



FILM
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

Films that Work Harder

The Circulation of
Industrial Film

EDITED BY

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Amsterdam
University
Press

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The Circulation of Industrial Film

*Edited by
Vinzenz Hediger,
Florian Hoof,
Yvonne Zimmermann,
with Scott Anthony*

Amsterdam University Press

This publication was made possible through a grant from the Open Access publication fund, Goethe Universität Frankfurt, with support from Philipps-Universität Marburg, by the Start-up Grant no. M4081571 from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and with support from DFG funded Institute for Advanced Studies Media Cultures of Computer Simulations (mecs), Leuphana Universität Lüneburg



Cover illustration: Film cans in Bay Village, Boston 1

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6298 653 4

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 781 5

DOI 10.5117/9789462986534

NUR 670



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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	9
Introduction: A Sequel and a Shift <i>Vinzenz Hediger, Florian Hoof, Yvonne Zimmermann</i>	19
Section 1 Networks and Flows: Visualizing Value Chains	
1 The Aesthetics of the Global Value Chain Container Shipping, Media Networks and the Problem of Visibility in the Global Sphere of Circulation <i>Vinzenz Hediger</i>	37
2 Object Lessons and Infrastructural Imperialism <i>Lee Grieveson</i>	105
3 Energy and Industrial Film Energio-Critical Registers <i>Thomas Turnbull</i>	123
4 Digital Afterlife of Industrial Film Weak Dispositives, Choice Architecture and the Distribution of Industrial Cinema <i>Florian Hoof</i>	143
Section 2 Operative Iconographies, Industry and the Nation State	
5 Beautiful Luxembourg, Steel Works and a Swimming Pool The Corporate Film <i>Columeta</i> and the Formation of a Corporate and a National Image <i>Ira Plein</i>	175
6 Hydropower for a Sealess Nation Representation of Water Energy in Czech Visual Culture <i>Lucie Česálková</i>	203

- 7 Modern Water Sprites 227
 History, People and the Landscape of Northern Sweden in Vattenfall's
 Film Production in the 1950s
Fabian Zimmer
- 8 Taxonomy of Techniques 249
 Visions of Industrial Cinema in Post-war Japan
Takuya Tsunoda
- 9 The Power of Flows 275
 The Spatiality of Industrial Films on Hydropower in Switzerland
Yvonne Zimmermann

Section 3 Institutions and Distribution Frameworks: Archives, Festivals, Fairs

- 10 Industry on Screen 299
 The British Documentary in Distribution – British Transport Films:
 A Case Study
Steve Foxon
- 11 On the Red Carpet in Rouen 317
 Industrial Film Festivals and a World Community of Filmmakers
Brian Jacobson
- 12 Cinema and Industrial Design 339
 Showmanship, Fairs and the Exhibition Film
Haidee Wasson

Section 4 Teaching Oneself and Others

- 13 Putting Films to Work 365
System, the Magazine for Business
Gregory A. Waller
- 14 New Media for the Schools of Tomorrow 391
 The AV Instructional Films of Robert W. Wagner
Charles R. Acland

- 15 We Must Know More Than We Can See 423
Images for Vocational Training and the Emergence of Cognitive
Ergonomics
Guilherme Machado

- 16 Free Enterprise Film 447
Aims of Industry, Economic Propaganda and the Development of a
Neoliberal Cinema
Scott Anthony

Section 5 Post/Colonial Industries and Third Industrial Cinemas

- 17 Framing Local and International Sentiments and Sounds 473
Unilever and Royal Dutch Shell in a Changing Nigeria
Rudmer Canjels

- 18 Working through the End of Empire 495
Tom Rice

- 19 Cinema-going on the Railway Tracks 513
Transportation, Circulation and Exhibition of Information Film in
Colonial India
Ravi Vasudevan

- 20 The Latin American Process Film 533
Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky

Section 6 Production Cultures and/of the Industrial Film: Amateurs and Professionals

- 21 Soviet Industrial Film across Categories 557
Negotiating between Utility, Art and Science
Maria Vinogradova

- 22 “There Is No Life More Reckless and Adventurous Than That
of the Oil Prospector” 581
ENT’s Geologist-Filmmakers in Iran
Luca Peretti

- 23 Industrial Film from the Home Studio 611
 Amateur Cinema and Low-Budget Corporate Moving Image Culture
 in West Germany (1950 to 1977)
Alexander Stark
- 24 Movie and Industry in Italy 635
 The “Golden Age” of Italian Industrial Documentary (1950–1970)
Anna Maria Falchero
- 25 A Film That Doesn’t Seem to Work 651
 A Shot of Renault’s Early Assembly Line (1920 to 1929) – A Case Study,
 Methodology and 3D Restitution for Film Analysis
Alain P. Michel

Section 7 Ephemeral Artistry: Ecologies of Authorship in Industrial Cinema

- 26 Business and Art 683
 Pharmaceutical Industries, Film Production and Circulation, and the
 French Film Production Company ScienceFilm, 1960–1980
Christian Bonah
- 27 Transfer of Power 711
 Films Officers in the British Coal Industry
Patrick Russell
- 28 Saudi Arabia’s John Ford? 737
 Robert Yarnall Richie, *Desert Venture* and Ephemeral Authorship in
 Industrial Film
Martin Stollery
- 29 Sounds Industrial 757
 Understanding the Contribution of Music and Sound in Industrial Films
Annette Davison
- 30 Creative Films for Creative Corporations 779
 Music and Musicians in Experimental Italian Industrial Films
Alessandro Cecchi

- Indices 799

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1.1a.	EVER GIVEN stuck in the bank. Image released by the Suez Canal Authority.	39
Fig. 1.1b.	The memefication of the EVER GIVEN incident (author unknown).	39
Fig. 1.2.	Maersk crews share pictures via the company's Instagram account, May 15, 2021.	40
Fig. 1.3.	The MarineTraffic.com landing page on May 10, 2021, 10:11 am CET (green: bulk cargo and container ships; red: tankers; orange: fishing ships; blue: passenger line ships; lilac: cruise ships and yachts).	42
Fig. 1.4.	Drone tracking shot of ship at sea. Evergreen line corporate video, 2019.	68
Fig. 1.5.	Aerial tracking shot in a CMA-CGM video introducing the natural gas-powered line flagship <i>Jacques Saadé</i> , 2020.	68
Fig. 1.6.	Aerial tracking shot of a Maersk Triple E ship with tracking info graphics.	69
Fig. 1.7.	Aerial tracking shot of <i>OOCL Hong Kong's</i> maiden call at Felixstowe, 2017.	65
Fig. 1.8.	Maersk Instagram video, released on World Environment Day, June 5, 2021.	74
Figs. 1.9a-i.	Screen shots from the Maersk Instagram video.	75
Fig. 1.10.	The visibility problem in global supply chains: <i>The Paper Trail of a Container</i> (Maersk, 2015).	77
Fig. 1.11.	Aspirational concepts: Advertisement for Maersk's Flex Hub, May 21, 2021.	78
Fig. 1.12.	Evergreen Line corporate video, 2019.	83
Fig. 1.13.	Aerial tracking shot of container being unloaded from a Maersk ship with converging movements of drone and container. Maersk corporate video for Europe, 2011.	85
Figs. 1.14a. and 1.14b.	Time-lapse shots of urban traffic flows, from <i>We Are Maersk</i> (2015).	86
Fig. 1.15.	Multi-layered temporalities: Market vendor and Maersk reefer container in Hong Kong, 2011.	87
Fig. 1.16.	Inside a Nike factory in China, from <i>We Are Maersk</i> (2015).	87
Fig. 1.17.	A Maersk rainbow container touring the tulip fields outside of Amsterdam. Maersk Instagram account, May 19, 2021.	89

- Fig. 1.18. Samantha Almon Adeluwoye interviewing Maersk CEO Søren Skou on innovation at Maersk under the watchful eyes of Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller, 2020. 90
- Figs. 1.19a. and 1.19b. Economic experts: Former president of Nigeria Ernest Shonekan and Professor Aby Awosika explain Apapa container port. 91
- Fig. 1.20a. Computer graphics locate growth at the point of congestion: Map of Lagos with Apapa container port in the foreground right. APM corporate video, 2011. 92
- Fig. 1.20b. Congestion at Apapa port, 2018. 92
- Figs. 1.21a. and 1.21b. Sharing the thrill of life at sea via the Maersk twitter account. 93
- Fig. 3.1. Boiler horse power gauge. Still frame from *Master Hands* (1936). © Handy (Jam) Organization, archival footage supplied by Internet Archive (archive.org) in association with Prelinger Archives. 132
- Fig. 4.1. The Mercedes-Benz Museum. 149
- Fig. 4.2. Elevator cinema. 151
- Fig. 4.3. Elevator cinema: Car racing. 152
- Fig. 4.4. Film Installation: *Descending from the Horse*. 153
- Fig. 4.5. Micro cinema. 153
- Fig. 4.6. Legend Room One: The Dawn of the Automobile Age. 158
- Fig. 4.7. Cinematic space becomes museum space: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. 158
- Fig. 4.8. The War Room set design turned into museum space: *Dr. Strangelove*. 160
- Fig. 4.9. Film installation “Fragments.” 162
- Fig. 4.10. Cinematic screens become museum screens: *Blade Runner*. 162
- Fig. 5.1. Frames from *Vu Feier an Eisen*, a reconstructed version of *Columeta* (1921–1922), reel I. Courtesy of Centre national de l’audiovisuel (Luxembourg)/Arcelor Mittal. 180
- Fig. 5.2. Frames from *Vu Feier an Eisen*, a reconstructed version of *Columeta* (1921–1922), reel II, III and IV. Courtesy of Centre national de l’audiovisuel (Luxembourg)/Arcelor Mittal. 181
- Fig. 5.3. Frames from *Vu Feier an Eisen*, a reconstructed version of *Columeta* (1921–1922), end of reel IV. Courtesy of Centre national de l’audiovisuel (Luxembourg)/Arcelor Mittal. 182

- Fig. 5.4. Frames from *Vu Feier an Eisen*, a reconstructed version of *Columeta* (1921–1922), reel V. Courtesy of Centre national de l'audiovisuel (Luxembourg)/Arcelor Mittal. 183
- Fig. 5.5. Charles Bernhoeft, *Hauts fourneaux de Dudelange* (Blast furnaces of Dudelange), collotype, from the album series *Le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* (1889–1891). © Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art – Luxembourg. 189
- Fig. 5.6. Nicolas Ries and Robert Hausemer, *Le beau pays de Luxembourg* (The beautiful country of Luxembourg, 1932). 190
- Fig. 5.7. Article on the Luxembourgian pavilion at the 1937 World Fair in Paris in *A-Z – Luxemburger illustrierte Wochenschrift*, no. 23 (1937), pp. 4–5. 192
- Fig. 5.8. Frames from *Acéries dans un parc* (dir. Georges Lust, 1960s, 45 min). Courtesy of Centre national de l'audiovisuel (Luxembourg)/Arcelor Mittal. 193
- Figs. 6.1a.–6.1c. Film stills from *Přístav v srdci Evropy* (*The Harbour in the Heart of Europe*, Drahoslav Holub, 1946). 213
- Fig. 6.2a. Cover of J.S. Kupka's novel *Rušné dny* (Busy days, 1955). 218
- Fig. 6.2b. Cover of Zdeněk Pluhař's novel *Modré údolí* (Blue valley, 1954). 218
- Fig. 6.3a. Recruiting poster for the construction of Lipno hydro-power plant, 1952. 220
- Fig. 6.3b. Cover of the economic research report *Rozvoj energetiky v ČSR* (Energy development in the ČSR, 1950). 220
- Figs. 6.4a.–6.4d. Film stills from *Lidé nad Čertovou stěnou* (*People over the Devil's Wall*, Emanuel Kaněra, 1962), showing the construction of the dam, a look at the machinery inside and its recreational benefits. 221
- Fig. 7.1. The water sprite at Trollhättan (Erik Josephsson/Carl Eldh, 1910). 228
- Fig. 7.2. Old times and new times in *Strömkarl* (1956). 233
- Fig. 7.3a.–7.3c. The “new face” as demonstrated in *Det nya ansiktet* (1958). 238
- Fig. 7.4. An anxious gaze is met with a measuring eye in *Den nya sjön* (1957). 241
- Figs. 7.5. and 7.6. Modern water sprites in *Strömkarl* (1956). 243
- Figs. 8.1. and 8.2. From *Sakuma Dam*. Picture courtesy Documentary Film Preservation Center, Japan. 257

- Fig. 8.3. Blocking and diverting the Tenryū River in *Sakuma Dam*. Picture courtesy Documentary Film Preservation Center, Japan. 259
- Fig. 8.4. Blasting in *Sakuma Dam*. Picture courtesy Documentary Film Preservation Center, Japan. 263
- Figs. 8.5.–8.6. Workers' faces in *Sakuma Dam*. Pictures courtesy Documentary Film Preservation Center, Japan. 264
- Fig. 9.1. Screenshot from *L'électrification des chemins de fer suisses/Die Elektrifikation der Schweiz. Eisenbahnen (The Electrification of the Swiss Federal Railway Network, 1921–1926)* (Cinémathèque suisse Lausanne). 280
- Figs. 9.2.–9.6. Screenshots from *Dienstbare Kraft/Forces domptées (Useful Power)*, sponsored by OSEC in 1938 (Cinémathèque suisse Lausanne). 282
- Figs. 9.7.–9.10. Screenshots from *Drei in einem Boot (Three in a Boat)* from the early 1950s (Cinémathèque suisse Lausanne). 291
- Fig. 10.1. Lights dimmed and projector ready for a BTF non-theatrical film show, c. 1970. 300
- Fig. 10.2. The BTF unit on location at Marylebone railway station, London, during 1969. 305
- Fig. 10.3. Checking 16 mm prints on completion of a screening. As many as two hundred copies of each title were held in the BTF Film Library. 308
- Fig. 10.4. British Rail's prestige cinema coach, which was launched in 1975, could be used on special trains to show films at 100 mph! 309
- Fig. 10.5. A BTF non-theatrical programme for 1955 creates an appetite for travel. 311
- Fig. 11.1. Cover of *L'avant-scène cinéma*. 319
- Fig. 11.2. Editorial in *L'avant-scène cinéma* with an image of Charlie Chaplin. 320
- Fig. 11.3. The cover of a special issue of *La revue de Rouen* devoted to the festival (1958). 325
- Fig. 13.1. System colour logo, July 1915. 366
- Fig. 13.2. H.B. Vanderblue, "Bringing the Factory to the Clerk: Motion Pictures of Making Processes Visualize Sales Arguments for Counter Use," *System* (December 1912). 372
- Fig. 13.3. Henry W. Mitchell, "The Camera as a Salesman," *System* (December 1910). 376

- Fig. 13.4. David Lay, "Putting 'Movies' on the Sales Force," *System* (July 1915). 381
- Fig. 13.5. David Lay, "Drawing the Crowds to Your Films," *System* (September 1915). 383
- Fig. 14.1. Chicago Teachers College, experimental multimedia teaching environment, in *Business Screen* (1962). 394
- Fig. 14.2. Production Still, "Communication Series," interim report, January 1965. Robert Wagner is on the right. 396
- Fig. 14.3. Still from *Airborne Television: Profile of a School* (1962). 399
- Fig. 14.4. Dial-up language instruction, in *The Teacher and Technology* (1966). 405
- Fig. 14.5. Central control room, U of Miami's octagonal AV instructional facility, in *The Teacher and Technology* (1966). 406
- Fig. 14.6. Multitmedia classroom usage, in *The Information Explosion* (1966). 407
- Fig. 14.7. Panel discussion, *The Communication Revolution* (1960), with, from the right, Keith Tyler, Marshall McLuhan, Gilbert Seldes, and Edgar Dale. 411
- Fig. 14.8. Index for modular possibilities, "A Galaxy of Motion Picture Documents on Communication Theory and the New Educational Media" (1966). 412
- Fig. 14.9. Splicing illustrated, "A Galaxy of Motion Picture Documents on Communication Theory and the New Educational Media" (1966). 414
- Fig. 14.10. Identification of asteroid 2 on print of *The Information Explosion* (author photo, 2014). 415
- Fig. 15.1. Example of a subcam user's point of view. Image provided by Saadi Lahlou. 433
- Fig. 15.2. Example of a subcam user's point of view. Image provided by Saadi Lahlou. 433
- Fig. 15.3. The replay interview. Image provided by Saadi Lahlou. 435
- Fig. 17.1. Over thirty Unilever films were available in the Nigerian UAC film library in the early 1960s, suggestions on their classroom use were supplied. Reproduced with kind permission of Unilever from an original in Unilever Archives. Advertisement file, UARM UAC/1/11/21/8. 477
- Fig. 17.2. The UK advertisements for the first three UAC films conjure up a pre-industrial world, in line with

- traditional colonial images. Advertisement, *Film User*, March 1957, p. 93. 480
- Fig. 17.3. The new face of Africa is represented by the sixteenth-century bronze head of Queen Mother Idia, emerging from a long period of obscurity. Advertisement, *Film User*, October 1958, n.p. 481
- Fig. 17.4. One of Shell-BP's "cinerovers" that would tour various districts and regions of Nigeria with a 16 mm projector, a generator, speakers and a collapsible screen on the roof. "More Requests for Films," *Shell-BP Bulletin*, no. 1, May 1963, p. 3. 486
- Fig. 17.5. Shell's tour operator invites everybody to take a journey to far away exotic lands. Advertisement, *Film User*, November 1962, p. 567. 487
- Fig. 17.6. After the premiere, *Enterprise in Nigeria* toured several districts in western Nigeria and was shown to state rulers, governmental officials and other distinguished personalities. "Enterprise in Nigeria." *UAC News*, vol. 11, no. 2, February 1962, p. 10. Reproduced with kind permission of Unilever from an original in Unilever Archives, UARM UAC/2/19/3/6/1/1. 489
- Fig. 20.1. From *Tejidos Chilenos* (Fernando Balmaceda, 1965). From the opening. 541
- Fig. 20.2. From *Tejidos Chilenos* (Fernando Balmaceda, 1965). Part of the 2:20 narrationless sequence, which is not in sequential order. There are shots missing from this figure, but not steps (as there are multiple views of the same step). 542
- Fig. 20.3. From *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957). Finished creations. 545
- Fig. 20.4. From *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957). Vibrating fibers. 545
- Fig. 20.5. From *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957). Film strip—two ways. 546
- Fig. 20.6. From *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957). Four consecutive shots. The first two transitions are dissolves; the third is a straight cut. All the transitions are establish graphic matches. 548
- Fig. 20.7. From *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957). Compare the visual eye metaphor of the earlier moment (left) to the eye of the penultimate shot of the film (right), an aerial view of the outdoor work space. In both, the metaphoric pupil uses light (from the bottom of the cavity in the

	first case and from the reflection of the sky in the second) to suggest life.	549
Fig. 20.8.	From <i>Mimbre</i> (Sergio Bravo, 1957). The opening and close shots of the film—of a tree.	549
Fig. 21.1.	Soviet delegate walking through the Leonardo Da Vinci Gallery at the Museum of Science and Technology in Milan. Leonardo was one of the early researchers of the process of formation of cracks in metals.	572
Fig. 21.2.	University professor using film to explain the process of formation of cracks in metals.	572
Fig. 21.3.	Izhor-Film amateur filmmakers preparing for a shoot.	576
Fig. 21.4.	Filming coworkers on the factory floor.	576
Figs. 22.1. and 22.2.	The films in the Archivio Storico ENI. Photographs by Luca Peretti.	584
Fig. 22.3.	Filming. From 1. <i>Scenette locali villaggi zona Goxar</i> (<i>Local Vignettes from Towns in the Goxar Area</i>).	587
Fig. 22.4.	Bath. From 27. <i>No title</i> .	587
Fig. 22.5.	Eating. From 36. <i>Campo attrezzato con tende lungo la costa</i> (<i>Camp with Tents along the Coast</i>).	588
Fig. 22.6.	Working. 38. <i>Mezzo di trasporto in movimento, locali al lavoro</i> (<i>Means of Transport in Movement, Locals at Work</i>).	588
Fig. 22.7.	Working. From 36. <i>Campo attrezzato con tende lungo la costa</i> (<i>Camp with Tents along the Coast</i>).	589
Fig. 22.8.	Working. From 24. <i>Riprese del territorio del Mekran e di alcune attività di rilevamento dei geologi</i> (<i>Filming of the Makran Territory and of Some Survey Activities of the Geologists</i>).	589
Fig. 22.9.	Local people, including a veiled woman. From 38. <i>Mezzo di trasporto in movimento, locali al lavoro</i> (<i>Means of Transport in Movement, Locals at Work</i>).	590
Fig. 22.10	Harsh conditions. From 31. <i>Momenti di difficoltà della spedizione dei tecnici verso la Provincia di Fars</i> (<i>Difficult Moments in the Expedition of the Technicians toward the Fars Province</i>).	595
Fig. 22.11.	A broken helicopter. From 38. <i>Mezzo di trasporto in movimento, locali al lavoro</i> (<i>Means of Transport in Movement, Locals at Work</i>).	604
Fig. 22.12.	Iranian police. From 23. <i>Momenti della spedizione dell'Agip Mineraria negli Zagros</i> (<i>Moments in the Agip Mineraria Expedition in the Zagros Mountains</i>).	597

- Fig. 22.13. Dance. From 20. *Danze e svaghi di baktiari in un campo. Aerei dell'Agip Mineraria sulla pista nei pressi di Jask (Dance and Recreation in a Bakhtiari Camp. Agip Mineraria's Airplanes on a Landing Field Close to Jask)*. 597
- Fig. 22.14. Close up. From 1. *Scenette locali villaggi zona Goxar (Local Vignettes from Towns in the Goxar Area)*. 604
- Fig. 22.15. Close up. From 37. *Immagini varie da una barca in navigazione, scarico pacchi in spiaggia e atterraggio dell'elicottero al campo base lungo la costa del Mekran (Various Images from a Sailing Boat, Unloading Boxes on the Beach and a Helicopter Landing at the Base Camp along the Makran Coast)*. 605
- Fig. 22.16. Orders. From 6. *Riprese di danze di beluchi, adulti e bambini e delle attività di un campo in disallestimento (Dance of the Baloch People, Adults and Children, and Dismantling a Camp)*. 600
- Fig. 22.17. Inside a helicopter. From 26. *Riprese aeree di un vasto territorio dell'Iran, in particolare dell'area del Mekran (Aerial View of a Vast Territory in Iran, the Area of Makran, in Particular)*. 600
- Fig. 22.18. View from above. From 26. *Riprese aeree di un vasto territorio dell'Iran, in particolare dell'area del Mekran (Aerial View of a Vast Territory in Iran, the Area of Makran, in Particular)*. 601
- Fig. 22.19. A city from above. From 17. *Documentazione filmica che mostra riprese aeree del territorio degli Zagros, dei villaggi e il campo base della spedizione (Film Documentation Showing Aerial Shots of the Zagros Territory, the Villages and the Base Camp of the Expedition)*. 601
- Fig. 22.20. Land. From 26. *Riprese aeree di un vasto territorio dell'Iran, in particolare dell'area del Mekran (Aerial View of a Vast Territory in Iran, the Area of Makran, in Particular)*. 603
- Fig. 25.1. Still frame from the assembly line sequence in the documentary film *Aux Usines Renault* (1920). © Gaumont Pathé Archives, 1920. 652
- Fig. 25.2. Analytical grid of visual sources. © A. Michel, 2001/2017. 659
- Fig. 25.3. First written attestation of a Renault Assembly line (Omnia September 1922). © *Omnia* (1922), Archives de Renault Histoire. 663

- Fig. 25.4. Picture showing a first form of the final assembly line, 1917. © Archives de Renault Histoire, Rights reserved, 1917 664
- Fig. 25.5. Ferro's analytical grid of films, 1973. © Marc Ferro, *Annales ESC*, 1973. 665
- Fig. 25.6. Drawing of the C5 workshop, 1918. © Service Outillage Entretien (SOE, 1918), Archives of Renault Histoire Association. 667
- Fig. 25.7. Table of the sequences of the documentary *Aux usines Renault* (1920). © A. Michel, EHESS, 2001. 668
- Fig. 25.8. Structure of the scenario of *Aux usines Renault* (1920). © A. Michel & J. Bernard, EHESS, 2001. 670
- Fig. 25.9. Geography of the scenes in *Aux usines Renault* (1920). © A. Michel & J. Bernard, EHESS, 2001. 672
- Fig. 25.10. A 3D restitution of an assembly line operation, 1922. © IDHES-Evry et ArchéoTransfert (2010). 675
- Fig. 26.1. Promotional leaflet for the film *Following Balint* (1976) produced by ScienceFilm and Duvivier for the pharmaceutical company Delagrangé. It is an example of authorial ambiguities that could exist in medical films between its medical "author" (Sapir) and the film's "director" (Duvivier). 695
- Fig. 26.2. The actor Michael Lonsdale in Éric Duvivier's film *Following Balint* (1976), playing a rather hesitant, middle-aged physician relating his patient case to the peer group. 697
- Fig. 26.3. The actor Michael Lonsdale in Jean Eustache's film *A Dirty Story* (1977), playing a man who finds a peephole in the female toilets of a café, conveying in the second part of the film in an off-the-cuff manner. 697
- Fig. 26.4. Invitation card announcing the experimental surrealist short film programme "Hallucinations" at the La Ranelagh art gallery and experimental movie theatre Le Ranelagh in the capital's fashionable sixteenth arrondissement in November 1968. The screening was cancelled due to censorship. 700
- Fig. 26.5. Poster announcing the experimental surrealist short film programme "Hallucinations" at the experimental movie theatre Le Seine in early 1970. 702
- Fig. 26.6. Original entrance ticket to the experimental surrealist short film programme "Hallucinations" at the experimental movie theatre Le Seine in early 1970. 703

- Fig. 26.7. Publicity for the experimental surrealist short film programme “Hallucinations” at the experimental movie theatre Le Seine in early 1970. 704
- Fig. 27.1. Donald Alexander (1913-93), photographed (by his first wife, the artist and illustrator Isabel Alexander) in 1939 (BFI National Archive; courtesy Robin Alexander). 712
- Fig. 27.2. The opening image of *Mining Review 1st Year No. 1* (1947) (BFI National Archive). 718
- Fig. 27.3. Autumn 1958 edition of NCB films catalogue (BFI National Archive). 722
- Fig. 27.4. Francis Gysin (1921-95), looking through viewfinder of Newman Sinclair camera, directing an early *DATA Mining Review*. Cinematographer Wolfgang Suschitzky (1912-2016) looks on (BFI National Archive) 724
- Figs. 28.1–28.4 Sartorial transformations in *Northwest Passage* and *Desert Venture*. 742
- Fig. 28.5. Advertisement for *Desert Venture* in *Business Screen*. 745
- Fig. 28.6. Publicity image of Robert Yarnall Richie for *Desert Venture*. 748
- Fig. 29.1. The chief engineer’s wife turns on the radio. 767
- Fig. 29.2. “Do you suffer from corns and bunions?” [close-up of speaker]. 767
- Fig. 29.3. A child recites addition.
- Fig. 29.4. The last sum. 775
- Fig. 29.5. A till presents the answer. 775

18 Working through the End of Empire

Tom Rice

Abstract

This chapter examines how industrial film was representing, negotiating and managing the loss of the British Empire to colonial audiences. It highlights the centrality of industry and argues that the colonial industrial film was defined, and enacting change, by a specific set of aesthetic values. Therefore, it foregrounds the work of government officials, and subject experts, within industrial film histories. Through the example of different government film units, the chapter foregrounds the performance of work and industry, both on, and off, screen, in the nation-building process. In the immediate aftermath of war film both represents and embodies a new model of industry and economic partnership for colonial audiences, revealing the informal economies of cinema that would often operate beyond independence.

Keywords: Colonial Film Unit (CFU); industrial film; government film-making; training schools; Africa; Jamaica

This chapter examines the *work* of the Colonial Film Unit, a government organization established at the outbreak of war in 1939. Over its sixteen year career, the CFU produced, distributed and, through a fleet of mobile cinemas, exhibited films for local audiences across the British Empire. Film became an increasingly important part of government work, used to define and shape productive citizens and to formalize economic ties between colonizer and colonized. Throughout this tumultuous period, film both represents and embodies a new model of industry and economic partnership for colonial audiences, revealing the informal economies of cinema that would often operate beyond independence.

The chapter asks a series of questions to understand the notion of “work” within this colonial cinema. How did the CFU represent work and industry, whether validating manual labour or foregrounding “hard work” as part of

the nation-building process? How did film itself work within the colonies, developing a language for “illiterate” audiences that perpetuated division and also shaped the ways in which industry was represented? How does this, in turn, redefine the industrial film for colonial audiences? Finally, how did film function as work and develop as an industry, producing, training and developing local units and filmmakers? In this way the CFU tentatively visualized a post-imperial identity not only on screen but also through its operating practices, establishing training schools and local units which, at least ostensibly, reflect and shape these broader moves towards self-government.

Within the context of this collection, it is important to note that this cinema for colonial audiences is, to an extent, a cinema of expertise. The founder and producer of the CFU, William Sellers, was formerly a sanitary inspector and civil servant, using film as part of the government health unit in Nigeria. One of his initial innovations with the CFU, the Raw Stock Scheme – which provided film stock for the colonies – was specifically intended to allow “experts,” whether on hygiene or industry, to make films that “adhere to the instructions given from time to time in the CFU’s quarterly magazine, *Colonial Cinema*.”¹ In this way, Sellers was encouraging colonial officials to make films as part of government administration, inviting us to consider not simply what film brought to these areas of government work, but also what these government workers brought to film and its use within the colonies. While the CFU did employ highly accomplished filmmakers, one of the arguments when piloting CFU training schools later in the 1940s was that it was easier to train someone knowledgeable in the culture to make a film than it was to teach a professional filmmaker about a local culture.² This cinema of expertise, in this case functioning alongside other media – including filmstrips, posters, talks, broadcasts and plays – remains somewhat marginalized within film history as value judgements based primarily on aesthetics have privileged documentarians that seek social

I would like to thank James Kearney at the AP Archives in London and Karl Magee at the Grierson Archive, University of Stirling. A number of the films mentioned within this article can be viewed online at www.colonialfilm.org.uk.

1 “Filming in Africa.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 1, no. 5, July 1943, pp. 1–2.

2 Sellers wrote in 1958 that “local people can be trained as film technicians more quickly, and more effectively, than expatriate technicians are able to acquire anything except a superficial knowledge of the anthropological and sociological complexities of African habit and custom and traditional way of life.” Sellers, William. “The Production and Use of Films for Public Informational and Educational Purposes in British African Territories.” *Colloquy of the Official Information Services in Black Africa*, Brussels, 1958.

change through film at the expense of department officials and subject experts, who apply their expertise to film.

Films of Work

When the CFU produced its first film in 1940, *Mr English at Home*, it depicted a lower-middle-class family living in Surbiton with the husband, an artisan, shown at work on a building site. The example was useful for the CFU, particularly during war, as it depicted hard-working British citizens relatable to the African audience. Audience reports commented on the work of Mrs English – “Do many English women have to work as hard as that?” “Do they not have servants?” – while a colonial films officer further remarked that it came as a revelation to many Africans that not all English households had a “complement of servants.”³ The CFU sought to challenge perceptions in subsequent films both by foregrounding the value of manual labour and by showing British men and women undertaking it. This served, as a report from Sierra Leone noted, to “disabuse their minds of the idea that the British are a race of rulers and overlords who, lily-like, neither toil nor spin.”⁴

The earliest experiments in filmmaking in the colonies had recognized and propagated this notion of “hard work.” When Julian Huxley took three films out to East Africa in 1929 to test audience responses to film, he included *Black Cotton*, a film of the cotton industry in Nigeria that had first played at the Empire Exhibition of 1924 to 1925, a massive celebration and promotion of imperial trade.⁵ Huxley noted how audiences grew “wildly excited” when they saw “natives” working on the screen. “They applauded, stomped with their feet, laughed, shouted, explained to each other,” he continued, “the noise was particularly deafening when anyone was seen on the film doing a hard job of work.”⁶ In promoting hard work and industrial labour, these films (and the discussions around them) were defining and showcasing film’s

3 “Kumasi Kumbunga and John English.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 3, no. 2, June 1945, p. 47; Smyth, Rosaleen. “The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1988, pp. 285–98.

4 “Sierra Leone.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 4, no. 1, March 1946, p. 13.

5 See Rice, Tom. “Exhibiting Africa: British Instructional Films and the Empire Series (1925–8).” *Empire and Film*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 115–33.

6 Huxley, Julian S. *African View*. Chatto and Windus, 1931, p. 292; idem. “Report on the Use of Films for Educational Purposes in East Africa.” 1930. The National Archives (TNA), London, Colonial Office (CO) 323/1252/15.

function in the creation of *productive* colonial citizens. Indeed films often spoke directly to workers in the colonies, playing, for example, on mining circuits. A wartime lecturer with Jamaica Welfare Limited's travelling cinema recalled the ways in which its shows sought to shape the colonial worker by privileging "hard work" as part of the nation-building process. The shows highlighted "that hard work is enabling and not a curse," he wrote, "that efficiency will receive reward even if long delayed at times, that building a nation means each individual, being and doing his best at all times."⁷

These earliest films for colonial audiences sought to further the economic productivity of the colonies by modernizing industries and their workforce. Huxley defined the success of one of the earliest experiments in health education in the 1920s, conducted by Dr. Paterson, a medical officer in Kenya, by stating that "the white settlers report an increase in the efficiency of their labourers."⁸ Many of these early experiments – most notably the early work of William Sellers, then a sanitary inspector in Nigeria – were ostensibly preoccupied with improving health, but the undercurrent of productivity was never far away. In 1934 Paterson suggested a series of films for East African natives, which were designed to "make the native peoples happier, healthier and more useful." He placed most emphasis on "useful." In trying to create productive citizens – as defined by their relationship to Europeans – Paterson explained that an African might never be healthy or happy unless he could provide the European, American and Eastern manufacturers "with those products of heavy industry and with such hardware and textiles as he cannot produce for himself."⁹

In the post-war period, against a backdrop of civil unrest, Cold War politics and mass decolonization, films of trade and industry help to imagine a new model of economic partnership for colonial audiences. The CFU, now funded through the Welfare and Development Act, sent units to Africa to produce films that would, as its own magazine reported, develop self-reliance and ensure that "the seeds of progress in health, industry and agriculture could be planted." Films like *Weaving in Togoland* (1946), *Better Homes* (1948), *Why Not You?* (1950) and *Good Business* (1947), sought to instruct local African audiences in modern agricultural and building methods.¹⁰

7 Rennalls, Martin A. "Development of the Documentary Film in Jamaica." MS thesis, Boston University, 1967, p. 35.

8 Huxley. *African View*, p. 161.

9 Reynolds, Glenn. *Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences*. McFarland, 2015, p. 168.

10 Sellers, William. "Address to the British Kinematograph Society." *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 6, no. 1, March 1948, p. 9.

The example of the 1947 film *Good Business* reveals the ways in which the CFU films sought not to show, but to do, to create these productive citizens through film. *Good Business* was made with the help of a local farming cooperative to “encourage Yoruba cocoa farmers in the development of co-operative marketing societies.” William Sellers decided to adapt the film for British and international audiences, under the title *Nigerian Cocoa Farmer*, to show “not the dark continent of the picture-postcard travelogue, but [...] a little-known aspect of colonial development in which African initiative, self-reliance and self-government play a significant part.”¹¹

There are two functions at play here. In *Good Business* the emphasis on cooperative societies is part of a membership drive for African viewers, while in *Nigerian Cocoa Farmer* it is intended to generate domestic and international support for continued expenditure on the colonies. Similarly the CFU’s home unit depicted events, such as Colonial Month in 1949, which were intended to showcase to British audiences the *value* of the colonies. The CFU films of these events then sought to connect the African viewer to Britain, to show them this British support and, in turn, to encourage Africans to modernize and develop their industrial methods.

This process is evident in the 1948 film *An African Conference in London*, which represents African workers welcomed to Britain, working with, and learning from, their British counterparts. The economic ties between the areas are shown at the Bourneville factory, as the African delegates watch the export of “good African cocoa,” seeing the “process through from beginning to end.” The film articulates a gradual shift in this colonial relationship. It includes sequences in London at official events (meeting the king and visiting London landmarks) which foreground a traditional imperial relationship and highlight difference (for example, through costume). It then shows the African delegates learning first-hand from a demonstration of British farming in Hertfordshire, and visiting a car factory in Coventry, now moving away from the centre to celebrate industrial Britain (“it’s the modern way to progress”) and promote social partnership. However, this movement of personnel is very carefully articulated. *An African Conference* emphasizes that the Africans depicted here are “visitors.” They are shown waving goodbye from the car factory, while the commentator notes that the

11 Morton-Williams, Peter. *Cinema in Rural Nigeria: A Field Study of the Impact of Fundamental-Education Films on Rural Audiences in Nigeria*. Federal Information Services, Lagos, 1952, p. 20; Sellers. “Address to the British Kinematograph Society,” p. 10.

skills they learn will be taken back “to their own country.”¹² This notion of taking modern British-taught skills back to the colonies would now extend to the practice of filmmaking.

How Film Works

On May 24, 1950, a series of Colonial Film Unit productions played “to a large and appreciative audience” at a British Film Institute event intended to highlight “film production in the colonies” at the Institut Français Theatre in London.¹³ The programme notes included two essays. The first, written by Harry Franklin, the director of information in Northern Rhodesia, discussed the effect of cinema on African audiences. In a now-familiar rhetoric, Franklin outlined the particular requirements for producing films “which are likely to be understood by the very backward peasant audiences.” Franklin noted that cartoons, maps, diagrams or “any type of trick filming” are not understood and extolled a specialized film technique that had been propagated by the Colonial Film Unit over the previous decade. “The ideal film for the villager,” he determined, “should be of slow tempo, on a subject with which he is familiar, with a soundtrack for music and effects only, and a commentary in the local vernacular given through the microphone.”¹⁴

Franklin’s writing sought to perpetuate a division between colonizer and colonized, applying an ideology of film form, popularized by William Sellers, that served to define and differentiate the colonial worker. This is evident in the films shown at the Institut Français in 1950, such as *Pamba*, a CFU production made by Norman Spurr in Uganda. Spurr ostensibly followed Sellers’ theories on film form, arguing that the experience of film for an “illiterate peasant” in Africa was “nearer 1910 than 1950.” He believed that “shots needed to be left on the screen for an appreciably longer time than with films for European audiences,” and that “there must be a simple aim.”¹⁵

12 Rice, Tom. “From the Inside: The Colonial Film Unit and the Beginning of the End.” *Film and the End of Empire*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 135–53.

13 “The British Film Institute, Commonwealth Film Production, Summer 1950.” University of Stirling Library Archives and Special Collections, John Grierson Archive, G5: 20:3; “Editorial.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 8, no. 3, September 1950, p. 51.

14 “The British Film Institute, Commonwealth Film Production, Summer 1950”; Franklin, Harry. “The Central African Screen.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 8, no. 4, December 1950, pp. 85–88.

15 Spurr, Norman F. “Films for Africans – 1910 or 1950?” *British Kinematography*, vol. 16, no. 6, June 1950, pp. 185–88.

Pamba is a “narrative-teaching” film, which follows, as Spurr himself noted, the “hoary old formula of the good versus the bad,” by showing the correct (translated as modern, British) way and the bad methods. The film was imagined and functioned as part of government administration. Spurr worked very closely throughout with the local agricultural officer who, he noted, recognized that visual aids “were not to replace him, but to be his servants,” and incorporated a comedy character, Kapere (“a victim of his own stubbornness, conceit or disobedience”), previously established and popularized by the Public Relations and Welfare Department through a comic strip and in the plays of its touring demonstration teams.¹⁶ Indeed Kapere features prominently in Spurr’s *A Challenge to Ignorance* (1950), a record of the demonstration teams’ work in Uganda. The film shows a wide range of performances – music, a Mr Wise and Mr Foolish play showing the “proper” way to plant cotton, demonstrations on soil erosion, banana growing and bicycle safety – and highlights how the government units use different media and organize the local space “to bring all the people together.” The film shows almost exclusively Africans on screen – performing and watching – except for the British welfare officer (always alone in the frame) who watches and advises on particular problems. This model of colonial supervision – a mediated move towards self-governance – is also evident in the film itself, which while depicting African government work is directed by Spurr and with a British voice of God narration.

Spurr recognized the potential value of film here. “The problem in our colonies,” he explained, “is the problem of a multitude who have much to learn as a changing world attacks the very roots of living, and yet there are too few teachers.” “Film, properly used,” he suggested, “may well become an important answer to this problem of how to teach quickly yet surely.”¹⁷ Spurr acknowledged that film does only part of the work here, working alongside other government materials and, most crucially, local personnel at the site of exhibition. “The expert should always be in attendance to answer questions, stimulate discussion, encourage endeavour,” Spurr argued, “then the film becomes an instrument capable of injecting new ideas into the very blood stream of the people.”¹⁸

We can glimpse this distinctive mode of address in the commentary of *Good Business*. In *Nigerian Cocoa Farmer*, the commentator identifies himself with British and American interests, noting that the Americans, “like

16 Spurr, Norman F. “Pamba.” *Empire Cotton Growing Review*, vol. 27, June 1950, pp. 172–76.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

ourselves, must import cocoa." In *Good Business* the commentator identifies with the African protagonist and now directly involves the audience, by asking questions like: "Where is Lawani going in the truck?"

This shift in address acknowledges the ways in which these CFU films were intended for exhibition, as part of a larger political event, alongside talks, music and demonstrations, that invariably culminating with the British national anthem. Indeed Spurr argued that for illiterate audiences film cannot be a "teacher on its own" and presented the local commentator as "the most vital link between the film and the audience."¹⁹ This figure might offer call and responses, ask questions of the audience, provide additional talks and direct where the audience looks on screen. He would organize the film space and explain and rework these films at the site of exhibition.

Audiences often then understood and experienced a film in ways that were unimagined when the film was processed in London. Spurr noted the parochial responses that ensured that even a film on "How to Wash" was severely criticized in Uganda because the Nigerian on screen washed his head last, while the local Baganda would wash their heads first. This was not, however, simply a question of whether a film was understood or even "useful" to an audience, but also in some cases whether it could be directly damaging to the colonial authority.²⁰

At the height of the Emergency in Malaya (Malaysia) in the 1950s, the government cancelled screenings of a propaganda film made by the Malayan Film Unit after reports that cinemagoers had cheered the on-screen appearance of communist leader Chin Peng.²¹ In Malta, the governor suggested it would be "little short of a disaster" to show *A Queen Is Crowned*, the biggest box-office hit of 1953 in the UK, given that it depicts an Anglican ceremony, and all the more so "at a time when there are signs that certain elements wish to attack the British connection, even by going to the length of disparaging the Monarchy."²² What we see here are examples of *films that don't work*.

Looking back on the CFU's work in 1953, Sellers surprisingly suggested that the majority of its films might fall into this category. Although he argued that "the technical and pictorial quality" of CFU films was "of a high standard," few could be classed as "successful and right for purpose." Sellers suggested

19 "Commentary and Commentators." *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 6, no. 1, March 1948, pp. 13–14.

20 Spurr. "Films for Africans – 1910 or 1950?" pp. 186–87; Rice, Tom. "Are You Proud to Be British?: Mobile Film Shows, Local Voices and the Demise of the British Empire in Africa." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2016, pp. 331–51.

21 "Chin Peng Cheered as KL Audiences See Peace Talks Newsreel." *The Straits Times*, January 6, 1956, p. 4.

22 "A Queen Is Crowned in Malta." TNA, FCO 141/10508.

that the cultural and language barriers were the problem here – foreign technicians had a tendency to relate a subject to their own culture, while language barriers placed a huge onus on local commentators. He saw the solution in local units, arguing that “if successful films were to be made *for* the people and *with* the people, they must be made *by* the people.”²³

Film as Work

While the CFU had looked to film to instruct productive colonial workers, after the war it sought to create filmmakers to continue, and embody, this work. “But the production of films is only one side of the Unit’s activities,” the Institut Français programme outlined in its second essay on the Colonial Film Unit, “and is perhaps ultimately less important than the task of training Africans and West Indians to make films for themselves.” Film was presented here as an industry, creating not only a product (film) but also the workers. The programme described a “great experiment: an experiment in film production, an experiment in education, and an experiment in the training of colonial people as filmmakers who will understand the problems and needs of their own countries, and who, with the help of the Unit, will be able to interpret these problems to their own people.”²⁴ Whether idealism or a practical response to the shifting political climate, this was extending a long-held view that government ideology was better received when coming from local voices – an earlier CFU report had claimed that audiences “believe much more readily what is told them by other Africans,” and that “their jokes went down better than ours.”²⁵ The CFU was now looking to shape the producers as well as consumers of film, training values, ideals and a dominant colonial ideology as much as technical skills.

The first CFU training school took place in Accra in 1948 to 1949 and was the subject of the first film shown at the Institut Français event. *A Film School in West Africa* is, in some respects, an industrial process film, following a familiar CFU trajectory in showing the creation, completion (and often export) of a product. The film opens at Accra airport with the arrival of the Nigerian trainees and then proceeds to show the different

23 Sellers, William. “Film Use and Production in British Colonial Territories.” *Report on the Seminar on Visual Aids in Fundamental Education*. UNESCO, 1954.

24 “The British Film Institute, Commonwealth Film Production, Summer 1950.”

25 Film Centre. *The Use of Mobile Cinema and Radio Vans in Fundamental Education*. UNESCO, 1949, p. 60.

stages of the training school (technical training, still camera work, loading film, script writing, filming, editing and finally, “viewing results”). The product at the end here is film and, in particular, filmmakers, who would over the next decade be tasked with developing local film productions in their own countries. This is a fantasy of production, of citizens as much as celluloid, with the structure positioning film alongside the other established industries that it would record.

The film is, however, also imagining a new model of empire here. It shows the moderated handing over of film apparatus. The instructor is very rarely out of shot, often framed over the shoulder of the six trainees, while the commentator reminds us that all film travels to London for final editing and processing. In so doing, it proposes an idealised partnership between colonizer and colonized. When first arriving in the classroom, the commentator states that “The students are welcomed cheerfully by the instructor and they, in turn, already feel that he is their friend.” The film’s message of cooperation is inescapable. They are, we are repeatedly told, a “team,” filmmaking is “above all a test of teamwork” and their success depends on “true cooperation with him [the British instructor] and with each other.” Later the commentator reaffirms that the school is training character and values, as much as technique: “The development of the spirit of co-operation was one of the main purposes of the training for picture making is no one man job, it is teamwork throughout.” This message was foregrounded in reports of subsequent training schools. “It cannot be too strongly stressed,” the CFU wrote of the West Indies film school, “that this spirit of friendliness and co-operation went a very long way to make the school initially a great success.”²⁶

As with all CFU productions, the film was intended for colonial (and primarily African) audiences. This may be evident in the film form, which largely follows the simplified, specialized technique espoused by Franklin and, in particular by Sellers. The film also talks directly to its African audience – the students are “writing what is called the film script” – and in this way seeks to train and create film literate viewers, to make them aware of the processes and techniques of film as well as the British efforts to mobilize African workers. Indeed the training and development of filmmakers was

26 “Colonial Film Unit Training School in the West Indies.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 9, no. 2, June 1951, p. 43. As so often with these government films, there are repressed histories within these shots. The scriptwriting takes place away from Accra on the battlements of the old castle at Anomabu. While presented as a picturesque coastal setting, a relaxed environment for informal discussion around a table, the fort represented the centre of British slave trading into the nineteenth century.

closely aligned to the “development” of film audiences. “Trainees are turning out a type of straight-forward film,” wrote the Colonial Office’s C.Y. Carstairs in 1952, “eschewing thrills, but strong in content and local touch, which very closely fits the stage of film education which their audience have reached.”²⁷

Yet, as the screening at the Institut Français attests, *A Film School in West Africa* also served an ulterior motive, to promote and redefine the work of the CFU to British authorities at a moment when its funding was being cut. The CFU was seeking to retain a foothold in the colonial territories as moves towards independence gathered pace, offering local access to the camera while still moderating and mediating its use.

As well as playing *A Film School in West Africa*, the screening showed extracts from two films produced by the trainees at the Accra film school. *The Good Samaritan* from March 1949 is introduced as “[a] film story made by the Nigerian students of the Accra Film Training School at the end of their six month course – entirely without guidance.” The central characters are Kafi, “an unfortunate beggar” who cannot find work, and Osei, the titular good Samaritan, who offers him food, clothing and, most crucially, work with a builder. The film shows Kofi at work, highlighting how the building is done, but focuses on the results of this labour. He is shown being paid and, as “Kafi is wise,” uses the money to buy a blanket. The moral of the film is explicitly revealed in the titles. “Osei tells Kafi that he must work hard and help others as he has been helped,” finally concluding that “Happiness comes from giving – not taking.” The film defines worth through hard work, but is not instructing in specific building methods (as in many CFU instructional films), but instead in values, in the importance of working, taking instruction and helping others. The goals of the film school are embedded in the story, offering a message of ongoing colonial partnership, but one in which the colonial figure, who has been given a helping hand, is now expected to take greater responsibility (“giving not taking”).

The screening also showed an extract from *Basket Making*, a film made by the Gold Coast students, which shows the process from cutting branches to selling at market. Ostensibly this is a typical CFU industrial process film, but significantly the process is conducted on screen by students from a village school. This is, once more, not simply an instructional film for a particular industry, but also a film about education and training, showing the development and construction of “useful” workers. Titles discuss both the specifics of construction – “Peeling the Adobe Branches for Interlacing” – and also the wider skills developed

27 Carstairs, C.Y. “Edinburgh Film Festival.” *Colonial Cinema*, vol. 10, no. 4, December 1952, p. 78.

through work (“work demands concentration and skills”). It is evident from the films produced during the courses that particular emphasis was placed on industry – another example from the Gold Coast students shows the process of extracting oil from Copra – and these films followed a well-established model, which presents the product from the land to market or export.

While these films showcase, and in their subject matter promote, the training and development of African filmmakers, the discussions surrounding these training programmes often reveal broader tensions. H.M.K. Howson, who worked at the training school and wrote the script for *A Film School in West Africa*, corresponded with Sellers about employing the trainees in Nigeria as regional films officers. Howson had spoken with H. Cooper, a member of the Nigerian Public Relations office, who argued that the trainees were not of “high enough educational standard” and expressed concerns about their “limited ability.” He further argued that they would need “one year of trial at least” to acquire “sufficient experience.”²⁸

Attitudes were worse still in East Africa. The CFU abandoned plans to host the next training school at Makerere College in Uganda in 1949 after East African officials argued that it would be difficult to find suitable students as the “proposed training course may be overloaded beyond the capacity of African trainees.”²⁹ Instead the next course took place in Jamaica at the recently established University of the West Indies, but the proposals for this were also adapted. The convener now suggested that the approach adopted at Accra – described as “extreme simplicity” to cater for the “ignorance of cinema convention” – would be unsuitable for cosmopolitan West Indies, which was culturally exposed to “sophisticated” American and British influences.³⁰

This slightly different approach is evident in some of the work produced by the nine trainees at the West Indian school, although once again it is notable that films of industry feature prominently here. The first film made by graduates in British Guiana was on the rice industry, celebrating new methods and machinery introduced through a cooperative scheme, while in Trinidad it was on cocoa farming. *Cocoa Rehabilitation* was directed by trainee Wilfred Lee and made in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture. The film follows the Mr Wise and Mr Foolish format, with John adhering to government directives and gaining a bumper crop and Tom,

28 Howson, H.M.K., to Sellers. “Future Film Section Organisation in Nigeria in Relation to the Accra Training School.” TNA, INF 12/285.

29 Smyth, Rosaleen. “The Post-war Career of the Colonial Film Unit in Africa: 1946–1955.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1992, p. 170.

30 Evans, Gareth. “The Colonial Film Unit’s West Indian Training Course in Jamaica.” *Visual Aids in Fundamental Education: Some Personal Experiences*. UNESCO, 1952, pp. 130–39.

whose “scepticism is mainly responsible for his lowly position,” ignoring instruction and ultimately realizing the error of his ways. The film is notably more ambitious in form – there are dissolves, close-ups, panning, the use of a chart, shorter shot lengths and even a match cut – but retains a familiar rhetoric around work. On receiving his pay, the commentator notes, “What a tidy sum it is indeed, high dividends for hard and honest labour.” The film emphasizes the economic importance of industry to the individual (“Every bag produced means more dollars”) but also to the nation, as the film concludes with shots of export (the well-worn image of the boat being loaded). “To win this battle and restore our export trade,” the commentator explains, “every farmer must help.”

The first production from the Jamaican trainees, *Farmer Brown Learns Good Dairying* was presented in the local press as a film “made in Jamaica by Jamaicans” but inevitably bears the marks of the CFU instruction. The film appeared alongside a brochure and a filmstrip – a form used particularly extensively in the West Indies – as part of the Livestock Division’s advisory work.³¹ It promotes the need for continued British assistance as the British instructor – who “knew very well [...] they have never followed his advice” – demonstrates modern farming methods to Farmer Brown. The film establishes a clear contrast between old and new, between the modern urban environment in which a group of young Europeans enjoy a drink in their car, and the old country district where locals transport goods on their heads and use horse and cart. While the film depicts the Jamaican workers preparing and delivering the milk, the Europeans are seen in two roles – as government officials modernizing the industry and as consumers.

This disparity in roles is often more explicitly outlined in sponsored documentaries for British audiences, such as *From Cane to Cube*, a film from 1950 produced for the British sugar-refining company, Tate and Lyle, which shows the movement of sugar from the fields of Jamaica to the factories of London. There is a clear division between the first half set in Jamaica and the second half set in London. In this example, the conventions of the industrial film help to privilege the British role within this imperial relationship.

From Cane to Cube initially follows a West Indian protagonist, who also provides the commentary for the first half of the film. The film projects familiar British interpretations of West Indian culture (“You know, we cane cutters are happy people when we are cutting”). The second half of the film in London is introduced by a smart British voice, claiming to work in

31 “Home-made Documentary for the Screen.” *Daily Gleaner* [Jamaica], February 15, 1952, p. 5; Government of Jamaica. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture*. 1952.

the Tate and Lyle Thames refinery. The British commentator explains the industrial processes using microscopic close-ups, scientific drawings and shots of a British schoolboy in a laboratory. The British worker states that “centrifugal force throws the mixture against the rotating basket” in order to remove the molasses. The Jamaican commentator? “No I never was one for knowing just what that machine does with that cane,” merely noting that that the cane is squeezed until “it just doesn’t look like cane no more.”

While this is a sponsored documentary and not a CFU film, this exaggerated shift is helpful in understanding the CFU’s representation of industry to colonial audiences. Sellers’ ideology of film form, while modified and adapted in the 1950s, shaped a colonial cinema that offered lengthy sequences without scientific explanation, with limited camera movement and minimal editing. The films officer in Nigeria even suggested that the laboured message on cooperative schemes seen within *Good Business* was not picked up by Nigeria peasants as “it may be that the whole construction and tempo of this film is rather in advance of the film education of these audiences.”³² In this way, the film form was used to reinforce dominant colonial ideologies not only by creating a division between the European and colonial spectator, but also in representing a largely static, traditional model of local industry. This is a cinema defined, and enacting change by, a different set of aesthetic values and this evidently shapes the ways in which industry is presented to colonial audiences.

The Work Continues

The CFU’s training programme continued into the 1950s. A film school at Cyprus in 1951 involved nine students from Cyprus, Mauritius, Hong Kong and the Sudan, while by 1953, Sellers reported that seventy students “from various countries” had been trained at the CFU’s London headquarters.³³ There were trainees with scholarships from Iraq and Haiti in London in 1954 and, significantly, such training did not end when the Colonial Film Unit closed its doors in 1955. In 1958 when George Pearson wrote about six young Nigerians who could potentially “devote their lives” to film and “grow old in its service,” he asked: “Where could they obtain the needed training?” The answer was the Overseas Film and Television Centre (OFTVC), which had been set up by the CFU’s chief editor Vic Gover and included prominent CFU alumni like Dennis Bowden. The centre operated as a commercial enterprise

32 “Showing Films in the Villages.” *Colonial Cinema*. September 1948, p. 63.

33 Sellers. “Film Use and Production in British Colonial Territories.”

to continue the work of the CFU and to connect these “comparatively ‘small voices’” to a “technical agent working from a main centre.” As it expanded, serving as the London agents for more territories, OFTVC provided not only post-production services but also training work, initially offering the six Nigerians – “well chosen, eager and anxious to serve” – a six-month course run by George Pearson in 1958, which was housed at the OFTVC studio.³⁴

The CFU officially disbanded in 1955 on the cusp of widespread independence, by which time Sellers estimated that films were being made in thirty-two of the British territories.³⁵ In some cases, these units sought to shake off the traces of the CFU – pointedly rejecting Sellers’ philosophies – but we can also often see continuity in exhibition practices, equipment, technologies and personnel. In reviewing the work of the West Indian school, *Colonial Cinema* had stated that “the pump has been primed” for future work and that the CFU was “most anxious” to retain close contact with the students.³⁶ So it proved as the head of the post-independence Jamaica Film Unit, the Trinidad Film Unit and the managing director of the Ghana Film Industry Corporation were all veterans of the CFU’s first two training schools in the late 1940s. The director of *A Film School in West Africa*, Lionel Snazelle, would head the Nigerian Film Unit until independence, training numerous students in ways articulated at the original Accra school, while other figures return beyond independence. Barely a year after independence, Norman Spurr moved out to Ghana, working with the audiovisual unit of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. On his return from Ghana in 1962, Spurr became principal of the OFTV Training School in London. For film, like so many industries across the empire, work would often continue even after the British flag was lowered.

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35 Sellers. “The Production and Use of Films.”

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