1944), *Need for the Moment* and *Rural Maharashtra* (1945) were films that focused on problems common to farmers all over the country ... The fact that in these films productivity was linked to supply of food or food grains to the armed forces seemed quite natural to them. After all, most recruitment for the army, totalling over two million, was from the rural areas. (109)

Drifters erases the gap between the fisherman and the market place by disavowing the discourse surrounding labor, wages, and the economy of exploitation, by focusing on the frenetic market place, and romanticizing through its climax the immediacy of the fruits of fishermen's labor and, by the superimposition of the large fish, suggesting that the benefits will be collective just like the work that went into the catching of the fish. In a similar vein the films, recounted by B.D. Garga above, which were produced by the Film Advisory Board, refuse to engage with the poverty of the Indian farmers and their economical situation which forces them to migrate and look for jobs elsewhere.

Though Mir's credentials as a technician are beyond doubt, like Grierson, he too was ultimately hired and paid for by the government machinery which wanted to further its agenda of a healthy economy that was predicated upon an enthusiastic and obedient labor which did not question the status quo, particularly when it came to working hours and wages. Films like *District Magistrate (*Prod. Ezra Mir, dir. Kenneth Villiers, 1945), which was produced by the Information Films of India, showcase the well oiled government machinery where a District Magistrate in Bengal

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acts as the spokesperson of the government as he is the link between the various administrative units and the Chief Secretary:

> "The district officer attends to problems brought to him. To help him, he has a body of administrative men who hold meetings at the village to settle local disputes. Officers responsible to the district officer, including the irrigation officer, the civil surgeon, and the police superintendent, make their reports to him. The district officer then has to make his report to the Chief Secretary at Calcutta. Back home, he entertains his friends, then retires to bed to study more reports until he is interrupted by an emergency call that a river has burst its banks. The district officer immediately sets out to supervise the relief measures" (FD Brochure).

Similarly, V. Shantaram Production, the company of the iconic filmmaker, produced *Aiming High,* an air force-training film in 1945. Ezra Mir directed the visually absorbing film which showcases the air force officers, pilots and trainees in action, and details their alertness, reflexes, and patriotism. Although made toward the end of the second world war as a statement against fascism and the safeguarding of the motherland, *Aiming High* focuses on technical finesse in terms of photography and editing to make a statement regarding how the various cogs can efficiently fit into the project of the nation, thus recalling the "socialist triumphalism" of Vertov, even as it disavows the larger designs of the Bristish Empire and its colonial project of exploitation in the name of war and justice.

The erudite Ian Aitken informs us that "the critical and commercial success of *Drifters* enabled Grierson to put his plans for documentary film production at the EMB into practice."[xxxvii] The theme of the nation in *Drifters* is articulated through the cultural specificity of the dresses, the mass culture of the workers, and the definition of the market place. It also recalls the dialectical tension between rural conservatism and urban superficiality in the British silent film *The Lure of Crooning Water* (1920). The nostalgia for the past and modernity's promise regarding the future frame the theme of the nation in *Drifters*, in the absence of spoken language or other banal elements, or generic specificity,

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as epitomized by the collapsing of the French national cinema with the avant-garde or art-cinema movement,[xxxviii] because of its being a documentary with a hybrid style.

According to Grierson, *Drifters* presented the day-to-day life of ordinary men with drama and truth:

> It thus threw open to British film production new sources of material limited only by the borders of life itself. It differed from Flaherty's work that it did not go to the Far North or the South Sea Islands in search of the remote or the exotic. It differed from the work of the Russians in that it was harnessed to no political theme. Owing much to those two sources, it enjoyed a greater liberty and struck a more universal note than *Nanook* or *Turksib*. [xxxix]

In Ezra Mir and A. Bhaskar Rao's documentary for the Film Advisory Board, *Changing Face of India* (1941), the production (executive producer) has been credited to Alexander Shaw, who along with Stuart Legg, directed *Cable Ship* (1933) which was produced by Grierson for the GPO film unit.[xl] In *Changing Face of India* too the sound and images are "harnessed to no political theme" even if the entire film is constructed as a montage to celebrate the gradually industrializing India. As in the case of the fishermen in *Drifters*, the village and the farmers in *Changing Face of India* and the details from their lives are juxtaposed with the city, the forest-research laboratory, the multi-storeyed buildings on the Marine Drive or the Queen's Necklace in Bombay, a surgical ward where a surgeon is performing an operation, the Nobel Prize winner for physics, Sir. C.V. Raman as he is busy in his research lab, other scientists and technicians in their workplace, and a train and the multitude of automobiles on road. The leisurely paced shots of the village life at the beginning are bookended with the cars on the road in Bombay at the end. The transition from the rural to the urban is marked by cutting away from folk art, as exemplified by the puppet show in the village, to the clarinet and drums of the western music in a star hotel where formally dressed city dwellers are dancing. Nonetheless, the fast-paced city life has its significance only because of its contrast to the village life we

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saw at the beginning. The structure becomes dramatic because of the poetic montage/ juxtaposition. Grierson used the term "poetic" to describe the methodology that he used to posit the struggles of life at sea, and capture "that atmosphere of higher meaning without which no drama is any drama at all..."[xli] In successfully capturing this "drama from the very ordinary (events of life)," *Drifters* elevates the individual and the inward over the social and the outward, and undergirds its place in the pantheon of European modernist films.

Industrial Britain (prod. and editor. Grierson; dir. and cameraman. Flaherty, 1930), produced by the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, also resonates with the theme of the rituals of skilled labor, as they enable social relationships within a small production unit. However, the subtext of the nationalist ideology in *Industrial Britain* tows the conventional pattern, as described by Erikson, of "(recreating) a wholeness and continuity with the past to transcend the alienation or rupture between individual and society that modernity brought about."[xlii] The film's motif is technically organized by cutting between the larger (industrial society) and the individual (specific details): the voice-over, "*And so you see, the industrial towns are not as drab as they seem. Behind the smoke, beautiful things are being made*," is layered over the extreme long shot of the industrial area and the next line, "*... English craftsmanship and skill for an emphasis on quality, which only the individual can give*," accompanies the close-up of the spinning lens of the aerodrome. The structure of the individual and society as reciprocally functioning systems in which each side contributes to the other is similar to the future Soviet Union envisioned by Eisenstein in *The General Line,* in which agriculture and industry, and the rural and the urban compliment each other.[xliii]

On Grierson's invitation Flaherty had come to Britain to shoot *Industrial Britain*, but the project ran into problems because of the extravagant style of Flaherty and the constraints imposed by public funds and government regulations, resulting in Grierson shooting

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portions of the steel plant sequence with Basil Wright and Arthur Elton, and editing the film with Edgar Anstey and Margaret Taylor, when Flaherty was forced to quit midway.[xliv] Extensive segments in the film detailing the making of the ceramic pot, the operation of furnace and the hand-blowing of glass into goblets have the touch of Flaherty—in the close-ups of the hands and the faces—while the segments of the steel, coal mining and the ceramic industries have a different visual style and editing pattern. The pedantic voice-over celebrates the craft skills and techniques, whereas the visual and editing style in *Industrial Britain* underscore its preoccupation with working-class labor and regional identity. However, the celebration of the skills is dominant, unlike in *Drifters* and its ambivalent critique of social processes.

Grierson's ambivalence towards scientific development could be traced to his Calvinist background and his affinity for the regional and the rural, and his simultaneous investment in socialism and egalitarianism, mostly driven by industry and technology. Therefore, the relationship of technology to traditional mores and practices were depicted as progressive (*Industrial Britain*) as well as destructive (*Drifters*). The same ambiguity could be seen when this theme extended from the nation to that of the empire, particularly in Basil Wright's *Cargo from Jamaica* (1933) that contrasts the industrially developed Britain with Jamaica, *Windmill in Barbados* (1933) which focuses on the industrially developing Barbados through its younger generation, and the celebrated *Song of Ceylon* (1934) which undermines the Orientalist objectives of its sponsor, the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board, by depicting the Ceylonese landscape as pristine and impenetrable by the commercial agenda of its colonizer that is driven by technology.

The closing sequence of *Industrial Britain* works primarily through visual patterns of the moving parts of the machines and locomotives, pistons in particular, and the human hands as they work in tandem. The airplanes and the sea planes as they take off are

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juxtaposed with the moving vertical arms of heavy-lift cranes and the faster rhythm, achieved through carefully framed movement within the shot and through editing, is allegorized as the movement of the nation. This sequence certainly recalls many of the sequences in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*. Though Grierson is critical of Vertov's manifestos predicated on the Kino-Eye, he is overwhelmed by his artistry. Consider for instance, his phrases of admiration even as he is qualifying them with criticism: [T]here are rabbits to be taken out of the hat (or bin) of montage, which are infinitely magical, but ...;[xlv] I have never set eyes on a film that interested me more than Vertov's *Enthusiasm*, nor one that demanded more solid criticism.[xlvi] Similarly the poetic close-ups of the workmen toward the end recall the glorious but innocent villagers of Dovzhenko's *Earth* rather than the binary "typage" of the dialectical protagonists and antagonists of Eisenstein.

Similar attention to local faces and using them as a landscape to weave the larger theme of the nation can be seen in the works of another veteran from the Films Division, N.S. Thapa. He was a combat cameraman who had widely travelled, particularly with the Prime Minster Nehru to Soviet Russia. No doubt Nehruvian socialism marks his works, like *Bhakra Nangal* (1958), which traces the history and the construction of India's mutipurpose dams at Bhakra and Nangal on the Sutlej river. Thapa traces the history of this mammoth project as it came into being in 1946 by initially using illustration and animation. Three minutes into the film, the voiceover reveals the theme of the film as the man-machine collaboration for development. By juxtaposing the machines in their various sizes and shapes with engineers, supervisors, technicians, and workers, Thapa uses the depth of the dam being constructed and focuses on the massiveness of the project as it progresses fast. Toward the end of the film, as Thapa weaves an Indian tapestry through the quotidian voices of B. Srinivasan from Madurai, Guru Dutt from Jullundur, Muralidhar Shinde from Bombay, Gurcharansingh Randhawa from Punjab, and Chunilal

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Ganguly from Calcutta, who proudly narrate their sense of pride and achievement in working on such a prestigious project, the voiceover reaffirms that these men are from "all parts of India," and they speak "different languages," and are united through their work "in the valley of the Sutlej." Thus the Griersonian influence on Thapa becomes easily perceptible through the theme of nation building with men from diverse regions and modern machines in a didactic project funded by the government. Vertovian man-machine utopia too haunts Thapa's montage aesthetics.

As Camille Duprez has noted in her detailed essay on the influence of John Grierson on the Films Division, *Rivers in Harness* (1949) and *Golden River* (1954) engage with the building of dams which became symbols of modernity and progress in their promising of water for cultivation in a draught prone agrarian economy.[xlvii]

GPO and the Art of National Projection: Experiments with Sound and Techniques

Basil Wright's experience in Jamaica and Barbados contributed to his most significant film *Song of Ceylon*, which enhanced "British documentary's reputation abroad by winning the Prix du Gouvernement Belge at the 1935 Brussels film festival."[xlviii]

The production context of *Song of Ceylon* as a propaganda documentary of the GPO, under its scheme of the "Art of National Projection" for the Tea Marketing Board which was designed to increase the sales of Ceylonese Tea, was subsumed by the artistry of Wright with substantial help from Cavalcanti who, with his experience in the avant-garde movement in France, was mainly responsible for the experimental sound track of the film which was constructed during its post-production in London.[xlix] Harry Watt, the co-director of Wright in *Night Mail,* considers the arrival of Cavalcanti in the GPO film unit as the turning point of the British Documentary Movement: "Cavlcanti was a great professional, and he arrived at the same time, more or less as we had sound… None of us

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had cut sound at all until Cavalcanti arrived."[l] However, Jamie Saxton convincingly argues for Walter Leigh, the co-director of Song of Ceylon, as the technician responsible for the experimental sound track of the film.[li]

The *Song of Ceylon* experimentally weaves together unusual sound effects with extracts from Robert Knox's seventeenth-century account of a trip to Ceylon and Walter Leigh's music. Wright used the "remote, grave" voice of the pianist Lionel Wendt, to read the meditations of Knox on Ceylon and its Buddhist culture. Stollery points out the play with "abrasive" accents and English "speech patterns" in the myriad "voices" in "the Voices of Commerce" segment of the film—in counterpoint to Wendt's dominant narration—as they "give orders, request information," and "announce commodity prices" over images of "traditional" forms of Ceylonese manual labor.[lii] The aesthetics of undermining the objective of the propaganda of the Empire and its benevolence is designed through the juxtaposition of poetic visuals and experimental sounds, which were mainly created in the studio.

The colonial exploitation of Ceylonese labor is structured through a series of conflicting sequences that alternate between tradition and modernity: "a segment describing the harvesting of tea by manual labor ... is followed by three shots of industrial machinery;" "an ocean liner" is abruptly inserted into a sequence of "the harvesting of coconuts;" and an "elephant disrupts a sequence devoted to describing commercial telephone and telegraph communication."[liii]

The montage of voices, as noted by Rotha, have a distinct political slant: "The market prices of tea, declared by radio-announcers and dictated in letter form by business executives are overlaid on scenes of natives picking tea leaves in the gardens, the 'Yours truly' and 'Your obedient servant' of the dictation being ironically synchronized over the

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natives at their respective tasks." [liv] The callous nature of the colonial exploitation is undergirded by the dissonant juxtaposition of images and visuals.

Brian Winston has critiqued *Song of Ceylon* for its disavowal of the exploitation of the colonial labor and the colonies;[lv] he echoes similar concerns expressed in the *Cinema Quarterly* when the film was released: "...the voices (in Voices of Commerce) are ghostly, and the influence of England on Ceylon is not at all ghostly; it is a forcibly transforming influence, leading to fever and conflict."[lvi] Nevertheless, Wright's poetic style and subtle critique on colonization enabled him to make a film which was internationally successful.[lvii] In the 1930s, Graham Greene writing in his *Spectator* film-review column argued that Wright had achieved "perfect construction and the perfect application of montage."[lviii] He noted the circular structure of the film, and the way the "religious imagery" and the "fans of foliage" punctuate the beginning and the end. He endorsed the sense of separation Wright achieved between the commercial West and the timeless Orient.

The film focuses on the religious rituals and Buddhist monuments, and uses extended dissolves and an unhurried editing style to showcase the leisurely lifestyle of the Ceylonese people. It engages with their intimate moments at home and the demanding time at work in the big expanse outdoors, evoking empathy for their culture while at the same time retaining a sense of the mystery of the unknowable. Nonetheless, Wright's premise of the impenetrability of the Orient establishes time as having stood still for the last two hundred and fifty years, as exemplified by his culling out of Knox's centuries-old observations, and characterizes Ceylon in the mold of the Saidian Orient: a place "characterized by unchanging continuities."

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The Films Division of India too had its own artists, as exceptions, within its Griersonian factory of propagandists who, nonetheless, were skillful in their trade of juxtaposing sounds with images for the cause of community and nation building. The preeminent artist during the initial phase of the FD was Pramod Pati. *The Explorer* (prod. and dir. Pramod Pati, 1968) recalls not only Basil Wright's images of the Buddha and the mythos of the East but also through its highly experimental editing and affective montage sequences, Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera.* Pati structures his fast-paced film where the average shot length is just a few seconds for a nuanced and accelerated rhythm toward the climax. The film moves from the religious and mythical to the symbols of modernity through both images and sounds. Initially, the fleeting shots of identifiable religious iconography are juxtaposed with images of youth and energy. For instance, images of the Buddha and the Tantric/Hindu mystical symbols are followed by a sequence of the close-ups of frenetically dancing youth, whose energy and visuals permeate the film. This is followed by sequence of science and technology--the close-ups of cathodes and anodes in a lab and young people inside the library, which is juxtaposed with nature--trees, water, and a man meditating. The following image of the electronic numerical board, prefiguring the computer-driven binary world of the future, seems to blink at and provoke us. Thereafter, the increasing pace of the film builds to a crescendo toward the climax through a collage of close-ups of different faces from varying angles accompanied by a well-designed, electronic and experimental sound track. Through his experimental-symphony film Pati, unlike the outsider Wright in *Song of Ceylon,* seems to self-reflexively contemplate the inner contradictions and ruptures in the Indian Psyche which on the surface seems to effortlessly straddle between tradition and modernity.

The *Night Mail* (1936), one of "the last of the montage" documentaries of the movement, adopted the conventional semantics of voice-over commentary and continuity editing. The experienced R.Q. McNaughton edited the film, and Harry Watt shared the credit for

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direction with Wright. According to Dai Vaughan, in the constituents of *Night Mail*, the film which embodies "the essence of British documentary," we can find the elements that define "the central myth of the British Documentary Movement: the tight-knit group, the journey through the night ... the physical isolation amid a sustaining and succouring network of communications; the task accomplished for a still more diffuse community whom the group, even through this network, never meets."[lix] All these elements recur in various forms as can be seen in Grierson's (earlier) *Granton Trawler* (1934), Jennings's (later) *Fires Were Started* (1943), and articulate the meaning of "work," and a commitment to its "ideal status" in a humane society, as sustaining a civilization.

Night Mail is an account of the Royal Mail train delivery service as it journeys across from London to Glasgow through various regional railway stations, amidst a constantly changing pastoral landscape, collecting and depositing mail. The city or the metropolitan is simulated through activities in the railway stations--mainly shot in the studio--and the pronounced artifice of the studio interiors creates a disjunction between the personnel in charge of the mail service and the world outside. The steamy portrayal of the train as a technological marvel of modernity poetically captures the landscapes of the countryside and shifts our attention from the organized workflow of the postal service. The postal workers are portrayed as cogs in a larger machine that dictates and coordinates their movement.

Winston, in his critique of the Griersonian tradition, has argued for the centrality of "rhetoric claiming artistic status" to the British Documentary Movement which has led to the tendency to focus "on surfaces," rather than portray the reality of the workers' plight.[lx] We don't get to know the postal workers in *Night Mail* as the visuals of the train's journey dominate the film—"the greasy iron rods and pistons, the backlight on the passing coaches, the telegraph wires and signals, hung mailbags, thrown newspapers, the

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skimming countryside, and the subjective shot from the rushing mail of the racing shadow of its own dense smoke at a steep curve." Nonetheless, it was the documentary movement that "captured the interest of film as an art." [lxi]

As the train nears its destination, in one of the celebrated sequences in the history of cinema, W.H. Auden's poetry and the music of Benjamin Britten are layered over the images of racing train wheels. Finally in Grierson's own emotive voice-over we hear the centrality of the mail to "national communication." However in playing out the opposition between the regional/cultural and the national/industrial, Griersonian predilection for the rural undermines the metaphor of the speeding train as the connecting link between the rural/urban and regional/national.

The heroics and camaraderie of the small group of postal workers, with its "leveling of social ranks in the higher interests of the job's completion," resonates with the experience of the film technicians—Wright and his group of men in *Night Mail*—rather than with the majority of the population. [lxii] *Night Mail* also recalls a body of nineteenth-century literature named "the Unknown England" texts. Dodd and Dodd point out the parallels: George Simms writes of the need to travel "into the dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General post office," and Grierson of his desire to "travel dangerously into the jungles of Middlesbrough and the Clyde." [lxiii] *Night Mail* successfully weaves Simms and Grierson's desires in its poetic journey. Grierson envisaged the ideal technocratic state as emerging from the "moving towards each other of Capitalism and Socialism"[lxiv]—an aspiration central to the spirit of social democracy and most art movements in Europe.

One of the significant legacies of the British rule is the Indian Railways and, therefore, it is not surprising that *Night Mail* is one of the most popular documentaries in India. Arguably, it is the most screened documentary in the film society and festival circuits.

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The reason, of course, is in the topography of India wherein the railways has played a major role in being a conduit to the linking of the south with the north, the rural with the urban, and the pastoral with the industrial. Therefore, *Night Mail* has always resonated with the Indian people in its exemplification of the Nehruvian idea of the industrial as enabling a form of egalitarian socialism which is predicated on the mobility of people, goods, labor, wealth, and education. Films like *Vital Link* (1951), and *Vigil on Wheels* (1955) among others, mirror *Night Mail* in remaining true to the Griersonian axiom of "the positive social function of art involved grabbing the power and energy of modern life, to represent the essence and sprit of things."[lxv] Films like *The Railway Belongs to You* (dir. Neil Gokhale, 1956) and *Voice of the People* (dir. S. Sukhdev, 1974) foreground the egalitarian and democratic aspect of the Indian Railways which was designed to ensure mobility of the people at an affordable cost.

To conclude, Indian Railways has been the metaphor for "Unity in Diversity," a motto at the heart of Indian democracy, and the above films, by taking us across borders and by juxtaposing the traditional with the modern, have helped showcase this spirit in varying degrees.

Notes

[i] Brian Winston, C*laiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisted.* London: British Film Institute, 1995. Winston criticizes Grierson and his group for aestheticizing the subject of their documentary instead of exploring the roots of the social problem, for instance Housing Problems (Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey, 1935), focuses on the individual subjects rather than the specificity of their problem driven by class.

[ii] Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike (1924), Potemkin (1925), October (1928),* and *The General Line (1929)* have great relevance to this paper. Grierson's collaboration with Flaherty on *Industrial Britain* (1933) exemplifies the Vertovian factor in the Griersonian discourse. Grierson himself did not acknowledge Vertov's man-machine theme as influencing his own projection of the industrial Britain, and its relationship with the common man, even if he was engaged actively with the Eisensteinian preoccupation with

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montage and socialist propaganda. *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) further complicates its standing with Grierson, as he was not open to experimental films, and Vertov's film denied any easy classification as it blurred the boundaries between documentary and experimental cinema. Eisenstein work on the other hand, even if fictional, had the dominant theme of propaganda– central to the Griersonian objectives.

[iii] However, in recent years the concept of the spectacular, along with the realist-documentary tradition of the Humphrey Jennings's lineage as inherited by Karel Reisz and Lindsey Anderson of the British Free cinema movement, has been occupying the central stage in critical debates around British cinema.

[iv] Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From documentary to Brit-Grit.* London: Wallflower Press, 2002. Lay gives a detailed analysis of Grierson's influence on British national cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. The Griersonian social documentaries prefigured the kitchen sink narratives of social realism. Nonetheless, it was the intervention of leftist film politics that challenged the class obfuscation and shed light on the post-Empire racism. Also see Winston (1995), for a critique of the socio-political strategy of Grierson.

[v] Grierson, John, and Forsyth Hardy, *Grierson on Documentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966: 166. Grierson, worked for the Empire Marketing Board from 1927 onward under Stephen Tallents when he was hired to produce a series of reports on film production for the EMB film committee. He continued to work for the EMB till 1933 before joining the General Post Office unit as a film officer.

[vi] Grierson was associated with the GPO from 1934-7. In 1939, he left for Canada, on an invitation from the government, to establish the National Film Board of Canada.

[vii] Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. See the chapter, "The Documentary Movement during the War, 1939-1945" for a brief history of the films made during the war. Humphrey Jennings started his illustrious career under Alberto Cavalcanti after he took over from Grierson in 1939, when Grierson left for Canada to establish the National Film Board of Canada. But the Griersonian theme of concern for the common man in the poetic wartime documentaries of Jennings like *London Can Take it* (1940), *Listen to Britain* (1942) and a *Diary for Timothy* (1944) are prefigured in the works of Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey's *Housing Problems* (1935), and Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936), and his mentor Cavalcanti's successful collaboration with Flaherty: *Coalface* (1935). Thus, for the purposes of this paper Jennings is understood to be indirectly influenced by Griersonian ideologies as inherited through Cavalcanti. The line towed by Lindsey Anderson of appropriating Jennings as a poet--away from Grierson, the propagandist-administrator--is questionable, since it was the wartime that gave Jennings the extra space/freedom he was looking for within the Griersonian tradition, as proven by the decline in the quality of his postwar films.

[viii] Grierson described Robert Flaherty's style in *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926) as "naturalist." See Grierson: p 84 and p 139. Later he invited Flaherty to Britain, and they worked together on the film *Industrial Britain* (1933). See Grierson: p 168 and p 216. This indicates Grierson's predilection for the ontological potential of the documentary even as he criticized Flaherty's romantic naturalism. At the same time, he was also

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influenced by the Russians and their theory of montage. He wanted to engage with Eisensteinian montage to complicate the linearity/naturalism of Flaherty's technique: see Grierson, pp. 121-38.

[ix] Bill Nichols, "What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own," *Introduction to Documentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, pp. 42-60.

[x] See Anuja Jain for the details on Alexander Shaw and the influence of John Grierson on the Films Division: "The Curious Case of the Films Division: Some Annotations on the Beginnings of Indian Documentary Cinema in Postindependence India, 1940s-1960s." *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 71 (Spring 2013), pp. 15-26.

[xi] Jain astutely traces the profound influence of Grierson on key Films Division pioneers like J.S. Bhownagary, who says: "the film now was to be regarded as a most valuable instrument with which to further the aims the nation was setting itself." Qtd. in Jain, p. 18.

[xii] Besides James Beveridge, who had worked with Grierson in the National Film Board of Canada, made forty documentaries in India, which were sponsored by Burmah Shell, some of which were bought by Films Division.

[xiii] See Gary Evans, John Grierson and the National Film Board: the Politics of Wartime Propaganda. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 31.

[xiv] Grierson, p. 148.

[xv] Referring to Flaherty's methods Grierson says: "Flaherty digs himself in for a year, or two maybe. He lives with the people till the story is told 'out of himself.'" See Grierson, p. 148. Stephen Tallents writes about Grierson having "served a tough apprenticeship to the sea in mine-sweepers during the war. We baited our hook with the project of a film to illustrate the North Sea herring fisheries. The treasury swallowed it, and Grierson set out to make his first film." See Swann, p. 30.

[xvi] Grierson: 136. Also see Ian Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement: an Anthology,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, pp. 77-81.

[xvii] Paul Swann argues that the success of *Drifters* was not repeated in other EMB productions, as they were generally made by "enthusiastic amateurs ... youngsters without professional experience." See Swann, p. 31.

[xviii] See Grierson: pp. 135-38.

[xix] Basil Wright in his interview with Cecile Starr discuses the general methodology of the shooting of the British Documentarians of that period. See Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins, *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of the Documentary*, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996, pp. 102-11. For instance, during the production of *Song of Ceylon*, he had just one assistant (p. 102); "we couldn't afford the luxuries" of a big unit.

[xx] Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, London; New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 110.

[xxi] See Aitken, *Film and Reform*, pp-104-118 for details on *Drifters*. According to Aitken, *Drifters* was very different from the straight forward publicity film which EMB officials had expected. He defines it as an "imagist" film and a "poetic montage" documentary. Also see Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 167, for *Drifter* and *Song of Ceylon*'s "poetic montage style."

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[xxii] Bert Haanstra, one of the great masters of the documentary from Netherlands, used the sea, fishing, and the discourses surrounding Europe's Modernism, to redefine Northern Europe through a series of documentaries, like *And there was no more Sea* (1955): "For centuries, the Zuider Zee was a source of income for surrounding communities like Urk, Stavoren and Enkhuizen. But beginning with the construction of the IJsselmeer Dam, the traditional fishermen's life around the inland sea changed, and today has almost vanished." Ref: Bert Haanstra, En de zee was niet (1955), The Netherlands, *Idfa.nl.*, Accessed 30 June 2016. <meerhttps://www.idfa.nl/industry/tags/project.aspx?id=419ce579-4df4-4151-a238-1acf5d7c88df>

[xxiii] Ian Jarvie and Robert L. Macmillan, "Document: John Grierson on Hollywood's Success, 1927." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* 9:3 (1989), pp. 309-26, as quoted in Martin Stollery, *Alternative Empires: European Modernist Cinemas and Cultures of Imperialism,* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, p. 156.

[xxiv] Ian Aitken, Film and Reform, p. 104.

[xxv] Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence,* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000, p. 29.

[xxvi] See Annette Kuhn, "British Documentary in the 1930s and 'Independence': Recontextualising a Film Movement," *British Cinema: Traditions of Independence,* Ed. Don Macpherson, London: British Film Institute, 1980, pp. 24-33. Kuhn draws attention to the "collaborative" practice within the British Documentary Movement which had a "pre-capitalistic" and "artisanal relations of production." Also see Lay, p. 41, for Cavalcanti's admission of their "collective" approach.

[xxvii] *The Broadway Melody* (1929), 104 minutes, Dir. Harry Beaumont. MGM's first full-length musical feature was advertised as "all-talking, all-singing, all dancing." It was the first, first musical to win an Oscar for Best Picture for 1928-9. This film prefigured the "backstage musical" genre. *The Cocoanuts* (1929), 93 minutes, Dir. Florey & Santley. The film debut of the garrulous Marx Brothers. Groucho plays a hotel manager/owner, with Chico and Harpo as con men who fleece guests, and Margaret Dumont as the only paying guest in the hotel.

[xxviii] Grierson, p-145-6. See "The Role of a Critic."

[xxix] Ibid: 62-3. Calling Stroheim "the crazy man of the film world" Grierson praises him as "the director of all directors," mainly because of his superlative disregard for the financiers who back him. This attitude of Grierson foreshadows his backing of the works of basil Wright like the *Song of Ceylon.*

[xxx] See Swann, p.175.

[xxxi] Grierson, pp.149-52 for Grierson's detailed analysis of *Berlin.*

[xxxii] Grierson was highly critical about the experiments of Vertov. He would probably have not seen the *Man with a Movie camera* when he made *Drifters*. However, from his writings we can infer the influence of Ruttmann's *Berlin,* and the other poetical, early city-symphony film, *Manhatta* (Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, 1921).

[xxxiii] Grierson coined the term "documentary," when he reviewed Flaherty's *Moana* for the *New York Sun* (Feb. 8, 1926).

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[xxxiv] Mette Hjort, "Themes of Nation," *Cinema and Nation,* Eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 99-100. Hjort says the theme of nation will emerge if elements like locations, language, actors, and props that mirror the material culture are "flagged." Hjort claims, "such elements can provide the basis for a given film's national quality but ... cannot constitute a theme." But "the self-conscious directing of focal awareness toward those meaningful elements" can help thematize the nation, as exemplified by Grierson's *Granton Trawler* (1934) and EMB's debut film *BBC: the Voice of Britain* (1934/5). Michael Billig's notion of banal nationalism is discussed by Hjort: "The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion, it is a flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (p. 100). This idea could be discussed in the context of the wartime films of Humphrey Jennings like *London can take it* (1940). However, Jennings poetic vision complicates Billig's notion of the banal.
[xxxv] Hjort details Lamarq's and Olsen's detailing of the "perennial and topical themes" of the nation. See Hjort, pp 97-99. However, cinema complicates such simple bifurcation, for instance, a film like *Drifters* problematizes such divisions.
[xxxvi] B. D. Garga, *From Raj to Swaraj: The Non-fiction Film In India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007, p. 109.
[xxxvii] See Aitken, *Film and Reform*, p. 119.
[xxxviii] See Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema,* London and New York: Routledge, 1993. She critiques this kind of simple reading and definition of national cinema without historical or cultural contexts. In her project she reads the French national cinema through the popular comedies and crime films which did well at the local box-office.
[xxxix] See Ellis, p. 44. For the details on *Drifters,* including Grierson and Paul Rotha's comments, read "The Empire marketing Board," pp. 38-45.
[xl] See Jain, Anuja, pp. 15-26.
[xli] Grierson as quoted in: Lay, p. 46.
[xlii] See Susan Hayward, "Framing National cinemas," *Cinema and Nation.* Eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 89.
[xliii] For a detailed analysis of Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929), see: Carroll, Noel. *Engaging the Moving Image,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 303-22.
[xliv] See Ellis, pp. 52-6, for a detailed account for the tensions between Flaherty and Grierson during the production of *Industrial Britain.* However, they were good friends for over two decades, and it was Grierson who arranged the funds for Flaherty's next film *The Man of Aran* (1934).
[xlv] Grierson, p. 127.
[xlvi] Ibid, p. 128.
[xlvii] See Deprez, Camille, "John Grierson in India: The Films Division Under the Influence," The Grierson Effect: Tracing Documentary's International Movement. Eds. Zoe Druick and Deane Williams. England: Palgrave Macmillan, for the BFI, 2014: p. 159.
[xlviii] See Stollery, p- 189.

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[xlix] Grierson, after seeing Cavalcanti's *Rien que les Heures* (1926) in Paris, was instrumental in bringing Cavalcanti to work at the GPO. Grierson notes Cavalcanti's "attempt to combine images in an emotionally satisfactory sequence of movements." (Grierson: 150). From silent avant-garde films the authorial preoccupations of Cavalcanti with images and movement continue with his sound experiments, particularly in the *Song of Ceylon*.
[l] See Elizabeth Sussex, The Rise and Fall of British Documentary: The Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1975, p. 49.
[li] See Jamie Sexton, "The Audio-Visual Rhythms of Modernity: Song of Ceylon, Sound and Documentary Filmmaking," *Nottingham.ac.uk*., Accessed 14 July 2016. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2004/may-2004/sexton.pdf>
[lii] Stollery, p- 192.
[liii] See William Guynn, "The Art of National Projection: Basil Wright's Song of Ceylon," *Documenting the Documentary*, Eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski. Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pp. 87-94, for a detailed analysis of the visuals and sound of the film.
[liv] Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film,* London: Faber & Faber, 1939, p. 222.
[lv] As quoted in Stollery, p- 191.
[lvi] Charles Davy, "Song of Ceylon," *Cinema Quarterly,* 3:2 (Winter 1935), p. 110.
As quoted in Stollery, p. 197.
[lvii] See Swann, p. 15.
[lviii] As quoted in Stollery, p.193.
[lix] See Dai Vaughan as quoted in Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins, "The British Movement."
pp. 119-21.
[lx] See Stollery, p. 191.
[lxi] See Lovell, Allan and Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1972, p. 138.

[lxii] Dai Vaughan, in Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins, p. 121.
[lxiii] As quoted in Lay, pp. 41-2.
[lxiv] Grierson says: "My view... would be that we are entering upon a new and interim society which is neither capitalist nor socialist, but in which we can achieve central planning without loss of individual initiative, by the mere process of absorbing initiative in the function of planning." See Peter Morris "Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson," Eds. T. O'Regan and B. Shoesmith *History on/and/in Film*, Perth: History and Film Association of Australia, 1987, pp. 20-30.
[lxv] See Deprez, p. 159.

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