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Newsreel: Film and Revolution

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by

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Newsreel is a living group and their history a dynamic, changing one. Without their assistance this study would have been totally impossible, especially since so little effort has been made to document the history of groups like Newsreel except by persons or parties commissioned in the work of political surveillance.

I am also deeply indebted to Gary Crowds, Mitch Tuchman, Ron Abramson and Roger McCreedy who either conducted interviews on my behalf or assisted me in the work of seeing films and arranging interviews.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Howard Suber, Chairman

Newsreel originated in New York City in 1968. They have produced and acquired several hundred films since that time but no systematic study has been made of their work. This thesis surveys the predecessors of Newsreel, the history of Newsreel itself and examines the films they have made in terms of their intended purpose as leftist and in some cases, Marxist, propaganda.

The historical material concerning Newsreel is derived from the few available public documents such as articles in underground newspapers, film reviews and articles and published statements by Newsreel centers themselves. This is supplemented by an extensive series of interviews that dealt specifically with the historical development of Newsreel and with their own conception of their work. Because a variety of sources were called into
play during the interview process, it is hoped that a reasonable degree of objectivity has been achieved. The films were made available to me by various Newsreel chapters and they were, for the most part, screened privately.

The study finds that Newsreel has been an accurate barometer of the leftist movement in this country during the past few years. The group began with a generally anarchistic worldview and has gradually evolved a more Marxist approach to their internal organization and to their filmmaking efforts. This has caused considerable shifts in policy and structure and introduced an approach to film that is significantly different from both their initial approach and from that of most independent leftist artists and filmmakers.
CHAPTER ONE

NEWSREEL'S HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Newsreel began in 1968, a phoenix-like creature arising from the ashes of the silent 50s. As part of the New Left its appearance was largely a result of the specific socio-economic circumstances of the middle to late 60s: the Vietnam war and Resistance movement, the displacement of the student population from imminent ascension into the ruling class to mass induction into the broadening ranks of bureaucrats and technicians, disenchantment among minority groups severely crippled, economically, by the scarcity of unskilled labor jobs, the mushrooming involvement with non-conformist life-styles and psychodelia, etc. Newsreel acknowledged no antecedents or influences, political or cinematic, that have directly contributed to its growth and they are no doubt correct. The major aesthetic innovation in documentary filmmaking during the 60s, cinéma-vérité, has seemed of scant value to them. The political development and struggle of the New Left could scarcely provide a model when Newsreel was itself immersed in the same conflicts. The traditions of leftist propaganda in America were scanty and amateurish with little or no visible accomplishment in Newsreel's chosen medium, film. In fact, we must go back to
the 1930s before we find a group at all comparable to News­
reel operating within the United States.

Although the leftest activity of the 1930s did not
lead in a linear fashion to its 1960s successors, it is
worth examining at some length. The period's general poli­
tical history is fairly well-known but the old left's propa­
ganda efforts are less so. Simply bringing some of these
efforts to light will indicate parallels, models, and flaws
which, unknown, may be repeated unknowingly or simply not
assimilated as pertinent historical background. Second,
many of the concepts of documentary filmmaking took shape
during this period and continued to command attention when
Newsreel appeared 40 years later. Some of these concepts
were also taken very seriously by the American leftists who
may have helped shape them into new configurations of em­
phasis and purpose. Finally, the filmmaking arm of the left
in the 30s held, I believe, a position relative to the
general flux of events that is reasonably similar to News­
reel's today. This is not necessarily true of any of the
specifics of that relationship but of its more generally
barometric nature. The filmmaking units were not vanguard
units in theory or practice, politically or cinematically.
They served far more to reflect the general attitudes and
tendencies on the left than to shape them. The same is more
or less true today and by studying a particular part in
detail we gain insights into the working of the whole.

* * *

6
A study of leftist filmmaking in America in the 30s cannot progress very far before the spectre of the Russian geniuses and titans looms above it. Eisenstein first of all, then Dziga-Vertov, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Kuleshov, Shub, Barnett, Kauffmann—these figures established precedents and models that became the mold to which leftist American film theory conformed. An exhaustive or even summary sketch of all these individuals is beyond the scope of this study. The most influential man of all, Eisenstein, has already become well-known to most of us. It will be useful, however, because he preceded the others and because his work is less well-known, to make some brief mention of Dziga-Vertov's theories.

Vertov's theories have to stand in place of his films since the films are generally not available. Vertov himself fell from favor early in the Stalinist era when his anti-fiction, anti-dramatic, anti-almost-all-of-pre-existing-cinema attitude isolated him, and his mixture of scientific and visionary rhetoric led to charges of formalism.

Vertov, like Eisenstein, whom he claimed to have influenced, was a man of overwhelming energy. His ideas splashed off the page. His thought struck sparks against the dry tinder of habitual reiteration. He achieved immense impact simply with the vitality of his expression. It marked a spirit of whole-hearted, highly emotional engagement that also characterized Eisenstein's writings and the tenor
of much American writing. While he sought to "detect" his plots in real life rather than "invent" them in the studio, he did not propose the unobtrusive attitude of cinéma-vérité: "He thrust the lens of his camera straight into the crowded centers of life."¹ Behind this thrusting motion lay his utopian vision of man, for he did not want merely to record untampered reality but to discover the "new man:"
"We want to move, by way of the poetry of the machine, from the shambling citizen to the perfect electric man."²

Vertov stressed the scientific nature of his work alongside his visionary conception of man. He saw the camera eye as superior to the human eye.³ He called for a "rigorous system of precise movement"⁴ and saw montage (editing in particular, selection in general) as the basic route to its achievement. Kinok, his first group's name, means "pilot" and his camera eye was meant to be a window to a new vision of the world: "I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you."⁵

The newsreel was at the core of Vertov's vision, but in a pure unadulterated state. He wanted no mixing with fictional devices for he saw the Kino-Eye as a world "perceived without a mask, as a world of naked truth."⁶ The newsreel consisted of "fragments of actual energy (as opposed to theatrical energy) with their intervals condensed into a cumulative whole by the great mastery of an editing technique."⁷ Vertov welcomed the addition of sound (he en-
visioned the incorporation of all the senses) and made the first Russian sound film—Enthusiasm. He called his sound films Radio-Eye and wanted them to allow the workers of the world to see and hear themselves synchronously.  

Dziga-Vertov was fascinated by the possibility of a scientific, pure, documentary cinema that could embody and perhaps forge the new man of Soviet Russia. He stressed editing as the core of scientific precision with rhythm as its foremost principle. He clearly embodied the revolutionary vision of a new society and a new era as well as elements of the several motifs of 20s and 30s intellectual thought—constructivism and futurism, for example. His commitment was to a social vision but his preoccupation was with the artistic realization. His politics seem more anarchist than Marxist, partly because they are never clarified. His newsreels were not intended so much as an expose as poetic exhortations "for a continuance of the revolutionary momentum... Using simple tools and seemingly simple techniques, Vertov made all Russia sing Lenin's praise, turning Lenin's dreams into reality, at least on film." The intensity and extremity of Vertov's exhortations were never equalled, at least in writing, but his impact could not be forgotten either.

* * *

Vertov's Kino-Pravda concept never dominated the Soviet industry although he interacted with it decisively.
During World War I the first agit-train was assembled to cover the Eastern Front and support the Army with film material. The Moscow based editor for the train was Dziga-Vertov. The agit-train effort catalyzed Vertov's radical thought and led to his early proclamations in favor of the documentary in place of mise-en-scene, the arena of life itself instead of the proscenium of the theater. But at the same time other directors were engaged in agitiki—short agitational films that almost invariably blended newsreel with fictional techniques (most notably through acting). They became the political and technical kindergarten for many filmmakers who thereby bypassed Vertov's more restricting exhortations. By the time the agit-train concept was revived in 1931, under Medvedkin, its emphasis was on film farces—imaginative fables that supported the government's new programs. By then Vertov had begun his fall from favor, even though his highly acclaimed Three Songs of Lenin remained to be shot. Eisenstein condemned his work as "formalist jackdaws and unmotivated camera mischief." an opinion shared by many critics, like Kraszin-Krausz: "His arabesques totally covered the ground plan, his fugues destroyed every melody."

Vertov's theories thus proved a dead-end within Soviet cinema which itself ran into the cul-de-sac of socialist realism. The fusion of documentary and fictional techniques, mediated by montage, that Eisenstein proclaimed
took precedence until the 30s when a correctional emphasis was given to the individual hero. Vertov's theories stood as the logical extreme of one approach that had been, in more moderate forms, absorbed into a less purist mainstream. And in America, as in Russia, his "influence" was not in terms of an identifiable school of followers but as a contributory source to the ferment which swirled around many young, leftist, anti-Hollywood filmmakers.

* * *

As early as 1925 there was agitation in America for a radical filmmaking unit. Willi Muenzenberg wrote in the July 23 Daily Worker: "We must develop the tremendous cultural possibilities of the motion picture in a revolutionary sense." But the Hollywood film remained dominant and it was not until 1928 that oppositional groups actually took shape. The first such group of major significance was The Workers Film and Photo League of America. Experimental Cinema, a magazine devoted to film theory and the Russian film, quoted from its founding principles:

The movie must become our weapon. It must spread the message of struggle against unemployment, starvation, and police clubbings. It must reflect the worker's lives and problems.

[The League had three points of emphasis], . . . to struggle against and expose the reactionary film . . . to produce documentary film reflecting the lives and struggles of the American worker . . . to spread and popularize the great artistic and revolutionary Soviet production.16

The Film and Photo League was conceived as part of an international worker's cinema movement. Bela Belasza and
Leon Moussinac were leading figures in this movement, both men more directly involved in film theory than political action, and the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theater, centered in Moscow, provided many of the broad, ideological directives. The Bureau's emphasis was on mass work (base building)—opposing bourgeois or fascist films through demonstrations, short articles or audience discussions while also "popularizing all revolutionary films." Of particular significance was the Bureau's contextual focus; films were only the hub around which organizing and political consciousness-raising could revolve. They noted that documentary films "must be accompanied by a lecture," that revolutionary films should have an introduction and that bourgeois newsreels required analysis to expose their suppositions. Their policies seemed to assume that the political leader or organizer need only give out correct analysis to his attentive audience for that analysis to be adopted by all. There also seemed to be an assumption that worker's newsreels need only portray the labor movement honestly, showing the realities of proletarian life, in order to be valuable organizing tools. During the 30s, though, the latter assumption was the prevailing one and there was reason to believe it a valid one: proletarian life has disappeared from the screen to a large degree (see either Rotha's or Jacob's history of the American film during this period) and those who did portray
it could very likely use that act as the basis for alliance. There was less concern with building a united front around specific contradictions than with fostering a general sense of class consciousness.

The Worker's Film and Photo League both organized protest against reactionary films (most notably the Nazi import, *S.S. Mann Brand*) and undertook newsreel production. The degree to which the League was a worker's organization in fact is not clear; among its claimed advisors or associates were: Margaret Bourke-White, Ralph Steiner, John Howard Lawson, Erskine Caldwell, Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, Elmer Rice, Burgess Meredith, James Cagney and Slavko Vorkapich. It seemed more a part of the intellectual and artistic enchantment with the Russian experiment than a genuinely proletarian movement but its films were decidedly working class in their orientation. A partial list of the League's films will give some indication of their emphasis:

Film and Photo League films

Newsreels

- Detroit Ford Massacre
- Hunger March- 1931, 1932
- Hunger- 1932
- California- 1934
- Bonus March
- May Day- ca. 1934
- The Scottsboro Boys
- Sheriffed

*Compiled from correspondence with Tom Brandon and reports in *New Theater*, *New Masses* and *Experimental Cinema* magazines.
East Side, West Side  
Farmer's March  
Marine Strike  
United Front  
The World Today- a newsreel series with issues on the Black Legion and evictions.  
Workers Struggle in New York- 1932, 1933  
Cotton-Picker's Strike- 1933  
Western Pennsylvania and Kentucky Miner's Strike  
Washington Farmer's Convention- 1934  
Tom Mooney Run- 1934  
San Diego Police Attack on Workers  
New York's Hoovervilles- 1032  
The City of Contrasts  

Documentaries  
Ernst Thaelmann  
Millions for US  
Pie in the Sky  
Sweet Land of Liberty  
The Land of the Free- 1934  
Imperial Valley- 1934  
Misery among Working Class Children- 1934  
Taxi- a feature length film  

The New York branch served as the actual headquarters, producing the bulk of the films and most of the leadership with the Los Angeles branch as a weak second. There were, however, active branches in numerous other cities including Detroit, Hollywood, Chicago, Boston and San Francisco. To what degree these chapters succeeded in distributing these films and with whom they worked most closely cannot be ascertained with certainty. Tom Brandon reported in New Theater, however, that a San Francisco Film and Photo League member had been jailed for "showing movies to the agricultural workers. What movies? Road to Life and newsreels of last summer's Cotton-Picker's Strike." And a subsequent New Theater editorial noted that Mother,
Potemkin, War against the Centuries and Film and Photo League newsreels had been shown to farmers in scattered Minnesota farm towns.

New Theater itself was called the "Organ of the League of Worker's Theaters, Film and Photo Leagues, and Worker's Dance Leagues." Its editor, Herbert Kline, later became involved in several important documentaries like Heart of Spain, Return to Life, Crisis (1938), Lights out in Europe (1939) and Forgotten Village (1941). The magazine reflected the great cultural upheaval that the Depression had precipitated and the various art groups represented the American left's commitment to a progressive solution (at the time even Unemployment Insurance was labelled a Communist plot). Ralph Steiner called for revolutionary films that would "clearly and forcefully reflect and direct the class struggle." Leo Hurwitz argued that, "We must think of our films as having the same capacity as union organizers . . . we are handling a very important political weapon, more effective at this time than carloads of bullets and machine guns," an elaboration of a claim by Sergei Eisenstein that, "Perhaps for the first time in history, the film has become as terrible a weapon as the hand grenade." Much of the enthusiasm surrounding revolutionary films had to do with the development of a film theory to unify them. The Cinema Bureau's contextual emphasis on pre-
sentation and political organization stirred less excitement than the challenge to forge new aesthetic principles for revolutionary filmmaking. Like Vertov's, much of this theory was conditioned by a great abhorance of the Hollywood dream factory. Any attempt to apply fictional techniques was justified mainly in terms of how it would enhance the newsreel or documentary. Some writers went as far as Vertov in demanding purely documentary techniques, warning that any fusion would "find 'the sensation of reality' irreparably damaged." 26 Others began to distinguish documentary and fiction by the relationship of shots to each other and to the actual world in order to fuse them in a more principled manner. Leo Hurwitz, for example, argued that documentary film is based on "the creative comparison, contrast or opposition of shots, externally related to each other, to produce an effect not contained in any one of the shots" (contrasted to "internal montage" where shots referred primarily to each other rather than the external world). 27 But, just as this approach echoed Eisenstein's montage theories, so it diverged from Vertov-like separatism concluding with a call for "a mixed form of the synthetic documentary and the dramatic film [where] the greatest task is to make the camera eloquent." 28

The latter route seemed to become the most traveled one as the Workers Film and Photo League's leading figures began to make personal, imaginative documentaries in the
late 30s and 40s. Ralph Steiner's comment that the filmmaker must always remember, "There is no art without propaganda [and that] there can be no effective propaganda without good art," became the kind of watchword that propelled the League's artists to dissect the filmmaking problems. Perhaps they felt securely lodged within a mainstream of oppositional politics with greater aesthetic and technical mastery as the primary impediments to further achievement. Steiner, among others, recognized that "a muddy political viewpoint will result in muddy technique" but his stress, like Vertov's, Eisenstein's—in fact, like all the Russian film theorists—was on perfecting film techniques that could make the cinema a potent weapon. The political contribution to "clear images" was generally acknowledged but seldom analyzed.

The League's members were capable of recognizing their shortcomings, but the determination to overcome them does not appear to have been a priority. Leo Hurwitz noted:

Paradoxically, our main weakness has been too little propaganda. To a class-conscious worker, for example, our May First reels, which show hundreds of thousands of workers mobilized in the streets, may be a source of inspiration and a stimulus to militancy, but to a non-revolutionary worker, unless we clearly and effectively dramatize why those thousands are marching, May Day is another parade of marching, marching, marching... [Our films] assume the revolutionary approach, instead of convincing the spectator of its correctness.

A New Theater editorial spelled out these faults even more bluntly:
1. Too much schematism and sloganism; low artistic technique, inability to express political tasks through artistic images, etc.
2. Theoretical and political backwardness; lack of knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and consequent inability to solve problems facing revolutionary art.
3. Organizational work lagging behind political work and the influence of the movement on the masses.31

Hurwitz saw this problem exacerbated by "the mechanical, schematic and unexperimental approach to the search for the proper forms for the revolutionary movie" and a general insistence on "the documentary form as the only true one."32 Hurwitz's critique represented a radical shift for a man who only a few months before had praised League newsreels because "a strike, demonstrations or hunger march is shown with the full brutalities of the police, with the full heroism and militancy of the workers, without the destructive mocking command of the bourgeois announcer."33

The euphoria of active opposition seemed to leave most of the members vulnerable to a sense of disenchantment after it wore off. Their response was to try to hone the rough edges from their craftsmanship rather than to strengthen their political scaffolding. The tendency may be an early indication of why Newsreel members assert that it is easier for a political activist to become a filmmaker than for a filmmaker to become a political activist.

*   *   *

In September, 1935, members of The Workers Film and Photo League merged with Nykino, an artist's workshop aligned with the left to form the New Film Alliance. This
organization was fairly shortlived, however, and in March, 1937, it was superseded by Frontier Films. A lengthy report in The Nation describes the new film group as "the same group, who several years ago, organized the Film and Photo League" but the prefix "Workers" had now been dropped from the new group's title and the participants seemed to be exclusively filmmakers of some note.* Frontier Films hoped to be an alternative to March of Time which they believed failed to "deduce pace and drama out of the real scene and the real protagonists." Paul Strand announced as their goal: "[to] devise legitimate techniques for moving an audience by projecting the basic dramatic meanings implicit in the documents."* Several films that still stand as honored examples of the documentary form were distributed or produced under Frontier Film's auspices including Spanish Earth, China Strikes Back, White Flood, United Action, and the group's most touted work, Native Land by Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz.* In 1942 the group disbanded, as did several

*Among those who were either colleagues or advisors were: John Howard Lawson, Elia Kazan, Leo Hurwitz, Herbert Kline, Ralph Steiner, Joris Ivens, Vera Caspay, David Wolff, Malcolm Cowley, John Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman, Archibald MacLeish, Lewis Milestone and Clifford Odets. (From Ben Belitt, "The Camera Reconnoiters," The Nation, 11/20/37) p. 557.

*Compiled from Paul Rotha's Documentary Film and New Theater magazine issues. Also an unpublished paper on Frontier Film's production of Native Land by Robert J. Wanzel, University of Iowa, 1970.
audience societies designed to support these efforts. The war had begun, the economy had overcome its most desperate contradictions and virtually all Americans had gathered around the banner of Anti-Nazism, if not Anti-Fascism. The reverberations of protest and hard careful looks at who profited from the three years of war died to little more than weak tremors in the post-war period when anti-Communism became a divisive ploy potent enough to aid in splintering the powerful CIO from within.37

Meanwhile a film movement that had begun as a radical alternative to the Hollywood product found itself drifting toward rapprochement. In 1934 just before its demise, The Film and Photo League helped form the Harry A. Potamkin Film School in New York.38 Its purpose was to serve as a workers' film school by teaching the history, development and craft of the motion picture. A heavy emphasis was given to the Soviet film and to the principle of teaching the practical aspects of filmmaking—camera, lighting, etc. There were plans to produce a documentary cooperatively (Waste and Want) and, like Frontier Films, the school lasted into the forties.

What became of its student/workers, however, is not clear. If they followed the footsteps of their mentors many no doubt found their way back beneath the broad mantle of the Hollywood industry. By the mid-thirties the stress seems definitely to have shifted from considering film as an
organizing tool to taking up the aesthetic challenges of quality film production. To some degree groups like the Film and Photo Leagues, Nykino, New Film Alliance and, especially, Frontier Films, may have been the necessary means for sustaining individual, creative talents more than a specific political direction. The individuals who had distinguished themselves by their creative talents gradually coalesced into a contributory current to American film history rather than into pinions of a revolutionary class struggle. Many made industrially or privately sponsored documentaries; others worked under New Deal programs to produce those two documentaries frequently cited as America's first major contributions to the field in the pre-World War II era--The Plow that Broke the Plains (1936) and The River (1937). (Paul Strand, Ralph Steiner, Leo T. Hurwitz shared the photography on The Plow that Broke the Plains. Steiner subsequently worked on The City for the American Institute of Planners on a Carnegie Grant then drifted to Hollywood to do intermittent work on short subjects. [See Paul Rotha's Documentary Film, p.316.] ) Still others moved into Hollywood and formed a community of their own, based on common, though somewhat diverse, political interests. Among these men were Jay Leyda, Lewis Jacobs and John Howard Lawson who, together with Edward Dmytryk and Upton Sinclair, taught at the League of American Writers School in Hollywood. Some, like Lawson, became
part of the ongoing industry and a focus for the red-baiting Hollywood hearings that led to the Hollywood Blacklist, among other things.

As leftist filmmakers moved further away from the objectives of the only organization with a program at all similar to Newsreel's, The Film and Photo League, their political focus blurred and both tactics and goals became more diffuse. The boundaries between the anti- or non-Hollywood newsreel and documentary and those made by the industry grew less distinct as men and their creative powers moved back and forth across the line with fewer and fewer qualms. Films that bear the names of those active in the early thirties efforts still had indications of a leftist viewpoint, but so did films made with Federal or private grants by filmmakers solely or primarily concerned with artistry: Joris Ivens' *The Land* ('40) for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Pare Lorentz's *The Fight for Life* ('40) and Willard Van Dyke's *The Children Must Learn* ('40) both about Southern poverty and its consequences for the Alfred Sloan Foundation.* The Film and Photo League's call for films "reflecting the lives and struggles of the American workers" became a principle, and often a profitable one, that government, private industry, philanthropic trickles of finance capital and the Hollywood system could all support.

*See Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, pp. 308-331.*
Even the old dreamland nemesis of the original League, the feature fiction film could concern itself with the working man, even though there were a few distortions. What the Hollywood film could not and did not want to do was to use the film within an organizational context where underlying bourgeois values and assumptions could be criticized. Nor could Hollywood present the working man with a Marxist point of view, at least not without parody. But these flaws became less a focus of outrage when numerous men with strong sympathies for leftist causes worked within the industry and when the strongest leftist organization, the Communist Party, was kept largely on the defensive. Whether or not even the Film and Photo League had been a bastion of Marxist or revolutionary propaganda of marked impact is open to question (especially considering the criticisms it received from members and allies). And, to add to the general hazing of distinctions, or as might be said today, co-optation, the dominant, "above ground" figures in documentary filmmaking were also prominent spokesmen for its propagandistic use. It is to their ideological viewpoint that we now turn.
CHAPTER TWO

THE IDEA OF PROPAGANDA FROM THE BRITISH DOCUMENTARY TO THE RISE OF NEWSREEL

Film theory in the late twenties and early thirties began as a poetic celebration. Journals like Close Up frequently ran odes that personified the glorious machine-art called cinema and that might conclude with lines like, "I claim you as a lover." Editorials proclaimed film as the "profound creator of free will and knowledge absolute." At the same time a certain amount of attention went to the left's political formulations about film, though this seems to be because Hollywood "debased" the art of film and Russia apotheosized it more than because of a specifically political commitment. Seymour Stern (a Film and Photo member) wrote, "Cinema is the most powerful instrument devised by mankind for the expression, in highly concentrated forms, of the dialectic world struggle of the classes."

The anti-Hollywood bias and the extended exploration of the film's documentary potential took prolonged, intense expression in the writings of Paul Rotha and John Grierson. These two men, both British, were major forces in the British documentary film movement, and it is the principles of that movement that have been largely responsible for the
film as we know it today. (The newer, cinéma-vérité tech-
iques are now the dominant ones aesthetically, but the bulk
of documentaries still adhere to the older, Rothen-Grierson
principles.)

In 1930 Rothen mercilessly attacked the Hollywood
film in his pioneering film history, The Film Till Now. In
1935 he published Documentary Film which, together with John
Grierson's writings and comments, not only provided a sum-
mary history of the documentary film but also a springboard
for an apologetic account of their own theory and practice
of filmmaking (as well as occasion for continuing digs at
the Hollywood product). Since their work was closely linked
to Britain's interests, or as they saw it, her problems, the
American documentary, outside of Flahery, drew little
attention. The propagandistic work of the Film and Photo
League was more or less forgotten and the theory of propa-
ganda it put forth glossed over as the documentary's most
prominent spokesmen moved in an altogether different direc-
tion. (In introducing a compilation of Grierson's writing,
Forsythe Hardy notes that the British documentary began to
effect the U.S. product "as early as the middle thirties" when the Film and Photo League had already begun to decline,
assuming that only this British scion--which failed to
"take" because of inadequate sponsorship--could have
brought the U.S. documentary to flower. It is an assumption
that may require reevaluation.)
Rotha frequently refers to the relationship between documentary and propaganda, but it is Grierson who makes it most clear: "I look on cinema as a pulpit and use it as a propagandist." He uses the same vigorous tone of engagement as many American leftists: "It is as a hammer, not a mirror, that I have sought to use the medium that came to my somewhat restive hand." And he embraces a comparable commitment to an artistic rendition of the burning issues of poverty, hunger, disease—the worker's plight and the nobility of his labor. In discussing his first film, *Drifters* (1929), about North Sea herring fishermen, Grierson wrote: "If the high bravery of upstanding labor came through the film, as I hope it did, it was made not by the story itself, but by the imagery attendant on it."6

But Grierson's propaganda was not that of a Marxist but more that of a reform democrat. He never proposed a radical restructuring of the economic system and stressed, not the transfer of power as the fundamental issue but the transfer of information. His communication theory's propagandistic color derived out of a reaction to Walter Lippmann's thesis that the average citizen was no longer equipped to judge or act upon the complex issues of his day, that he was deluged with more information than he could possibly assimilate within his limited leisure. Grierson's, and the British documentary movement's, solution was to provide a "shorthand method for world observation."7 Grierson
argued, "There is an inhibition in the air and at the root of it is this failure of our educational forces . . . to give the citizen his bearings." He proposed to offer bearings by a threefold effort to create "firstly: interest. Secondly: the participation which emanates from interest. Thirdly: standards of judgment." His was a far more reasonable, fatherly tone than that of Dziga-Vertov or of the American propagandist's; it offered comfort in the midst of turmoil, wisdom in the face of anarchy. Grierson would bring the citizen back inside the parliament and with knowledge revitalize democracy.

Participation, for Grierson, was in the ongoing problems of the nation and its commonwealth of neighbors. In radical distinction to Engel's famous definition of the state, Grierson observed, "The state is the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured." Rotha echoed his thoughts: "Our propaganda for democracy had got to have in it a description of what Britain is doing, and might do, about the organization of social life to still better ends."

The key, for Rotha and Grierson then, was to shape raw information into patterns of meaning that would aid the individual in the participatory obligations of citizenship. On the one hand this required a point of view which the filmmakers would supply (preferably not by "Voice of God" narration, as Rotha termed the omniscient voice-over, which
was a sore point to the imaginative documentarist even then). Grierson noted that information "has to be directive if it is to be manageable. It has to be keyed to specific ends or purposes if it is to be articulate." And the overriding point of view was to awaken man to the basic rights and duties, faults and strengths of citizenship. Their point of view is reminiscent of American populism's faith in the informed public, the average man, while they have even fewer qualms about the inherent dangers of big government. The "fantasy of goodwill" was not reserved exclusively for the Hollywood dream product.

A second major preoccupation for Rotha and Grierson was a source of appeal to the broad public and both of them found this in the utilization of drama. They saw drama as inherent in the raw stuff of life and in information pertaining to it. Unlike Vertov they did not seek determinedly to "detect" rather than "invent" this drama, but, then again, they felt a sharply defined commitment to a social viewpoint (citizenship within a democracy) in whose name a degree of artifice was not only desirable but at the core of their philosophy of providing "standards of judgement." They did, however, insist on a faithfulness to reality that ruled out total fictionalization. As Rotha put it, "the essence of the documentary method lies in its dramatization of actual material," while Grierson tied an even tighter bond between drama and citizenship.
There are, we said, basic dramatic patterns in terms of civic relationships since all social problems are bound to involve a relationship between people and forces. Revelation of these dramatic patterns is the first essential in the process of modern education. The tradition of the British documentary reflects this "creative interpretation of reality" quite faithfully and leaves for us a record of excellent craftsmanship and social concern. The "people" are displayed with far greater precision, however, than the "forces" that create "civic relationships," or what Gramsci would call the "civil society." Rothe and Grierson may have had little sympathy for the Hollywood film but they also had little quarrel with the "forces" that controlled it. Grierson's early efforts, in fact, were for the Empire Marketing Board whose express purpose was to "promote all the major researches across the world which affect the production or preservation or trans­portation of the British Empire's food supplies." Grierson saw its work as an effort to "bring the Empire alive in contemporary terms, as a commonwealth of nations and as an international combine of industrial, commercial and scientific forces." The fantasy of goodwill behind that conception needs no great dissection. The Third World struggle against imperialism is not a phenomenon restricted to the last few decades. Lenin, in fact, wrote Imperialism,

"Some of the outstanding films include Drifters, Desert Victory, Housing Problems, Listen to Britain, The Londoners, Night Mail, The Saving of Bill Blewitt, Target for Tonight, and Song of Ceylon."
the Highest Stage of Capitalism in 1916 and uprisings, bloodshed and rebellion were not uncommon in the 19th century when it all began. The Third World did not exactly welcome Britain, or today, America, as the founding link in a relationship of equal benefit and it is the need to mask and counteract these contradictions, as much as the more euphemistic idea of citizenship training that makes propaganda a necessary adjunct to state power: "If only for the sake of quick decision and common action, it is democracy for which propaganda is the more urgent necessity." 17

Grierson and Rothe, however, did not give evidence of any uneasiness in their alliance with state policy and machinery. They had all the room for "creative interpretation" that they required (as the Drew-Leacock-Pennebaker cinema-verite team later did under contractual obligations to Time-Life, Inc.). In fact, Grierson stated quite categorically, in introducing Rothe's book:

Documentary gave to propaganda an instrument it needed. There was therefore, virtue in the word propaganda, and even pride, and so it would continue for just as long as the service is really public and the reference is really social. If, however, propaganda takes on its other more political meaning, the sooner documentary is done with it the better. 18

Propaganda thus acquired a broad, legitimate meaning as educational persuasion or guidance, the dramatic realization of information for the promotion of citizenship and a more narrow, illegitimate meaning: the explicitly one-sided endorsement of a particular program, generally requiring
action or concrete commitment. The distinction was generally upheld by analysts of propaganda in the period (who concentrated their study on the latter, more obvious, form) and the educational-propaganda film that the British documentary movement proposed became the standard means of information dispersal, or propagation, and a normal experience for film audiences.

The documentary film thus took a socializing, but not socialist, turn, with ideological justification, that drew it further and further away from the goals envisioned for it by Vertov or the Film and Photo League. Propaganda became a commodity artfully conceived to serve the interests of the ruling class while being accepted by other classes. By making the documentary synonymous with propaganda Grierson, Rotha and the dominating momentum of the British filmmakers helped legitimate the overtly persuasive use of film and to disqualify propaganda that opposed their point of view. By explaining propaganda as a necessary aid to citizenship which they promoted as agents of the established government, they undercut the use of film to develop radical opposition to the existing forms of "citizenship."

Promoting the fantasy of goodwill, even rubbing our noses in some of the desperate contradictions of our system (albeit aesthetically palliated) is one thing; calling for radical change, for new forms of citizenship is quite another.
During a period of great economic crisis and of urgent social transformation when much of the film product floundered in escapism and romanticism, Rotha and Grierson's emphatic defense of the propagandistic, socially committed film documentary contained clearly progressive elements. It is not entirely surprising to learn that Grierson refers to himself as an "old radical" and that Rotha was deeply sympathetic to the political left. But the dimensions of a point of view that receive greater or lesser emphasis are often determined by external circumstances rather than their internal relatedness. Thus Rotha and Grierson may have overplayed the radical implications of their propagandistic approach since most filmmakers chose to work with film in a far less committed fashion. From the beginning when Grierson took work with the Empire Marketing Board, the radical thrust of their documentaries was always channeled into a corrective format, altering the terms by which films could be conceived and distributed but not the supportive function for the governments and ideologies that surrounded them.

An indication of how limited their radicalism has been to the ongoing industry and dominant ideology is the fact that similar material (USIA, television news reports, etc.) is no longer openly called propaganda but presented as
factual documentaries (i.e., "objective" reports) for which apologists seldom even suggest a propagandistic intent. Their propagandistic, socializing role has become an unstated assumption which, by being unstated, becomes all the more powerful. Not the least significant result of this absorptive process was the shifting definition of propaganda itself.

The word originally had a strictly religious meaning. It was first used by Pope Gregory IV in 1622 in an encyclical entitled *Congregation de Propaganda Fide* which called for an active propagation of the Catholic faith. Not only faith could be propagated, though, and by 1800 the word had taken on political overtones. By 1842, when class conflicts were beginning to heat up to a visible level, the word had taken on a disruptive connotation and was largely applied to secret societies. In fact, once this and other similar connotations develop (untruthfulness, covert ends, the use of a mouthpiece or "front") the concept of propaganda itself becomes a propaganda weapon. And in a class society, "propaganda," like "the state" receives its greatest significance and takes on virtually an electrostatic charge, of variable sign, according to class alliance. Often that charge appears greatest when the propaganda's alliance to one class is honestly and sincerely misconstrued as service to the other. When Grierson, for example, called the state, "the machinery by which the best interests of the people are
served," he saw propaganda as the educational force that trained his audience to respect and maintain that benevolent machinery. He sought to eliminate surreptitiousness and other adverse connotations by being entirely aboveboard, an action he could take with little fear that others would doubt his motives: the institutions that sponsored his work belied disruptive intentions. Grierson could chide those who doubted his position with comments such as "the thought of making work an honorable theme, and a workman, an honorable figure, is still liable to the charge of subversion," 20

Grierson and Rotha's apology for propaganda has no discernible undertone of duplicity and their vision of a dynamic, responsible citizenry democratically participating in the mechanics of self-government was a noble one. Unfortunately it was distinguished more by its utopian nobility than its materialist accuracy. Their honesty and vigor assumed the workability of existing institutions and the virtue of defending them. It was an assumption that the general nature of their economic and political system and the precise nature of the lives of the workers whose labor they extolled tended to contradict and an assumption that later groups like Newsreel often rejected with a fury in excess of their reasons for it.

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State power becomes authority when it is legitimimized. The well-documented trend in bourgeois-democratic societies
is for legitimacy to become more tenuous, authority less automatically acknowledged and power more brazen. Legitimacy (in traditional liberal ideology) is defined by the dynamic exchange between masses of people who voluntarily grant power and concede authority and the government that serves them. The contemporary function of legitimacy, however, receives its most telling definition in sociological analyses that "dissolve legitimacy into belief or opinion. If a people hold the belief that existing institutions are 'appropriate' or 'morally proper' then those institutions are legitimate . . . In effect, this analysis dissolves legitimacy into acceptance or acquiescence." John Schaar, who makes this observation, goes on to conclude, "Followers believe in a regime, or have faith in it, and that is what legitimacy is. The faith may be the product of conditioning, or it may be the fruit of symbolic bedazzlement, but in neither case is it in any significant degree the work of reason, judgment, or active participation in the processes of rule." This irrational core to the supremely rational belief in government by consent provides the essential paradox that every advocate of alternative modes of government must contend with.

The normative role of propaganda, the role we usually do not recognize because it is so deeply rooted in the values and attitudes of ruling class ideology, that is, the dominant ideology, becomes quite clearly to help
legitimize power by "conditioning" (e.g., commercials) or "symbolic bedazzlement" (e.g., the mystification of technology) rather than by dialogue and reason. Overtly announcing a propagandistic intent is obviously a contradictory act, one that indicates adherence to the older, liberal ideology rather than the bureaucratic one that dominates today. The faith that creates modern legitimacy is best propagated covertly, subtly; it is, after all, a substitute for dialogue, reasoned exchange, true representation, and if it seems to flow from leaders to followers on too plainly marked a one-way street it undercuts its own persuasiveness. Hence, it becomes advantageous to label conservative propaganda with neutral terms like "news," "report," or "documentary" and radical propaganda with highly charged terms like subversion, brainwashing, etc. And because of the benefits stemming from the ownership of the means of production (namely the mass media or communications industry) propagandists for the legitimacy of the status quo have decisive advantages in selection and format that can also serve a propagandistic role without being labeled as such.

The power to select and generate news has long been recognized as a propagandistic asset. It has seldom enjoyed the openness which Rotha and Grierson's liberal assumptions accorded it, however. George Creel, an advisor to Woodrow Wilson, argued against ironclad censorship during World
War I, for example, and instead proposed, "A sales campaign that would carry the official war aims and peace terms not only through the United States but to every neutral country . . . a campaign that would literally choke the channels of communication with approved news and opinions and thus squeeze out other reports." The campaign sought to convince the world of U.S. invulnerability, of America's tradition of freedom and democracy and that peace would "usher in a new era of peace and hope." Unlike Rotha and Grierson, Creel did not assume an educational posture where the dissimination of information served to prepare men for active citizenship; his was a sales campaign to generate faith in a policy whose ambiguities were obscured the more easily to convince. It was propaganda for acquiescence and it has become the order of the day.

Because "propaganda" is itself a potent propaganda weapon and because a propaganda for acquiescence utilizes a palliating, soothing tone, most analysis of propaganda stressed the word's more obviously sinister and disruptive aspects. Leonard Doob, in Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique, written in 1935, describes "intentional propaganda" as "a systematic attempt by an interested individual(s) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion, and consequently, to control their actions." Doob notes that the unintentional propagandist "is able to control almost completely the media of
communication within a society." By ascribing, perhaps accurately, unintentionality to the propaganda for the status quo he effectively removes this area from careful scrutiny, an excision that caused little comment for well over a decade. What preoccupied him and many other researchers of the time were overt, systematic efforts at directed action, not acquiescence; conditioning for an imminent course of action, not a general way of life.*

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The propaganda for acquiescence, the dominant propaganda which has, at least since Wilson, succeeded in "choking" the channels of communication did not have very high visibility for individuals biased to receive most communication as objective reportage with unmeasured but minor quantities of unintentional propaganda and intentional propaganda as a discreet sub-category. Many recognized that suggestibility was frequently more effective than command, but these insights were not assimilated into a theory of propaganda until much later. But by the 1950s this process of assimilation had begun to gather steam. Richard Griffith, in a 1952 supplement to Rotha's Documentary Film, commented

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*Dictionary definitions of propaganda from the time reinforce this slant: (1) "The secret or clandestine dissemination of ideas, information, gossip or the like, for the purpose of helping or injuring a person, an institution, a cause, etc. (Webster's Unabridged, 1938) (2) "Efforts directed systematically toward the gain of public support for an opinion or course of action," (Funk and Wagnall's, 1938)
at length on the newsreels and documentary films prepared for the World War II service man. He observed that early newsreels (Screen Magazine, produced by Leonard Spielglass) were "too pompous or too corny" but that later issues avoided too systematic or omniscient an attitude. Their success seemed directly proportional, in fact, to their orientation toward "the apron strings or the backyard of isolationism." Griffith also noted that "the old Voice of God commentary was unacceptable to troops under discipline. Commentary had to be spoken in their vernacular and uttered in the voice of a clearly identifiable man, a man whom the men themselves could accept and recognize as an authority." The example he cites is a film about internal subversion (The Battle of the United States) "fortified by the physical presence on the screen, and by the direct voice in commentary, of J. Edgar Hoover." Griffith concludes:

The resulting experiences of the Screen Magazine with its vast soldier audience . . . suggest in fact that the man-in-the-mass will accept concepts only on his own terms and in his own conception of his interests--a conclusion which casts sobering light on many information-film theories both past and present.

Griffith did not ask if propaganda helped shape a man's conception of his self-interests in the first place, but others were soon to pose that question quite emphatically. Griffith did recognize that the propaganda which theorists and analysts could easily identify with their working definitions were what the "man-in-the-mass" could
also easily identify and just as readily discard. Deeply effective propaganda, it appeared, took a more circuitous route and drew heavily upon prevailing opinion and attitudes to which it could attach itself, often solidifying these very attitudes and opinions in the process. In practice, this frequently meant reinforcing a prevailing ideology that found a vital role for "false consciousness" to play. (A certain degree of subjectivism may seem inevitable in determining in any given situation what "false consciousness" is. Here, I understand the term to mean a faith in institutions or people whose legitimacy is derived from the faith they themselves promote or a conception of self-interest that is at odds with actual socio-economic circumstances--a worker, for example, could falsely perceive his interests as identical to his boss' in a period of prosperity. To realize the relative rate at which he and the company accumulate capital or to experience a decline in real wages disproportionate to the company's reduced profits or loss and still retain this notion would be a sign of false consciousness.) In any case, the element of false consciousness is integral to what could be termed the propaganda of acquiescence. The idea that this form of propaganda supports values and attitudes that its critics perceived as immicable to their own interests, in very indirect and often "unintentional" ways, was crucial to understanding the reaction against it by the mid-fifties. Why Mr. Hoover's power should be legitimized
as authority, for example, was never questioned in the Army film. His authority was assumed, allowing the bulk of the material to appear objective and pragmatic. With a topic like Nazi infiltration there was little likelihood of debate. With other topics where debate might be more likely, it was no more openly invited. Little indication was made that an alternative point of view was possible, let alone plausible. This was not the educational-propaganda that Rotha and Grierson had conceived, but "consensus" propaganda, as another American "authority" might have turned it.

This dawning recognition of the pervasiveness, and not entirely accidental nature of "unintentional" propaganda began to crystallize around several sociological investigations of the fifties: Riesman's works, especially *The Lonely Crowd*, William Sloan's fictionalized sociology, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*. These works suddenly pulled the wool from the eyes of a public that had never considered the broader implications and role of propaganda in their lives. "Motivation research" the name of the advertising game that Packard explored, did not even attempt to communicate its message at a rational or conscious level. The blunders that led *Screen Magazine* to pomposity or corniness were eliminated from the start. False consciousness is rooted in the most basic values we assume, placing it on the margins of articulate consciousness, if not within the realm of the subconscious.
itself. It was this diffuse level which "motivation research" explored on the sound assumption that the topmost layers of logic and reason do not direct everything we do. Of course, their research was not pure but applied and their goal, therefore, nothing short of manipulation: thought-control by another name is "brand-identification." Their methodology involved the utilization of (not by any means the amelioration or liberation from) repressed, essentially sexual energies. Their promise, simply, was that commodities offered what the contradictory tensions of repression desired: emotional security, reassurance of worth, ego gratification, creative outlets, love objects, a sense of power, roots and immortality. Motivation research never actually provided these qualities since it sought to use, not eliminate, the conditions that created them. They promised fulfillment, but it was fulfillment that had to be continually renewed with bigger, better commodities, a circular pattern that became known as "consumerism."

A good deal of indignation surrounded the "discovery" that propaganda wasn't so easily confined to rational attempts to steer people towards a course of action; that, indeed, it seemed to work best when its appeal was to more far reaching and less specific goals or objectives. Frank Whitehead in Discrimination and Popular Culture wrote, "To persuade people to a course of action by reasoned argument would seem to be a perfectly legitimate procedure for the
propagandist, whether political or commercial. The advertising "profession" has long been of the opinion, however, that human beings in the mass are more malleable if you address your appeal not to their intelligence, but to their private fears, anxieties and daydreams. The older anxiety about systematic attempts at control of our attitudes and thereby, actions, now found an even more terrifying cause for alarm. There was not even room for reasoned refutation: propaganda had learned to bypass the intelligence.

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The increasingly studied application of motivation research in order to "give people what they want," (i.e., those wants that the propagandist first intensified or exacerbated and then offered temporary, almost addictive, solutions for) coincided with fundamental economic relocations. The end of the Second World War unsprung a vast industrial capacity upon a domestic market conditioned to thrift, frugality and scarcity. The expanding productive capacity required a much vaster market and the consumer-society was the partial solution. Advertising sought less to sell lipstick or any other particular commodity than to buy customers. In large measure it worked and the economic structure was stabilized until the late 60s through consumerism at home and imperialism abroad. The mass media themselves became the primary disseminators of the altered ideology arousing concern that there was no true alternative being
provided: "The word 'media' was evidently felt to be a misnomer, they were not just vehicles—they provided the views, filtered the news and devised a special kind of entertainment."35

An even more penetrating analysis led to a recognition of who owned the mass media and how it served their interests. Herbert Schiller's fully documented study, Mass Communication and American Empire, posed the provocative, key question: "What happens . . . if the military-industrial power enclave has grown up strongest in the information apparatus itself?"36 His question connects what could be considered merely as economic marketing technique to the larger questions of the political role of "unintentional" propaganda in a democratic society. What if our mass media do not simply transmit information, but propagate the faith necessary to create political or institutional legitimacy when legitimacy is denied its traditional meaning? And what if they are an active force in propagating this faith across the world?

The media Schiller discusses most extensively are radio and television. (If Lenin were alive today he would undoubtedly name these as the most important media for the broad goals he set instead of film.) And what Schiller documents is the fact that the three major television networks broadcast to roughly one hundred countries, own stations in many (along with Time-Life, Inc.) and follow a
systematic, ruthless plan to undercut competition, including any indigenous television industry. These networks clearly operate more as a marketing/propaganda vehicle than a neutral information exchange. They have become totally enmeshed in a web of political-military-economic power whose authority their very existence, let alone their program format, selection and content works to legitimize through acquiescence. Information is transmitted along one-way air waves and feedback or participatory citizenship becomes an illusive ideal.

Schiller's conclusions are a sobering contrast to the post-scarcity euphoria of the McCluhans and Youngbloods: "It is willful escapism to believe that technology, by itself, will soon force its ways out of the restrictive social web that now surrounds it." Furthermore, "the messages a system transmits are inescapably tied to the character of that system's structure and control." Propaganda was no longer an epiphenomenon within the broader circle of "pure" communication. Art, journalism, research—all endeavors that seek to transmit values and ideas to other men are inescapably part of a propagandistic parcel. The

*Schiller informs us that in order to build future markets, the American media sell television programs at phenomenal discounts, that involve sizable losses, in underdeveloped areas regardless of relevance or appropriateness so that, for example, "it is cheaper for the Nigerian television networks to buy American films than to produce their own." p. 112.
choice is not between propaganda and objectivity; it is between one form of propaganda or another, between propaganda that can readily be defined as such and that which works beneath a veil of non-partisan objectivity.

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Hence, whereas older studies of propaganda tended to dismiss unconscious or unintentional propaganda in order to concentrate on the more overt forms, these forms, basic to the transmission of all communication and any ideology became more sharply examined and their economic basis more carefully scrutinized. This shift of focus corresponded to a shift in the economic dynamics of capitalism itself from a still vigorous competitive capitalism to the virtual triumph of monopoly capitalism, from the domination of industrial capital to the rule of finance capital and from domestic consolidation to vigorous imperialism.

Economically, the accumulation of vaster and vaster sums of money into various conglomerates has forced capital overseas in search of new sources of profit. It has also meant that the aspirant to the free market place has had a smaller and smaller chance of success. With such immense sums of wealth ($25 billion in assets for the Bank of America, for example) investments cannot earn maximum profits in a single country, let alone one industry or a mere factory. Imperialism becomes an imperative and, as Schiller indicates, the ideological emissary of today is frequently the television set and the movie theater rather
The closure of the frontier in an economic sense, the realization that "big money" had become concentrated in the hands of no more than a few hundred people, has had a disturbing effect on the myths of competitive capitalism. Just as the compelling rational for accumulating capital had been undercut by the consumer economy, so the Horatio Alger myth found itself less expressive of everyday potentiality. The working class may have appeared in the fifties and early sixties to be on the way to absorption into the middle class, but by the latter half of the sixties both classes seemed enmeshed within an endless matrix of personal alienation and social anomie. Faltering efforts at politicization, odysseys of escape and/or self-discovery and humanism turned bittersweet if not altogether sour--these and other themes suggested creative struggles to portray the collapse of out-moded ideology and to discover new patterns of meaning.

Thus by the late sixties major relocations were taking place. Propaganda study had shifted to an examination of "unintentional" bias, rather than the more easily identified advocacy of an alien, threatening ideology or of distinct courses of action. The mythology and values that unintentional propaganda drew upon also came under scrutiny, most effectively from artists rather than scholars whose propagandistic function within the mass media was to shape a new mythology and new set of values based upon the now
dominant principles of monopoly capital. As Irwin Silber has argued, a great deal of the counter-culture's thrust was precisely in this direction.\footnote{44}

And all of the relocations took place within an arena of heightened awareness where bias that may have originated at a subconscious level no longer remained below the threshold of analysis. A broad but generally leftist spectrum of analysts and artists (despite cries of imminent fascism, the mass media's express ideology has been more liberal than reactionary) has grown increasingly concerned with the means by which a dominant ideology inimicable or at variance with the interests of the majority is nonetheless propagated and accepted. The disparity between power and authority, the increasing importance of obfuscation and mystification made propaganda a particularly volatile issue and an almost obligatory tool of state control. The disenchantment with claims of objectivity, the frustration with distortions of fact were widely felt responses which many believed could no longer be effectively articulated within media whose effect was so engineered as to blunt the edge of any protest. What appeared to be an all-enveloping political, economic and cultural process of socialization finally led some artists to a detached position similar to that which more scholarly analysis enjoys. The bankruptcy of educational-propaganda became, for some, official and a broad range of alternative media, alternative life-styles and alternative ideologics positioned themselves in a
tenuous--sometimes co-optable, sometimes disruptive--relationship with their dominant counterparts. One facet of this reactive movement was the formation of Newsreel.
CHAPTER THREE

NEW YORK NEWSREEL: BEGINNINGS AND ULTRADEMOCRACY

By the late sixties two interrelated ideas had begun to permeate the New Left. One was that the exemplary act carried out within the legal framework (accepting punishment for "crime") would not be enough to realize the dream of its most eloquent spokesman. Adjustment and accommodation might occur, but it would be co-optive adjustments and token accommodation. The Left began to turn away from the heritage of Thoreau and Gandhi and gravitate more toward the militant, guerrilla tactics of Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese liberation forces.

Second, trusting the mass media to help popularize and explain the exemplary act, to serve an "edu-prop" role for the citizenry as Rotha and Grierson had envisioned, became a deeply ridiculed idea. The Left began to notice that their own propaganda vanished inside a sponge-like medium of cool absorption—television—where it was not met and countered on its own level but rather transformed into something alien, dangerous, inhuman and irrational. The propaganda of the status quo had become part of the legitimizing process based not on dialogue but monologue, not on reason but unconscious and irrational strivings, not on...
consent or participation but on manipulated faith and conditioning.

These two ideas became part of the rationale for the underground newspapers which emerged in the latter half of the sixties. Together with the often overtly political music of singers like Dylan, Paxton, Ochs, etc., they served an instrumental role in propagating a definitive body of resistance ideology. As time went on, most of these individuals and collective enterprises came under the umbrella of the counter-culture. Their political pointedness became blunted as the political activists generally conceded the propaganda field to the advocates of life-style politics, a position of minimal threat (certainly in the short run) to the established order.¹

An exception to the process of the underground media's drift toward co-optation and neutralization through life-style politics has been The Newsreel (officially termed The Newsreel I shall simply refer to it as Newsreel). The reasons why Newsreel has become increasingly Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, more and more analytical and consistently militant will form one of the basic focii of this study. Newsreel began with an exceptional degree of militancy which has been modified, in many ways radically, but never co-opted. Its early militancy was an accurate reflection of Movement attitudes at that time, its members a fair representation of Movement membership and its films a barometer of the thoughts and acts of a large portion of the Movement.
This barometric connection to the Movement and the discernible changes in Newsreel direction make its study a useful means of obtaining a detailed perspective on a broad set of trends and their implications for the Movement today.

Newsreel began in New York City. Its nucleus was composed of a solid cluster of experienced filmmakers, mostly individuals with longstanding friendships, while the outer orbitals of the group were filled with a wide assortment of politically and creatively motivated individuals, largely college students most of whom were new to the Movement in terms of group participation.² The nucleus had already produced an impressive array of films: Peter Gessner had made *Time of the Locust* in Vietnam and *NLF* in Venezuela, the second with Robert Kramer,³ Norman Fruchter and Robert Machover made *Troublemakers* about a Newark (N.J.) poverty program in 1966 which was shown at the Lincoln Center Film Festival. (Robert Kramer was working at the time as an organizer in the community action project that *Troublemakers* focused on.)⁴ Robert Kramer then made *In the Country* in the fall of 1966 and *The Edge* in the spring of 1967.⁵ Alan Jacobs had made *Alabama March* in 1965 and two other filmmakers who helped start the Boston Newsreel, Ed Pincus and Dave Newman, made *Black Natchez* in Mississippi about the same time.⁶ After Newsreel was formed Robert Kramer went on to make *Ice* and Robert Machover another feature fiction film, *In Passing*.

In order to survive as independent filmmakers many
of these individuals, together with friends who worked with them and later came into Newsreel, formed a production company called Blue Van Films. This was later reformed in an expanded version as Alpha 60. Neither company proved entirely satisfactory and the idea of a newsreel organization was broached (in fall, '67). Several of these individuals attended the Pentagon demonstration later in the fall. When they discovered that the police brutality (tear gas, beatings, etc.) which they witnessed as a widespread phenomenon was minimized by the television reports, it became a precipitating event in the newsreel group's formation. A short time later, in winter, '67, the Newsreel became a reality.

The first open meeting took place on December 22, 1967 at the Film-Maker's Cinematheque (an underground filmmakers' center with which Jonas Mekas was closely associated). Ironically, that same day Universal Newsreel Service, the last of the theatrical newsreel services, closed. Open meetings were held, ads were placed in the underground press, and a large group that fluctuated between 50 and 70 people became associated with the project. During this initial, ultrademocratic phase, the decisive power was held by the nucleus of formerly independent filmmakers.

To some degree, Newsreel was considered a survival mechanism, a means for struggling filmmakers, politically committed, uninterested in sponsored documentaries, to continue making films. It offered a pool of skills,
equipment, ideological support, and perhaps most importantly, a distribution apparatus. Distribution has always been the stumbling block of independent filmmakers. Without a well cultivated distribution network to generate interest, a following and financial support, the filmmaker is forced into sponsorship (government or industrial) or reliance upon funds and outlets he can find for himself. Without independent distribution, political films particularly had little chance of being shown. Neither commercial theaters nor television were likely to exhibit them. These outlets, in fact, were the defined enemy. And general distribution is much too difficult a task for the independent filmmaker to undertake on his own. He must rely upon commercial distributors with the advertising and marketing wherewithall. But Newsreel's founders did not want to be subject to the selective control of commercial films. Their commitment was to what Irwin Silber terms "outlaw art," art created and distributed outside the established commercial apparatus. (Paradoxically, the only two films which any of the Newsreel filmmakers made outside the newsreel format, In Passing and Ice, were refused distribution by Newsreel.) Although one of Newsreel's most significant achievements has been the creation of an independent distribution system, it has not become a solution to the distribution problem for the individual, political filmmaker. Instead, it has created a new kind of political filmmaker who has accepted the collective as auteur. (American Documentary Films, based in New York
City, more closely serves the needs of the independent political filmmaker for sympathetic distribution, but it is far closer to a distribution firm with leftist tendencies than the more pervasive changes in filmmaking and distribution methods that Newsreel adopted."

Survival, though, was more a tacitly understood need than a publically articulated one. The specific plans and goals of Newsreel were never dodified but certain points recur in almost all the early announcements and internal discussion. One of the most stressed points was the idea of creating an alternative media, of opposing television, radio, and film with a radical filmmaking unit as well as underground newspapers, and a Liberation News Service. A fund raising letter in February, 1968 described Newsreel as "an alternative to the limited and biased coverage by the media in the area of filmed news." A spokesman for Newsreel in Europe stated, "It is clear to us that the means of communication of the Establishment do not lead to an approach to the problem which menaces its existence. The mass media have always consciously restrained free access to information . . . It is this hidden information, tied to the national reality, that leads people to revolution. In liaison with revolutionary groups around the world, Newsreel works to diffuse a consciousness of events and situations capable of shaping the future of our movement."

As a natural consequence of their previous experience with distribution and of their concern for
offering masses of people an alternative to the 6 o'clock news (which replaced the equally repugnant March of Time series of the Film and Photo League's era), there were plans to engage in theatrical distribution and to link up with the established 16mm circuits of college and film buff audiences. David Stone, who had a solid background in film distribution, worked to realize such an orientation, stressing the importance of distribution in any form, of effective accounting and office procedure, and of a widely available, theatrical alternative as a long range goal.\(^{14}\) For the most part, however, Newsreel found access to the established distribution channels clogged or unsuitable and the occasional theatrical screenings (at the Elgin, the New Yorker, the Gate and The Film-Maker's Cinematheque) served more a fundraising function than an ongoing, preferred form of release.

The types of film initially proposed, though, testify to Newsreel's intention to provide a thoroughgoing alternative to the mass media. A Guardian article on Newsreel reported that three types of film were planned: news, education and tactical.\(^{15}\) News films would offer rapid coverage of "demonstrations, ghetto rebellions and other such events" ideally available within a week of the event. Education films would provide more comprehensive analysis of particular phenomena such as "interviews with Leroi Jones, Jim Garrison, urban renewal, public schools, hippy communes, consumer abuses, etc." The tactical films were more narrowly Movement oriented. They would

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demonstrate techniques that organizers or groups could use for organizing or militant action--types of demonstrations or using guerilla theater, for example. This latter type of film was seldom made, and the news film became less and less of a priority as Newsreel began to concentrate on analysis. Hence most newsreels are not newsreels as Rotha would conceive them (strict reportage) but documentaries (interpretative). This restricted range made Newsreel less of a total alternative and a far less easily embraced one.

Together with increasing emphasis on interpretation or analysis, second thoughts about simply turning out films that would wind up in the hands of organizers "out there" deflected Newsreel away from its original flirtations with established distribution channels and outlets. It was not until quite recently that Newsreel again began to consider utilizing these channels for certain purposes and films.

Another recurring point in terms of distribution was the organizer theory. As one ex-Newsreel member described it, Newsreel would, "offer tools for those people out there who were working all the time with the people so that they would be able to use film to bring people around. We became a kind of service organization for people who were actually organizers." This approach later went through major modifications, but the initial concept was quite clear and frequently repeated: "The Newsreel is particularly concerned to put film into the hands of organizers and activists who can find ways to use film as tools in their
daily political work."\textsuperscript{17} It was statements like these that led the House Internal Security Committee to conclude that "\textsuperscript{18}Newsreel is a part of the propaganda arsenal of SDS."\textsuperscript{18} Newsreel may have welcomed so comfortable an arrangement with a potential army of organizers, but, as they later admitted, their entire organizer theory grew shakier and shakier, and formal ties to any group were never a reality.

A third feature of the group's initial point of view was the prominence of confrontation theory. Like the Film and Photo League they saw film as a potent weapon, but unlike the League they wanted to turn film into an aggressive, offensive weapon that confronted more than educated, that challenged more than described. The Berkeley Barb reported, "They want to turn reels of film into 'wepons and tools' to change viewer's consciousness . . ."\textsuperscript{19} Norman Fruchter commented, "Bullets kill, depress, sadden, probe, demand. We want that kind of engagement."\textsuperscript{20} Even more stridently, Robert Kramer announced, "We strive for confrontation . . . We want a form of propaganda that polarizes, angers, excites, for the purpose of discussion--a way of getting at people, not by making concessions to where they are but by showing them where you are and then forcing them to deal with that . . ."\textsuperscript{21} Kramer also called for "films that unnerve, that shake people's assumptions, that threaten, that do not soft-sell, but hopefully (an impossible ideal) explode like grenades in people's faces, or open minds like a good can opener."\textsuperscript{22}
There was enormous arrogance and self-righteousness here, but this was not unique to Newsreel. At this point the Movement believed it had the strength to catalyze imminent revolution; it only needed to hit people over the head so that they too could see it. Long term base-building or patient consciousness raising were strategies denounced as right-wing deviations. The ultra-left, with policies of militant confrontation and mass action, held sway. Newsreel did not stand above that ideology but shared it. In fact, spokesmen emphasized the politically committed nature of the group above its potentially more detached, filmmaking aspect. Dan Brown noted, "We understand our films are convincing because we are always engaged in practice." And Robert Kramer declared, "Our propaganda is one of confrontation. Using film--using our voices with and after films--using our bodies with and without cameras--to provide confrontation." Action and the call to action arouse excitement, emotional energy and intense moral feelings. Action, as T.E. Lawrence discovered it, can be a euphoric state where alienation and ennui melt away, where a disjointed man in disjointed times can forge unity in the white heat of battle. There is an element of the Calvinist ethic here also, of work at its most intense--as conflict, crisis and confrontation--being the measure of the man. The notion has a solidly American ring to it conjuring up the vision of titans of intestinal fortitude, mental stamina and emotional power: when the going gets tough, the tough get going.
It belongs to the tradition of a Richard Milhous Nixon, and for a while was also the cr\'\-\-do of the Left.

That Newsreel could not only participate in action but also convey that excitement on the screen became another distinguishing feature of the early Newsreel. One former member described his initial attraction to Newsreel as the result of the films' "emotional impact that I found tremendously good . . . it was the immediacy of an experience that lacked polish but has a crude urgency." Kramer found the similarities between Newsreel films and battle footage satisfying. Newsreel, like the Left in general, was at war and sought to extend the conflict to areas so far isolated from it. But Newsreel's early testimonials to its members' baptism under fire held less fascination for the uninvolved than for fellow partisans. The films may have helped build solidarity and morale, but they were not yet directed to extending the "war" as much as intensifying it. Later, when the euphoria wore off and the Movement began to move away from confrontation theories, many felt, perhaps predictably, a sense of disillusionment. Some drifted away; others remained to develop less arrogant forms of propaganda.

*   *   *

Many commentators on Newsreel have noted its indebtedness to the "New American Cinema" or the underground cinema. There were certain obvious similarities. Most apparent was the fact that Newsreel's nucleus of founding
members had been "experimental" or independent filmmakers and they had friendships and connections with various members of this underground. Secondly, the underground cinema had demonstrated the feasibility of noncommercial, anti-Hollywood filmmaking. While Newsreel members could also draw on their belief in the strength and size of the Movement for support, this tradition of maverick production and distribution to which Blue Van and Alpha 60 belonged, also no doubt lent plausibility to the Newsreel concept.

Third, there was a stylistic similarity between Newsreel films and many underground films: shaky cameras, garbled sound, grainy images, unconventional editing, etc. For Newsreel this was at the heart of the battle-footage look: grenades and bullets do not explode in our faces with mellifluous thuds or graceful fragmentation. There was probably less conscious choice or deliberate design involved than students of "influence" would prefer, however. As one Newsreel editor stated, "Slick filmmaking was never an issue because it was never a possibility." Unlike many underground filmmakers, Newsreel lacked the time and resources to produce more polished products. Their aesthetics were an aesthetics of necessity that others might choose to simulate but which Newsreel could not choose to reject.

Elements of arrogance and class bias also played a role in the use of format. "Slick" filmmaking was associated with ruling class ideology; Newsreel did not want its content encompassed by "legislated and approved senses
that give the illusion of the commitment to analyze. The illusion of real dissent. The illusion of even understanding the issues."30 If Newsreel had had the opportunity to make a studio feature or to televise a panel discussion, it would have probably refused. (Kramer and Fruchter, in fact, took part in the disruption of a WNDT, Channel 13, discussion-interview with New York's underground press.) Revolutionary art was sloppy, inaudible art. This was presumably the vernacular of the people, of the working classes still enchained and of the student vanguard who would precipitate the revolution. The assumption that others would not only tolerate poorly made films but even welcome them as vehicles of liberation was perhaps directly proportional to the intensity of self-righteousness in Newsreel's thinking. No doubt the attitude helped propel Newsreel beyond the level of stagnant announcements and provisional plans that often entraps new enterprises and thereby to aid in the prolific production of a wide range of newsreels. Simply getting started and having a frame of mind conducive to working diligently with the materials at hand may even have outweighed any aesthetic considerations. It is ironical, though, that a major portion of that frame of mind should derive from essentially chauvinistic assumptions.

**Inside Newsreel**

A closer look at the membership and internal structure of the early Newsreel will enlarge the context in which
it can be understood. The early structure reflected the Movement's general abhorrence of "leaders," rules, discipline and order. A strong affinity with anarchist sensibilities manifested itself across much of the Left, in the call "to do your own thing," to reject the notion of spokesmen and authority-figures in general, to rely upon the individual's sense of justice and his innate disposition to act forthrightly in its pursuit, to coalesce in loosely organized affinity groups for brief periods or particular actions. Hence Newsreel's structure took the form of "ultrademocracy" where everyone was considered equal. The only leaders were those who carried out organization functions and open, mass meetings were utilized to make decisions.

As the Guardian noted, "Anyone can propose a film and the resources put at his disposal depend upon what he needs and what is available ... The content of Newsreels, given internal approval, is left almost entirely up to the people who work on them. No attempt is made to put forth an overall specific political line." Former members from this period stress the latter point: "The original group was clearly a filmmaking group. That changed over a period of time because it was also a socially, consciously political organization which was constantly trying to hammer out those politics and see how unified they actually were. People talked about Newsreel as if it were a unified organization when, in fact, never even from the beginning could it have been said by anyone on the inside to be that. There were no
Newsreel politics."\textsuperscript{32}

Newsreel would provide raw stock and lab fees but most of the remaining costs and almost all of the initiative, including the specific point of view, or line, originated with the individual.\textsuperscript{33} But the individual members had a certain homogeneity about them. They were predominantly white, middle-class, college students or graduates or sometimes less formally educated associates of the same cultural milieu. (Newsreel’s office locations have clustered along the Manhattan axis running from the Village to the Upper West Side.)\textsuperscript{34} And as we’ve seen the nucleus was all male. It was also, as might be expected for independent filmmakers, a fairly wealthy group.

These points were lost in the early days when the sheer enthusiasm and excitement of building Newsreel were at a pitch, but their unobtrusive presence was itself a sign of privilege: “Nobody thought too much about economics at the beginning, probably because most of the original group either had money or had skills that allowed money to come in.”\textsuperscript{35} The focus was on the work: "People gave everything to Newsreel. They lived it, they slept it, they worked it, that was it--their entire world."\textsuperscript{36}

The consequences of these factors were multiple. The intellectual milieu from which many came brought a distinctive flavor to their work. In fact, for many Newsreel served as a rite de passage into organized Movement work.\textsuperscript{37} And they brought assumptions about the primacy of
rationality with them. Early, and not so early sound tracks tell us what the Movement feels like and means. There seems to be an assurance similar to that of the early "unenlightened" issue of Screen Magazine that direct exhortation by unidentified voices will move men to action if it is, in this case, militant and pure enough. Little account was taken of the more general pattern in which oppressed people accept and identify with ideological premises even though reason might refute them (false consciousness).

In effect Newsreel members took their own radicalizing experience as normative. Most had gone through a process of being "alienated, to being liberal, to getting involved somewhere, to becoming radicals." For people who already thought of themselves as radicals in spirit Newsreel offered intense involvement: "It was like you had a feeling of a high, but under tremendous kinds of pressure." This stress on enthusiasm and personal feelings was common to the Left then, and belongs to a general pattern of political engagement by elements of an intelligentsia:

The fanaticism of the 'radicalized intellectual' should be understood [as] a psychic compensation for the lack of a more fundamental integration into a class and the necessity of overcoming their own distrust as well as that of others.

"Fanaticism," as Mannheim calls it, can lead to a wide range of problems which Newsreel later had to deal with. It is a "violation of dialectics," according to Chairman Mao, to the degree that it fails to penetrate the inner dynamics of the enemy and confront his deepest strengths. But this
should not be taken as a self-sufficient explanation of why Newsreel or the Left need not be taken seriously. Looking at the emotional and psychological roots of a movement is only another dimension to understanding. It was the task Wilhelm Reich set himself in his study of the mass psychology of fascism and is best understood as an aspect of "relationism," to use Mannheim's term, rather than relativism: to acknowledge the interrelatedness of all things and all forces in the one totality of history.

These points were not altogether lost on the Newsreel members of the time. The difficulty was that the Left had not yet evolved the vocabulary of the forms for coping with them. Many of the early members recall a strong sense of intimidation and fright in the face of the political savvy and filmmaking expertise of the group's nucleus. A woman who has been with Newsreel since its first months recalled,

I came out of the woman's movement, but found little support in the group for those politics. There was one woman in the group with a woman's consciousness, but there were almost fifty people altogether. They were dominated by white, middle class males who came out of college backgrounds and a lot of radical activity so they have the verbiage, the words, like the analyses that were flipping around the room were ... .

Interviewer

Impressive?

Newsreel

Right. I was very impressed. I felt ignorant and that stifled me.42
Outside of the nucleus there were only a handful of individuals with extensive, applicable experience. For most it was an initiation process and the voluntary choice of Newsreel—when the technique of filmmaking has always had an aura of mysticism about it—may be suggestive of how they would relate to some of these problems and of how those with expertise could use their knowledge opportunistically. In any case there was an inevitable vacuum of decision-making that had to be filled and the members of the group's nucleus filled it. They soon established additional Newsreel offices in other cities (Boston, San Francisco, Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago and, through San Francisco, Los Angeles.)

But, more important for now, they exerted enormous de facto power over a membership of assumed equals. As a member from the time described it: "The structure itself became a determinant of your freedom. Whether you do or don't do something may depend on, in a so-called free situation, someone having made a phone call and setting up a bunch of screenings and suddenly someone has to take care of all the dirty work of making those screenings happen."44

A five man co-ordinating committee (all white, middle-class men) functioned to carry out day to day decisions. Policies and general priorities were subject to the consensus of the overall membership. But the general meetings had a peculiar feel to them as if the final decision had already been agreed upon by the core leadership: "I'd sit at a meeting and so and so would argue this point and so and so
that point and I'd get the sense that they'd argued that before but were only acting it out for the group."\(^4\)\(^5\)

When democracy is carried to the extreme and everyone has a free say with no controls, no checks and no balances, there is a tendency for the loudest, or the most articulate or most militant individuals to gain dominance. Frequently there will be a hierarchy of political sophistication established in such a situation: "It can be a real problem to find people who can openly accept you at whatever level you're at, if they've been through that level already... How you come on or don't come on in these groups is very important."\(^4\)\(^6\) It is a hierarchy that, like the institutions the Left opposes, places greater value on appearances than honesty, in which the "right" answers and attitudes count most and in which personal growth can therefore be stultified in the name of freedom. It does not necessarily mean that the most vocal spokesmen have duplicitous intentions or that they are hypocrits. More to the point, the insistence on total personal freedom confuses everyone as to the limits of freedom. No one wants to be the first to say "We need to form a committee" or "We need stronger discipline." People tend to act on the basis of prior models and peer group expectations and for a group constituted as Newsreel was, operating within American society, to exhibit symptoms of elitism, racism, class bias, subjectivism and male chauvinism is less a sign of sinister leadership than of callowness. A revolutionary movement cannot
spring up full-grown from dragon's teeth; it's emergence is
the result of continual struggle with what is wrong. The
story of Newsreel is a story of that struggle not a story of
deluded idealists or cynical wheeler-dealers trying to carve
out a personal empire.

* * *

When a group or an individual lacks a firmly held,
comprehensive analysis of his historical situation he is far
more subject to external influences which are often contra-
dictory or narrowing in their point of view. For Newsreel
one such factor, apart from those we've already discussed,
was New York City itself. The three Newsreel units we will
look at in any detail (New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles)
have had distinctly different histories which have tended to
converge as their political powers of analysis and collective
discipline have increased. Initially, though, New York City
was an added force working to shape Newsreel's morphology as
much as class or racial background.

In some ways New York City helped form a closed
circuit that reinforced the assumptions individuals brought
to the group. People know they are New Yorkers and a
definite pride usually remains after all the myriad criticisms
are subtracted. New York (by which I mean primarily
Manhattan where Newsreel's work centered) is an intellectual
and financial center with a small industrial proletariat
(working-class populations, though, surround the city in
towns like Newark). The publishing industry (including
representatives of the "Old Left" like Commonweal, Nation, New Leader, Commentary, Dissent, etc., as well as similarly oriented book publishers), academia (N.Y.U., Columbia, The New School, Juliard and the other professional and fine arts schools), the drama world, art galleries, museums, and the artisans and intelligensia of the Village and Upper West Side create a heady milieu that in many ways is not typical of the average American city. Nor is the appeal of this cultural diversity counterbalanced by a visible tradition of union or labor militancy as it is in San Francisco, thereby fostering the false dichotomy of art and politics. This milieu with which most Newsreel members felt some association, became another rationale for a sense of arrogance. It meant that when New York Newsreel established branch units its attitude was something more akin to a colonizer's than a partner's. Exceptionally different centers, like the analytical and distribution oriented Los Angeles office, were looked upon as "odd" or "strange" and their ideas consequently slighted.

In retrospect, Newsreel has recognized this problem: "The mistake we made in sending people other places was a general attitude of chauvinism that people here had about New York: 'New York Newsreel is the most revolutionary organization and we're going to tell it to you like it is!' That was a hard one to break down. New York chauvinism also tied in, perhaps seductively, with new working-class theory where the vanguard elements would not come from the
industrial proletariat which was shrinking in size and, presumably, power, but from the technicians, lower echelon bureaucrats, certain professionals, skilled laborers and service-industry workers who appeared more visible and powerful than the scattered blue-collar forces of New York. The new working-class was a more educated, seemingly more liberal amalgam of forces in which most students placed themselves. Presumably they would be more susceptible to arguments raised at a conscious level--à la Rotha and Grierson but with a confrontational bite--than the industrial proletariat whose consciousness had fallen prey to the irrational lures of television commercials or mass media propaganda in general. The new working-class experienced capitalist exploitation in similar, conceptual patterns to the white, middle-class students, as alienation and anomie, as part of general theories of spiritual barrenness and cultural malaise rather than as daily economic deprivation, racial and class humiliation or as raw, manual labor that brought no sense of satisfaction. It is not a question, however, of which kind of exploitation is more "real" but of recognizing that the Movement's, and Newsreel's, perceptions of the problem aligned it with significantly different groups from those constituting the "old" working-class, an alignment that had a surprisingly brief life-span, at least inside Newsreel.

Kinship or affinity in terms of point of view becomes all the more important when an edge of fanaticism
pervades a movement, as it did in the New Left's early stages. When there is chauvinism in a group's internal structure its external manifestations are likely to be even more intense and there was clearly the former: "We [Newsreel] wanted a hard core of committed from backgrounds with a certain set of sensibilities . . . There was an overwhelming kind of arrogance about those who were in and those who were out."\(^{49}\) There is no way to demonstrate empirically to what degree the New York City milieu itself encouraged this attitude, but for the Newsreel group it was an attitude that broke down only slowly and not at all at first.

**Early Films**

*Newsreel films reflected many of these problems and attitudes within a polemical format designed to counteract the more subtle propaganda of the mass media with agit-prop and other forms of intentional or overt propaganda.* Standing up to the "pig media" as an alternative media frequently meant showing the same events that NBC, say, thought "newsworthy" but from an opposing point of view. The Pentagon demonstration in late 1967 was an example, where the Newsreel (No Game) mixed shots of the marchers with Vietnam war footage and a voice-over narration about the nature of the war. This approach tied Newsreel to a fairly strict newsreel format onto which interpretative narrations or pointedly contrasting images were grafted. It allowed
little room for exploring where the Movement might lead or for helping open up new territory aesthetically or politically. And it helped insure that Newsreel served a baro-
metric rather than vanguard role (contrary to the expectations of some of its early members).

Self-liberation was another related concept that figured in the making of several early films. In Columbia Revolt, made a few months after the group began, a student voice is heard to say,

There seems to be a lot more dignity among students now because they feel that they have a right to say the things they're saying. That's why I think the amnesty issue has been raised and reraised so many times here. We've had to reassure ourselves by issuing votes of confidence for it every thirty minutes. Because people are not sure whether they're supposed to feel guilty for what they're involved in, and the whole issue of demanding amnesty first is to show that we have rights.

A former Newsreel member described how this feeling worked at the level of filmmaking: "The idea was to get people to express for the first time some of their feelings about the problems they face in their own lives and to encourage them to describe that without feeling they were some kind of freak." There is an inward pointing quality to these statements that reflects a great deal of New Left thinking at the time and indicates the interaction of fuzzy politics with the "counter-culture" rhetoric of liberation. Work that is primarily propagandistic can be on shaky ground if it is seeking to persuade others by serving as a proving ground for the self-liberation of its makers.

Closely related to this approach to the group's work
was the nature of its self-legitimizing function for the Movement. Far flung and loosely related events became more connected, more meaningful and more important when they were captured on film and put up on a screen. To the degree that Newsreel reported rather than analyzed while predicting certain victory rather than calling for objective scrutiny, it served to magnify the power of the Movement and invest it with an aura of self-delegated authority, like a Papal decree. It was an enclosed form of legitimization that did not include or demand dialogue with the masses of people who were sometimes acknowledged as the true source of legitimacy. The acts and statements of the Movement became a more immediate, self-evident source. Somewhat predictably, the strongest criticism of early Newsreels has been that they were mainly for the already committed. Those beyond the fold found few fissures, let alone pathways, inviting them to enter.

That the Movement has come a long way since 1968 is reflected in the fact that the bulk of the early films have been withdrawn from circulation. Not only because many are of poor artistic and technical quality, but also because the perception of the problems and the means of dealing with them have altered considerably. A look at the titles of the first few newsreels, though, will give a clearer indication of where Newsreel began:

2. No Game--the Pentagon Demonstration, fall, '67.
3. Four Americans--interview with the four deserters from the U.S. Intrepid.
4. Rankin Brigade--trip by a militant woman's group to Washington, D.C.
5. Garbage--Radical anarchist group dumps garbage at Lincoln Center.
6. Mill-In--an account of disruption tactics on Fifth Avenue during the Christmas, '67 season.
8. Resist and the New England Resistance--about turning in draft cards and other forms of resistance.
9. Riot Weapons--about riots and the police weapons and tactics for stopping them.
10. 1.S. 201--about a parade in memory of Malcolm X at a school in Harlem.
11. 6th Street Meat Club--a Lower East Side venture killed by bureaucratic maneuvering.
12. Chicago--about plans for radical action at the Democratic convention.
13. Chicago, April 27th--riot control practiced on an anti-war march. (made by Chicago Newsreel)51

A Newsreel member summarized the early films by saying, "They only showed the white movement and anti-war movement and at that point in the political history of the radical movement, that was where it was at--going to organized mass demonstrations."52 This focus is perhaps exemplified by the dominance of draft resistance films, a natural topic for Newsreel to pursue and one which revealed where they, as well as the Movement, "were at." Draft resistance was a predominantly white, middle-class college-graduate oriented movement. It had a heavy aura of moral righteousness about it. Some of its participants advocated pacifism and liberal arguments (accepting jail sentences that gave legitimacy to the government) that the Movement was still only beginning to struggle against. It had, therefore, elements of elitism, racism, male chauvinism.
(women were sometimes used to "comfort" AWOL soldiers), moral righteousness in place of political analysis, and pacifism—all positions the Movement rejects more unanimously today. To expect Newsreel to ignore the draft resistance movement, however, is like expecting a tree to ignore its roots. Draft resistance and anti-war protest were the Movement to a sizeable extent. Where New York Newsreel failed, and where San Francisco and Los Angeles Newsreels had more success, was in perceiving and dealing with the faults within that Movement.

Another film indicative of some of the same problems but of greater importance to Newsreel's survival was #14, Columbia Revolt—a report on the student strike over the construction of a gymnasium at Columbia University. This was the first long Newsreel (50 minutes) and one of the best made Newsreels to date. It had considerable circulation at all the Newsreel distribution centers and, together with #19, Black Panther (formerly Off the Pig) became the best known, best liked early Newsreel.

Filming the occupation of the buildings and the police busts (from the inside) afforded Newsreel members the opportunity to put their bodies and voices on the line quite literally. It also involved them in their own milieu and evidence of rapport runs throughout the film. Like the militant students at that particular point in time, Newsreel was not drawn towards theory; "Newsreel was into practice; we were heavily pragmatic." Columbia Revolt registers
this approach both in the sense of genuine spontaneity among the activists and in the very limited analysis which the film provides.

The contrasting ideas that lie at the core of Columbia Revolt's immediacy are exposure and celebration. The film begins with various shots of the campus and the noble, classic architecture of its older buildings. Coupled to these shots are President Grayson Kirk's thoughts on the modern university's role in supplying the needs of developing nations and the domestic government. The actual use to which educated labor is put is then spelled out by student voices who reject their role as instruments of oppression. They then discuss the gym issue, the proximal cause of the student strike. Again, they expose the unstated realities of the enemy's plans: Columbia's trustees represent sizeable real estate interests; they have pursued a policy of changing the predominantly black area around Columbia into a white ghetto; the gym, a private gym to be built on a public park, belongs to this policy.

Throughout the film exposure of the interlocking and self-serving interests of Columbia's trustees, the business they represent and the various levels of government they support becomes the sole form of analysis and, therefore, justification for the strike. The element of moral indignation is just below the surface of such a view, where the fundamental patterns of exploiter-exploited, profit-making and slum-dwelling, etc., are assumed evils. Since the
exploited slum dwellers themselves are not central to the strike, or the film which does not go beyond the analysis or feelings of the white militants in the strike, the nature of their oppression and the place of the gym within that context is generally acknowledged but not explored. The focus is on the white students whose mass militant action was designed to expose a corrupt, hypocritical system for what it was, radicalize others by their action and thence swell their own ranks. The black students, who act almost entirely off-camera, despite general agreement on their crucial role in the strike, (Newsreel was still an all-white organization) had a more specific aim: to stop construction of the gym. The whites were inspired by the militancy of the blacks and credited them with being the vanguard of the strike. They adopted the militancy, however, without its purpose: militancy itself became an end rather than stopping work on the gym or mustering community support. (A student says at one point in the film: "We didn't realize that we were much too timid, and that what we really had to do was show our moral strength and hold the building.")

The remainder of the film's thrust takes the form of a celebration. A celebration of militancy as a pure, moral and workable tactic (one student says, "I was completely neutral. I'm not neutral anymore. I'll occupy buildings tomorrow.") and a celebration of the militants' internal, communal relationships. The revolt, which coincided with the events of May-June, '68 in France, was one of the first
manifestations of the merger of the counter-culture with student activism. The camera follows food and drink as it is passed from hand to hand; we see sentinels at windows receiving cartons of milk from comrades; we see halls and rooms crammed full of people enjoying themselves with dance, song and talk. (Much of the camera work in Strawberry Statement, in fact, seems directly borrowed from the visuals of Columbia Revolt.) The celebratory mood climaxes in a very well-shot sequence of a candle-light wedding within an occupied building. The couple is pronounced "children of the new age" and their ceremony embodies much of the very positive, tremendously uplifting spirit of the Aquarian revolutionaries. Clearly, by image and testimony, the action was a powerfully liberating one for the participants and by bearing witness to that liberation Columbia Revolt portrayed a dimension of the Movement that many other Newsreels neglected altogether.

Aesthetically, Columbia Revolt represents one of the most successful uses of voice-over narration by Newsreel. Newsreel far too often relied upon "voice of God" commentaries to make a political point or fill a visual gap. In Columbia Revolt there is almost no sync sound and seldom more than one sound track (overlapping sounds are usually the actual recording imprint). And yet there is little sense of detachment in the narration. For one thing it is broken up among numerous voices who explain different facets of the action and secondly, the voices sound like student
voices. In some cases they are. In others they are Newsreel member's, but there is no way to determine which is which when the speakers are so nearly identical in sound and accent.

There is also no way to sort out who is who among the militants. The only named activist is Mark Rudd and he is on-camera only briefly. Although many faces recur and many have gone on to play prominent roles in the Movement, none are identified and none are lingered upon. The collective spirit is emphasized and identified with ultrademocracy. Even the differentiation between leaders, or representatives, and "the masses" seems to be equated with competitiveness and class society. This emphasis is not unusual given Newsreel's internal structure and the prevailing modes of leftist thought at the time. The Guardian's favorable review spoke of the film's theme "of a classless, non-competitive collective society that insists on singing, dancing and voting on things--everything.\(^5\) Whether or not ultrademocracy could be a workable vehicle for a revolutionary movement was not yet a primary question among the New Left activists.

Other films from Newsreel's early period reflected even more clearly the general lack of analysis underlying the moral revulsion and spiritual quest that lent so much impetus to the Movement then. An interesting comparison of how this manifested itself within Newsreel films can be made with *Isle of Youth* and *Threatening Skies*. The first is a
film shot in Cuba by Newsreel in 1968. The latter is a British film offering a sympathetic portrait of North Vietnam's struggle against U.S. imperialism during the early years of the war. It belongs to a large body of films distributed by Newsreel but made elsewhere that deal with Cuba, Vietnam and other focal points of revolutionary struggle.

Both films share the common format of portraying a foreign nation's struggle for freedom as witnessed and narrated by an outsider. Threatening Skies' narrator describes the background to the present war. He analyses the reasons for the U.S. escalation of the air war. He describes the people's work, their war duties and their determination. We also hear the sounds of war: the repeated, ominous noise of an unseen jet, air raid sirens, anti-aircraft guns. The visuals constitute a well-selected document of daily life, juxtaposing women planting rice with the rifles that dot the field like spartan haystacks or showing Hanoi students running to their school's anti-aircraft batteries. The narration is always oblique, fleshing in the image with a broadening context that leaves it for us to apply to the particular image portrayed. The overall mood is educational. The propagandistic slant is open and apparent but not insisted upon. The narrator provides the general shape to events, the images concrete examples. We are left to draw the conclusions ourselves.

Isle of Youth, about a model community built on a former prison-island, has a markedly different narrative
line. This time it is an American (Newsreel) voice describing the Cuban revolution but it is also describing the quality of experience instead of the historical situation. The narrator tells us how good it is for the people, how much better their lot is now, how wholesome outdoor farm work can be. It is reminiscent of the testimonials one hears for summer camps or 4-H clubs. Unlike the professional narrator of *Threatening Skies* who describes in objective tones, *Isle of Youth* offers us an amateur, disembodied voice that evaluates and moralizes without establishing its authority to make such judgments and without seeking our consent to that authority. Whatever rapport we develop with what we see depends largely on what we wanted to feel in the first place. What we see are fairly ordinary shots of farms, farm animals and the Cuban people. There is even a kind of touristic doting on songs and festive spirit that *Threatening Skies* astutely avoids. The British film also portrays the culture of the people but as one of the sources of their determination to oppose aggression. *Isle of Youth* does not link popular culture to the revolutionary struggle so much as extol it as a virtue in its own right. At its worst, this approach exhibits a moralistic, patronizing simplificness that combines the faults of cultural nationalism with the sins of racism.

The British film's concentration on an historical process as opposed to Newsreel's praise for the moral quality of an event helps situate *Isle of Youth* within the
Movement's and counter-culture's set of shared values. It becomes an assumption that the proper show of moral strength, the free expression of love and comradeship, will win the day. Political strategies and tactics can be put aside.

Lincoln Center, another Newsreel film, reflects this attitude from the negative side. It shows the Puerto Rican people, who lived where the Center was built, out in the streets, singing, dancing and talking with the informal grace and easy naturalness that is virtually a stereotype image of Third World peoples. Where the language barrier may have offered a rationale for omitting interviews in Isle of Youth, there is neither the rationale nor the interviews here. An outsiderly, touristy sensibility prevails as though Newsreel were not nearly so much in its element as at Columbia during the strike.

More than half way through the film, the sound track falls silent. Then, shots of the completed Lincoln Center and a voice-over narration take up. They tell us what they presume we've seen: that a "living culture" has been destroyed for the sake of a dead one. Besides reflecting a limited view of Third World culture, the film offers no indication of why the Center was built in defiance of this culture nor of what objections were raised. Lincoln Center gives little evidence that an historical process embodying the contradictions of capitalism has taken place. Instead, the moral shock we are intended to feel is meant to propel us to sympathy and action for a cause that requires no
deeper understanding.

ROTC is an early Newsreel with a specific topic and a more sustained attempt at analysis. The film is not used much today since ROTC has become less of a focal point than organizing enlisted men and the Movement has moved off-campus into the Third World and working class sectors where ROTC is largely irrelevant. Hence ROTC is as much a victim of the Movement's advance as of its own internal flaws.

ROTC uses the expose method of having the ROTC commander at Harvard University, Colonel Pell, describe the role and purpose of the program. His interview material is juxtaposed with footage of U.S. Army intervention in Guatemala to secure economic interests, a narration describing the generally imperialistic role of the army and shots of the use of the army to suppress domestic riots. Pell, of course, reveals his own prejudices and therefore discredits (or endears) himself to us. He doesn't want his son led by a high school drop-out, for example. But this type of irony simply feeds our own prejudices more than it educates. Pell is laughable; his simplistic notions of duty and responsibility, his narrow conception of his obligation to provide "leadership" without questioning the use to which it is put, his ambivalent attitude toward a faculty he envies yet cannot relate to all offer amusement. Yet, our reaction to Pell is entirely dependent on what we think of ROTC before the film opens. The historical analysis of the role of the army provides some food for thought that has the potential
for persuasion. It also creates an ironic counterpoint to Pell's own words and thus a means of guiding our response to them. The tendency to attribute "irony" to the counterpointing rather than "distortion" though, still remains dependent on values we bring to the film. ROTC sets out in the direction that de Antonio has explored more thoroughly and with still limited success, but lacks the subtlety of his work. The film is not patronizing or moralizing and is generally concise and well-documented. Newsreel's approach to the film, though, failed to influence some of their other efforts that could well have benefited from its less strident tone.

Although released in 1969, Summer '68 and Amerika (sic) reflect the depth of the early Newsreel's problems and the lack of a clear progression in artistic skill or political insight. Both were the work of a few individuals who initiated and carried out the projects; decisions were left primarily in their own hands. In fact, until quite recently Newsreel's main source of control over film form and content has been the post facto decision of whether or not to allow distribution as a Newsreel film. While many points of general agreement were hammered out in open meetings, the bulk of Newsreel's film did not incorporate these arguments in a cumulative manner. The individuals in charge were still largely auteurs with similar points of view. Hence a film made in '69 could reflect flaws even worse than a film made in '68. It depended to a great degree on the
artistic and political level of the filmmaker, more perhaps than Newsreel's steady groping toward a more effective internal structure and consistent approach to propaganda. Each new project that saw a new face at its control meant a reversion to fundamental learning processes and basic errors repeated; a body of insight and knowledge did not build up so much as factional sets of opinions and animosities based on levels of expertise that were seldom bridged.

*Summer '68* is a very loose compilation of events centering around the anti-war movement and the Chicago Convention. The film conveys little sense of stylistic unity—unlike *Chicago '68*, a student film (UCLA) about the same events where intercutting and a music track gave a sense of wholeness to the film. Perhaps this was intended as a comment on the Movement's own confusion although the filmmakers were experienced enough to know the result would confuse the viewer more than convey confusion. Also, the film suggests that after Chicago the Movement changed, discovering the great importance of local organizing, but this part has no more continuity or direction than the earlier sequences. Most likely, the film's shape was determined by the footage on hand and the commentary used to bridge the gaps and give some semblance of cohesion.

The film is virtually a family album for Movement groups that figure in other Newsreel films, and Newsreel members are frequently on camera as well: leaders from the Boston Draft Resistance, *Up Against the Wall*, *Motherfuckers*
(the stars of Garbage), Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden, Dave Dellinger (who lent his name to early Newsreel fundraising)\textsuperscript{57} Robert Kramer, Jeff Shero of the Rat and others including Newsreel members who helped break up Channel 13's underground press discussion, etc. Newsreel concludes that Chicago failed to raise the "real issues," that mass action had limited value and that anti-war protest lacked the kind of leverage a radical movement ultimately required. A section of black leader breaks the film in half, somewhat like Chris Marker's Le Joli Mai, and then the post-Chicago section begins with GI organizing at Fort Hood, Texas. The methods and strategies of GI organizing are not dealt with to any great extent and the persistent antagonism of GI's to "outside" organizers is overlooked in the general excitement of Movement spokesmen and followers. The implications of organizing among individuals who do not, or, in any event, cannot openly share life-style political values do not seem apparent to the filmmakers. The film does record a major shift in Left thinking, but without analyzing it. It also conveys the impression that those who had been at Chicago and into anti-war, anti-draft work had now decided on, and therefore legitimizod, local organizing. An entire dialectic of struggle between groups like the Black Panthers or the Revolutionary Union (RU) and SDS or draft resistance groups or Progressive Labor (PL) is overlooked, perhaps in an attempt to create greater clarity and continuity. The result, however, is to distort the historical process beyond
recognition, giving prominence to prevailing ideas without discovering why they prevail.

Amerika, if anything, is even less coherent. Like La Hora de Los Hornos, it attempts to survey the state of a nation, but there the resemblance stops. Solanas applies rigorous organizing principles and a firm view of the class struggle's manifestations in cultural, economic and political terms. Amerika prefers to expose injustices, absurdities and brutalities within ruling class practices and thereby to condemn them. The moral rage that lies beneath the controlled analysis of La Hora de Los Hornos erupts all over Amerika and blankets the scientific mind with Pharisaic judgments.

We witness a wide array of scenes and events in Amerika from hip drug users to Bobby Seale, from a crassly enacted monologue on the corporate businessman (done by the lead actor in Ice) to interviews with anti-war GI's who served in Vietnam, from riots in Ecuador to the Chicago convention. The events lack any organizing principle, even so basic as the black leader division mark in Summer '68. A Newsreel member who used the film at various showings said, "When I've screened it people have related to different parts of it--drugs in Astoria, armed struggle, etc. But the film doesn't make the connections. People don't acquire a political methodology from it." Instead of a sense of process the film conveys a sense of timeless abstraction. For the quality most obviously lacking is a sense of
dialogue. The filmmakers, unlike Solanas, have not grappled with the inner meanings of events. They have not discovered the essential relatedness of events that gives them historical perspective. Instead they have substituted a monologue through which, as in Isle of Youth, they impose their meanings onto events. Hence historical relationships are no longer essential and riots from around the world can but cut together in praise of the abstract concept of rebellion, or revolution. Events and people from across the country can be mixed together because their unique situations and the interrelation of these situations is less important than the general concept of rebelliousness or, on the other side, of inhumanity. The lack of dialogue with concrete events becomes the external manifestation of the absence of dialectical reasoning. Marxism, or New Left radicalism, which in '68 was still ill-defined, becomes an a priori category for arranging and judging events according to their fit. The material world becomes idealized; scientific methods become moral dogma and Marx becomes the high priest of a religious cult. The urge to preserve the sanctity of the creative individual and the right to subjective interpretation leads, ironically as Chairman Mao has noted, "[to] empty, dry dogmatic formulas [that] do indeed destroy the creative mood; not only that, they first destroy Marxism. Dogmatic Marxism is not Marxism, it is anti-Marxism." 59 It was an irony that lingered on with Newsreel even after it was recognized but before there were means of dealing with it.
CHAPTER FOUR

NEW YORK NEWSREEL: THE SEARCH FOR A

STRUCTURE--PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

New York Newsreel's initial expectations and early accomplishments never solidified into an homogenous body of dogma. Throughout Newsreel's history various tensions and active struggles have propelled the group onward, sometimes despite itself, frequently no more rapidly than elsewhere in the Movement and often more slowly. During the latter part of '68 and most of '69, Newsreel, on the surface, underwent relatively minor adjustments. Below the surface, however, tensions and contradictions were mounting that finally forced major changes in late '69, early '70. Hence the modifications in Newsreel's structure, "line," and films are less significant than their inability to contain the increasingly keen political awareness of its most advanced members.

The summer of '69 saw the culmination of ultra-left rhetoric in the creation of the Weathermen. Talk, threats and deeds of violence, terrorism and confrontation dominated much of the Movement's thinking. Summer '68 and Amerika, both in their abrupt, wrenching style and in their portrayal
of rebellions, reflected the left's preoccupation with making itself felt. Robert Kramer asserted in an interview, "Now we move according to our own priorities, and we are justified in this by objective conditions. Five years ago, for example, such a decision would have been suicidal. Our movement was only emerging--few people knew anything about it--few people were involved. But now, all our audiences know the essence of what we're talking about."\textsuperscript{1}

The Left believed it had a definable body of support and a recognizable position. "Reasonable" dialogue was no longer required. Put everyone up against the wall and sort them out. Through confrontation we achieve polarization and through polarization, action. Action was the alpha and the omega and whatever could incite action was desirable. If films could operate as grenades or can openers then their role and purpose was clear. This transitional period in New York Newsreel became the period of the acid test for this theory.

Confrontation theory operated largely as a "negation of the negation." Its premises were anti-capitalistic and anti-imperialistic. These premises generated corollaries within a filmmaking group such as anti-aestheticism, anti-criticism and anti-intellectualism since, in a polarizing process, these categories were seen as tools of the ruling class. In negating that class's ideology anything they touched, used or exploited was thought contaminated and even now there are lingering, hard to extirpate, traces of this
Manichean viewpoint.

Confrontation theory also relied heavily on moralistic assumptions. There is a right and a wrong, a good and a bad, and those in the wrong should feel guilt for their errors. The attempt is made to divide the world into two, contending camps of darkness and light. The precedents and categories proceed Marx by several millennia and, in fact, have far less to do with materialist methodology than with dogmatic theology (in the non-pejorative sense of codifying an all-encompassing, prescriptive worldview). Exactly why these categories and this theory should take hold at this time, in this manner, is a study of its own, one that might fruitfully continue the early work of Wilhelm Reich and apply the insights of Marcuse to the present more than the future. In any event, Newsreel films assume a Manichean universe when they regard the capitalist or imperialist as a criminal or sinner. (For Columbia to build a gym in a public park demonstrates the moral and social guilt of the board members as much as a manifestation of economic relationships that can be scientifically studied.) Confrontation theory plays on the feelings of guilt that an observer might feel if he silently sanctions exploitation. It tries to put him against the wall and demands to know which side he's on. As such it reflects much of the radicalizing process for Movement people from the white, middle-class who opted for new alternatives and a more humane future.

Confrontation, though, generally pushes those who do
not associate guilt as much as opportunity, sin as much as happiness, with capitalism to the opposite pole. Those who have not already slipped beyond the web of false consciousness to glimpse its working from above become all the more enmeshed. Confrontation appears a threat, risking everything for no clear goal while for the radical, false consciousness seems a smokescreen, hiding reality with ludicrous fantasies. The radical assumption becomes that militant rhetoric and rational description will shatter false consciousness like so much glass facade. False consciousness can be negated virtually by willing it negated, and people mobilized by goading them to act.

Testing these concepts in the heat of battle became a necessity that no amount of analysis or refutation could allay. Advancing to a positive program of any description had to wait until the furor of negation (even of programs that later became indispensable--tenets of Marxism for example) began to abate and the Movement could take stock of where its apocalyptic visions had led.

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Newsreel's general adherence to a confrontational line created a sharper and sharper line of demarcation between it and the mass media. The concept of serving as an alternative moved from a differing notion of content (potentially usable by "advanced" theaters or distributors) to a radically different notion of format itself. An attitude developed that remained in force until the recent
release of *The Woman's Film*: "We don't want to show our film in commercial cinemas or on T.V. where they risk being directed by the system of consumerism and would not create the kind of political effect we seek."² Reaching people who were being deceived by the mass media everyday was no longer an unqualified priority. The means by which they were reached, even if it reduced their number enormously, became the first consideration.

This clarification of an initial ambivalence about how films would be distributed was part of Newsreel's continuing effort to define itself. As the first year of operation went on, some members began to question Newsreel's political role.³ Newsreel attracted a fairly wide-range of Movement-oriented people, partly because there were few "post-graduate" or self-sustaining political organizations an individual could join. As a consequence many felt more strongly committed to the Movement than to Newsreel and to the idea of promoting revolutionary change more than developing a sophisticated understanding of film or propaganda.⁴ And as conflicts arose some would move out in order to work at other tasks within the Movement.⁵ Those who remained constantly had to redefine Newsreel's political relationship to the rest of the Movement.

At first this was done in terms of film(ing) technique where Newsreel, too, was behind the barricade and out in the street. The individual's body, "with or without a camera" was his manifestation of commitment and so he put
his body "on the line." The product of his commitment, the film, was then passed on to organizers waiting to put it to use.

Gradually inadequacies began to appear in this approach. Shooting film as though recording a battle had an adventurist aura about it that impeded thoughtful analysis, but this was not the predominant consideration at first. More pressing was the growing feeling that Newsreel should channel its active commitment into distribution rather than filming. In New York, unlike Los Angeles, this never meant abandoning film production altogether, but it did mean a serious reconsideration of the organizer theory.

Newsreel distributed their own films and those they obtained from abroad from the very start, but it was initially a fairly orthodox operation (under David Stone). Some members, particularly Norman Frucht, began to wonder if Newsreel should not be more active. They thought Newsreel members should become organizers themselves, go out with the films and learn how "to turn people on." Partially this was an extension of confrontation theory to the actual projection of the film and partially a recognition that, in many cases, there simply were not skilled organizers "out there" waiting for the films. (In Los Angeles there were skilled organizers but almost invariably from groups whose analysis L.A. Newsreel disagreed with. This made organizing around screenings a defensive action as much as an offensive one while in New York it was primarily
the latter.\(^8\) In many ways this development may be one of the most significant in Newsreel's history. Although post-screening discussion is not done to any large extent by the Newsreel offices now, the renting groups are often staffed with skilled organizers and the films frequently fit into a broad program of political education thereby preserving and, in fact, improving the basic principle which Newsreel initiated.\(^9\)

Groups renting films are not only inclined to be in closer contact with their audience and able to sustain more prolonged study, they are also less likely to exhibit a confrontation edge during discussions as Newsreel itself was often prone to do.\(^10\) Despite the policy's alteration with time, it served to bring Newsreel face to face with its audience; it directed confrontational energy away from the filming process, helping prepare for more detached analysis and linking Newsreel to the more specific problems of persuading and organizing via film propaganda. Finally it provided the ice-breaking precedent that demonstrated to somewhat sceptical activists that films could be discussed and not simply projected.

How much this policy helped moderate Newsreel's moral fervor and directed it to the problems of developing propaganda that their own audience-discussions indicated was effective, is impossible to measure. To the degree that organizing tactics were not studied systematically it would
seem that this policy had less direct internal impact than it might have. Its oblique impact, as a precipitating factor in Newsreel's internal, political development may actually have been greater. Present and former members, however, all agree that the policy's impact was highly visible and very important to them.¹¹

One of the reasons post-screening discussions and a more active form of distribution did not result in immediate change inside Newsreel was that the policy was considered a half-way house. From the start of the debate on distribution and organizing there were two camps:

... those who felt Newsreel should pursue propaganda work, media work, and those who felt that wasn't as important as primary organizing. But the people arguing for primary organizing were never really satisfied with [discussions after screenings], because that's a bad compromise. That's hit and run organizing and nobody was arguing for that. Those discussions that were held after screenings were the most useful things Newsreel did, but the people talking about primary organizing were thinking about staying with a constituency, living with those people and not having a separate identity.¹²

This issue came to a head later and those advocating primary organizing were to leave the group.¹³ Ironically, this included most of the nucleus of political filmmakers who discovered they could neither make films as they previously had within the Newsreel context nor engage in rigorous organizing activity.

Recognizing the political ramifications of distribution as an organizing tool gave Newsreel a perspective no other distributor, commercial or non-commercial, shared. Newsreel sought out and encouraged the audience it wanted to
reach with flexible rates that varied from nothing to listed catalogue prices (about $1/minute). This inevitably led to greater concern with the question of "for whom," a question that remained unresolved until much later and is perhaps still not entirely resolved. As one Newsreel member remarked, "My thing about Godard is who sees his films?"\textsuperscript{14} Another former member commented that Joris Iven's film on Laos, The People and Their Guns, sat on the shelf for two years because he had no distribution outlet and because of economic obligations he'd incurred.\textsuperscript{15} The position of both these artists was one which Newsreel was determined to avoid by guaranteeing that the films got seen by the people for whom they were intended. Godard was able to distinguish between making political film and making film politically,\textsuperscript{16} but Newsreel went even further and insisted on using film politically, much in the spirit, if not the practice, of the Film and Photo League's organizing program.

This focus has given Newsreel films the status of "out-law art," to use Irwin Silber's phrase.\textsuperscript{17} Newsreel has rejected the productive apparatus of the ruling class almost \textit{a priori}, contrary to work patterns found among Film and Photo League members. Newsreel has also rejected its distributive apparatus, and this is most crucial. (Recent "compromises" particularly around The Woman's Film are deliberately used to raise funds or stimulate interest that is then channeled back into the autonomous Newsreel distribution network. Newsreel cannot be co-opted as long as its
own distribution network remains the principal one.) As Silber ably points out, "The revolutionary quality in a work of art is not a permanent intrinsic quality ... embedded into the very form and/or content of the work forever. Whether or not a work of art is revolutionary depends completely on the time, place, and circumstances of its dynamic interaction with an audience." 18

In film there have been frequent discussions about bourgeois style, form and even iconography. Newsreel's early enthusiasm for its "battle footage" appearance assumed a simple correspondence of form and revolutionary action. But others, including Mao, have stressed that a "general world outlook [cannot] be equated with a method of artistic creation and criticism." 19 The revolutionary impact of Salt of the Earth screened at Lincoln Center for a black-tie audience is far different from its impact at a woman's lib meeting. And its impact today may be radically different from its impact five years from now. In film propaganda the context in which a screening occurs is of vital importance. The dream palace is not an antiquated metaphor and even in film schools, the attempt to discuss a film is often resisted as an intrusion on a personal experience. Film screenings are social events but the viewers are essentially isolated from one another during the show. Without discussion or other "space" for reflection and response, even the most radical film can give only the "illusion of the commitment to analyze." (Solanas, by incorporating space for
discussion into the actual structure of *La Hora de Los Hornos*, goes Newsreel one better.) By insisting that we consider the film within a larger context than its internal aesthetics or its extractable "message," by demanding that it serve as the catalyst for debate and heightened awareness, Newsreel has extended its concern beyond the inherent properties and effects of their film medium to the contextual elements that constitute each historical moment in which their propaganda is made manifest. The distinction is a crucial one and is one of the prime reasons why Newsreel remains a political organization whose importance has often exceeded the intrinsic quality of its work.

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The adoption of post-screening discussions as an organizing tool did not have as great an effect on Newsreel's orientation as it might, largely because there were still no unified Newsreel politics: "there's no revolutionary party yet, only fledgling forms of various undergrounds. No coherent strategy, no discipline to stay hewed to, so we make our politics [our films] on the hoof; our discussions often threaten to become interminable." 20 New York Newsreel, in fact, steered deliberately clear of sectarianism or of any "correct line" at all. The screening context received no distinctive shape but became, like the films, the product of individual initiative and thought. 21 The forms of ultra-leftism--ultra-democracy, total individual freedom and total eclecticism of policy--were still predominant and the
advocates of greater discipline and better defined politics did not yet meet with a receptive response.

This unfettered, empirical/pragmatic approach of taking events as they come and struggling to mobilize people around them (rather than simply educate) remained strong through much of '69. Not until the fall of that year did major reorganization occur (although lesser changes took place in the spring—discussed below) and just prior to that, a lengthy article entitled "Towards a Redefinition of Propaganda" appeared in the _Leviathan_. Credited to Newsreel it was written by Robert Kramer and summarized the open-ended politics that much of the original nucleus favored. The article also appeared a few months after the first screenings of _Ice_ and was an indirect attempt to deal with some of the criticism that was quickly heaped upon the film.

In retrospect the _Leviathan_ article represents a minority position. A few months after it was written most of the original nucleus had drifted away into other forms of political work. At the time, however, it reflected the, at least tacit, consensus of New York Newsreel and represented one of the poles in the deep struggles that took place in late '69 and early '70. The article's position was not shared by other Newsreel offices however. S.F. Newsreel wrote a similar article of their own that constituted a rebuttal (discussed later) and Los Angeles Newsreel had made criticism that, in fact, helped precipitate the article's
The article stresses over and over the need for unbiased attention to concrete events and real conditions, that the situation in the United States is "absolutely unique," that effective propaganda must deal with "how people are affected by a film" and give careful attention to institutions ("school, media, army, etc."), ruling class ideology and "its co-optive strategy." Because the essential requirement that propaganda not simply repeat things "[people] have already heard and explicitly rejected" Newsreel considers arguments like "the working-class is the agency of revolutionary change in the U.S.A." as an "unsubstantiated abstraction." For Newsreel this type of analysis becomes part of an a priori, ahistorical idealization (Marxism-Leninism) unrelated to the concrete needs of the immediate moment. But it is "the only available totalist alternative" to capitalism and Newsreel lives uneasily with it while trying to formulate "a new theory of revolutionary change." Most important, most Marxist arguments about vanguards or agents of revolutionary change are based on different conditions apparently not applicable to the unique U.S. situation. Hence they are "not subject to verification" (nor have they ever been, except after the fact). The Marxist approach becomes reduced to a "correct line" of narrow dogma which Newsreel emphatically rejects in order to take up a flexible position "between empiricism and
dogmatism.\textsuperscript{26}

The article shows marked traces of new working-class theory and empirical influence. The former leads to an equation of "real needs" with post-scarcity solutions rather than with the means of achieving these solutions and the rigorous analysis of the present contradictions within capitalism (U.S. imperialism versus Third World liberation struggles is never mentioned, for example). The article cites as an example of what it considers desirable that a film on "WORK" should indicate the possibility for the elimination of alienated labor by a different relation to the means of production. Neither the nature of that relation (already specified by Marx and implemented by Lenin, Stalin and Mao) nor the means of achieving it (the forms, the strategies, the alliances and tactics) are mentioned. We leap (in another example about housing as well) from "real conditions" to "real possibilities" with no clear indication of who will be first to make the leap or how they'll do it. New York Newsreel seems to stand not between empiricism and dogmatism but between empiricism and utopianism with little idea of how to mediate between the two (outside of knowing they do not want to do it through the materialist dialectic of class struggle).

Empiricism, however, seemed to be the pole that attracted Newsreel most strongly. By dismissing Marxism on the grounds that the present is always unique and the
"correct line" an attempt to create self-verifying, idealist categories, Newsreel moved toward a positivist position that rejects all theory, revolutionary or otherwise, as idealist and sectarian. Karl Mannheim aptly describes positivism's tendency to avoid fundamental issues:

The world becomes divided into two mutually exclusive areas—empirical science and philosophy. The first is for particular and immediate questions. For problems of the "whole," "loftier" philosophical speculation is resorted to. Philosophy becomes like a constitutional monarch: it reigns but does not govern. Day to day decisions are made on the basis of verified, concrete data such that empirical investigation goes on as smoothly as ever while a veritable war is waged about the fundamental concepts and problems of the science."

Ironically this approach is the basis for bureaucracy, behavioralism, statistical social sciences and the professionalism of experts and think-tankers; it is thoroughly denounced by Marcuse, even as he discusses new working-class theory as well as by almost every other revolutionary. Yet it appears here at the crux of Newsreel's political position.

Newsreel, however, did not move toward a scientific empiricism with social science-like techniques. In fact, empiricism may have been to a large degree a rationale for analytical weakness and a justification for subjectivism. It certainly offers the opportunity for positive feedback from concrete but not necessarily representative factors like New York City or the most militant of Movement rhetoric. Empiricism seemed to operate in a peculiar alliance with subjectivism, insisting on an "actual connection with
people's real conditions and real oppressions," and yet allowing these conditions and oppressions to be defined by those militant forces that exerted the greatest influence rather than by scientific study. Empiricism became a defense against the effort to develop a "line" within Newsreel ("correct" can only have a temporal reference and even then only approximate), a justification for presenting empirically demonstrable "real conditions" within the Movement itself subjectively (Ice) and an uneasy refutation of Marxism that attempted to do to Marx what he had done to Hegel.

The argument is not without merit, however, especially in insisting on flexibility within the propaganda itself and the primacy of developing revolutionary unity instead of trotting out dogma that's already run the course and never reached the finish line. (The article cites C.P. U.S.A. propaganda of the 30s and 40s as examples of what not to do, but with no specific reference. It is unlikely that they knew of the Film and Photo League's work, for example.) Had Newsreel distinguished between Marxist theory and methodology and its bastardized imitations that substitute rigidity for flexibility, dogma for point of view, the refutation that had to be subsequently overcome need never have been made. As it was, Newsreel's position paper reflected much New Left thinking that was attempting to both assimilate new working-class theory and pose alternatives to the outmoded categories of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric.
By the end of 1966, many felt a need to define the group's political stand more clearly. People came to Newsreel at all different levels. The Movement itself tossed and turned among various alternatives. "We were all radicals, but if you asked, 'Who's going to make the revolution,' you'd get a different answer from everybody." Newsreel therefore decided to take a collective look at itself, the country and the Movement and determine from that political analysis what films needed to be made.

In early spring, 1969 Newsreel embarked on an extended analysis of objective conditions. There were "very heavy 10-12 hours sessions for four or five weeks which were both ruthless and a product of our own privilege. If any of us had to work . . ." The discussions helped polarize the anti-correct line advocates and the advocates of greater discipline, but no decisive confrontation occurred. Those who believed Newsreel members could and should "do their own thing," working on broad, common goals and being everybody's friend did not seem at complete odds with those arguing for better organization with more equal opportunities (a more serious effort at providing skill-teaching workshops for members, for example) and for a representative body to give overall direction and make basic decisions. The fundamental contradictions had not yet crystallized in the minds of either side and one of the most critical issues, the woman's
question, had not yet come in decisive play even though women like Lynn Phillips who edited *Columbia Revolt* only got work by struggling against men to learn skills and to use them.

Nonetheless, there were tangible results and Newsreel entered what might be called its "bourgeois-democratic" phase. The ultrademocracy that proved incapable of creating genuine equality was replaced by a representative-parliamentary system that increased the measure of equality while still allowing room for old attitudes and former positions of power to be largely continued. The "proletariat" of Newsreel, the unskilled, non-white, non-middle-class, non-male members, or those with several of these attributes, still had a backseat role and still lacked the formal means of maintaining a more balanced position. One member recalled, "Who made films? The people who knew how to make films; people who had access to money, skills and all that. There was little emphasis on training new people to get into it. It was very difficult to get initiated into the filmmaking." The changes were, however, for the better and if they proved ultimately unworkable, they were nonetheless a progressive and perhaps necessary step.

Newsreel's political line remained ambiguous (the *Leviathan* article appeared more than six months after the structure changed) but the mechanics of decision and filmmaking became more systematic. Newsreel adopted a "cadre-like structure based around interests or constituencies such
as high schools, women, the Third World, college, the working-class, the army, etc.\textsuperscript{31} These cadre soon reduced themselves to three: the Third World, high school and working class.\textsuperscript{32} In addition, an "operations committee" drawn on a revolving basis from the members of the different work-groups (the word cadre was dropped, "after we found out what it meant") was responsible for most overall decisions.\textsuperscript{33} Other committees were set up for tasks like distribution.

The work groups had only loosely co-ordinated policies and each group undertook projects largely on their own initiative. They also carried out political education study groups internally and tried to relate to their constituency in a total way--providing screenings, discussion, and distributing relevant literature.\textsuperscript{34} This brought Newsreel closer to primary organizing than a random series of screening-discussions, but the emphasis was still on film production. The groups, though, even among the three that became dominant, varied considerably in achievement. The working-class group had numerous internal problems as well as problems of overlap with other groups, especially the Third World group. The high school work group held together but without any firm sense of direction. A film was begun but its prime maker finally left Newsreel and completed it on his own.\textsuperscript{35} Newsreel did not respond very favorably to the completed film.\textsuperscript{36} The Third World work group was the strongest and pushed hardest for political discussion within the overall group, but almost everyone felt that the
divisions were somewhat artificial and that the gains in organization lagged behind the inadequacies in flexibility and co-ordination. The work groups remained in existence through most of 1969 even though most members were never fully satisfied with them and were constantly asking if there might not be a better way. For some this restructuring represented a difficult adjustment. A certain element of fun seemed lost as political considerations took on greater importance and the tremendous excitement of early newsreels began to wear off with repetition. "The rawness no longer awed everybody. We'd not only seen Vietnam and riot footage, we'd become inundated by it." This form of response, though, was an intense form of the "do your own thing," "we're all freaks and ought to have fun" attitude that underlay some of the anti-correct line arguments. It was a minority position and those who felt straitjacketed by the somewhat tighter structure and discipline or who felt their commitment was to some other facet of the Movement drifted away. There was no major turnover in membership, however, and the work-group structure was a far less decisive change for New York Newsreel than the next set of changes in 1970.

Films

Most of the films made in 1969 continued to reflect attitudes prevalent in 1968. Since the nucleus of filmmakers were a prime force in shaping these attitudes while
the momentum for changes resulted from the interaction of their fairly articulate position with a still inchoate set of alternatives, this continuation should not be surprising. It represents not so much stagnation as a lag between shifting forms and changing consciousness and the effective representation of that progression.

The film for which careful historical placement into this context is most crucial is Ice. The film, directed by Robert Kramer, is not a full-fledged Newsreel both in that its form is feature-length fiction and that Newsreel has refused to distribute it. Nonetheless it was shot in early '69 by Kramer with the active support and participation of other Newsreel members whose decision against distribution only occurred after it was completed. While Ice is less instructive than Newsreel's usual documentary format in terms of the group's use of film, especially since it bears the clear stamp of a single personality, it constitutes an important attempt to realize on film the assumptions, obstacles and goals of Newsreel and the Movement at large.

Peter Watkins is quoted in Film Society Review as writing that his films are not reviewed at all. Instead British reviewers test "[the films] compliance to a series of totally arbitrary rulings as to how that particular 'reviewer' feels that I should have made the film. In other words, the way in which he or she would have made the film." To a remarkable extent Kramer's film has suffered the same fate, especially among leftist critics. The very
same page of Film Society Review, for example, quotes Yves de Laurot, a reportedly radical film theorist, to the effect that Ice "amounts to a direction and director-less non-film" a conclusion presumably evoking clearly defined ideal types for the cinema since de Laurot offers no further substantiation for his claim. James Roy MacBean tells us that Ice "errs in omission. . . for if there is anything the revolutionary movement in America needs in order to effect meaningful change, it's Marxian analysis of the economic foundations and ideological superstructure of American capitalism. Joan Mellen, writing in Cinéaste, also indirectly instructs Kramer on how he ought to have made the film. She agrees with MacBean that the characters border on the psychotic, and that Kramer "does not allow his revolutionaries to perceive the importance of working toward the formation of a mass organization." While these preferences for different kinds of film treatment are well-articulated fragments of a comprehensive revolutionary perspective, their appropriateness to a discussion of Ice is more a function of their author's radical awareness than of their understanding of the film itself. Commentators insist on judging Ice according to their present understanding of what a revolution in America should be like, not in terms of understanding whether that was Kramer's preoccupation as well nor in terms of the historical stage at which he made the film since the conceptions of what a revolution would be like were quite different then than now in many people's
mind.

Were we to insist that John Ford's *Grapes of Wrath* show the need for a militant labor organization, it might seem a more extraneous demand than when the same sorts of judgments are leveled at *Ice*. Indeed we would be far more inclined to praise Ford rather than Kramer it seems, in the terms in which Engels lauded Balzac for giving us "a most wonderfully realistic history of French society." While the analytical methodology that works to reveal the secrets of the past is clearly a function of our own era, our understanding of an event or artifact must be in terms of its historical period. While Kramer fails as completely as Ford or Balzac to embody a Marxist vision of revolutionary change, he does succeed, quite brilliantly at times, in portraying the radical vision of the American, white, middle-class anarchist left of 1968.

Had Kramer created a Western or other period piece, or clearly set his film in the year 1968, we would probably be much more alert to the need to place it within its own historical context. By setting *Ice* in the near future, a time that could almost be the day after tomorrow, Kramer encourages the assumption that his characters are an extrapolation of the revolutionaries of today and their tactics a direct challenge to the tactical needs of today rather than a reflection of those of yesterday. This is not the "fault" of Kramer anymore than the similar phenomenon in science-fiction films is the fault of their makers; it, like many
other facets of Ice, simply demands great care on our part to be sure the "messages" are read correctly.

Another obstacle to understanding Ice is the almost unanimous assumption that it is about revolution when it deals far more directly with propaganda, communication and changing states of consciousness. In essence, the film is about the carrying out of an urban guerrilla offensive in order to make a show of strength and muster support. Most of the principal characters are part of a Newsreel-like propaganda unit; their relationships and work are explored at length, in cinéma-vérité fashion. Intercut are occasional, didactic sequences dealing primarily with the concept of false consciousness and linking this concept to the work of the radicals. By the film's end several die; others are wounded or crippled, and the offensive is of dubious success. The "spring offensive" in the film is not an act designed to gain power but to show strength; the characters, and film, are less concerned with the actual mechanics of the ultimate class struggle than preparing people for it. The film attempts to break the ice that freezes people's minds into rigid categories of perception, the ice that rigidifies into false consciousness on the part of revolutionaries as well as apolitical citizens. The absence of workers, blacks, Third World people, etc., is not so much an indication of their unimportance as the effort to concentrate on the work of a Newsreel-like propaganda unit. The film's portrayal of this arena of struggle is not
necessarily any more correct than its supposed portrayal of what revolution will be like, but before we can judge the film we have to understand it.

Ice expresses many of the assumptions of new working-class theory, confrontation theory, the counter-culture and anti-correct line propaganda theory. The film meanders through relationships and events in a non-causal, non-expository manner where the regular "rules" of fictional narration are disregarded. We observe the planning and enactment of a propaganda offensive where the characters seem to have little more data about events or others than the fragments that we see. The offensive ends; casualties are counted, but nothing definite seems to change. Perhaps some ice has melted but even that is not for sure. For Kramer, the absence of proper introductions for characters, the lack of plot development, and abstinence from many of the conventions of character portrayal are part of an effort to create a fiction that does not simplify reality but instead captures its complexity. This approach follows from an anti-correct line approach to propaganda and also underlies Amerika and Summer '68 where an array of events are not given an underlying unity. Kramer's hope is that this approach will "open up" the viewer's consciousness instead of closing it down with an externally imposed ideology. Ironically, his concern for capturing complexity without analysis is what tends to close down his film for most viewers.
Attempting to capture the complexity of reality can easily lead to confusion. Ice is not ultimately confusing but it is very demanding of the viewer in much the way Dreyer or Bresson is, and a large part of these demands derive from Kramer's empiricism. MacBean is right in pointing to Kramer's non-dialectical presentation of characters, but it is not because they reveal themselves to us in a one-dimensional context. Their action's meaning is restricted to the situations we observe; the connecting lattice-work that fictional conventions usually provide is absent. Hence the characters do not seem to contain or partake of struggle. There is a stasis to their nature that originates in a stress on empirical observation over dialectical analysis.

This stasis, to which the title may refer, has its most concrete objectification for Kramer in false consciousness which locks out underlying dynamics from our awareness. This term is a key to much of the film's intent for Kramer's empirical eye provides a ruthlessly honest portrait of false consciousness within the Movement as well as without. Kramer himself acknowledges one flaw to be the lack of an indication of how this will be overcome, especially in regards to women.45 (The woman's question had not yet arisen inside Newsreel in 1968 and the tools for dealing with it had not yet been adopted--criticism and self-criticism.) Nonetheless, by structuring the film so that we as viewers are challenged to construct a meaningful pattern of our own out of the disconnected data presented, Kramer
indicates an avenue by which art, or propaganda, can provide an exercise book in which perceptual experience leads to a critical analysis of consciousness, first the character's, then, hopefully, our own. Whether that consciousness is "false" or not is for us to decide and the act of decision is what makes the dichotomy of true/false a meaningful category. That the method fails for many may not be simply a question of misunderstanding the film, however. The empirical underpinning to the whole enterprise never allows the decision we arrive at to move beyond subjectivism. There is no linkage to historical, material relationships as a basis of decision and the quality of falseness becomes a matter of subjective impression.

Another source of difficulty with the method is that false consciousness may not be an effective category for propaganda work. In some ways it is like a facile imitation of vulgarized psychiatry where naming the problem presumably cures it. The section of the film explicitly labeled "false consciousness" presents several liberal and conservative arguments, but there is no objective, scientific basis for comparison with what remains presumably true consciousness. We may agree with Kramer's assessment; we may at least be provoked to rethink our position; but the film provides little basis for changing our views other than emotional sentiments. This was the course of change for many Movement people, however, and Kramer relates to this empirically observed process rather than exploring others. He identifies
examples of false consciousness that existed in 1968 (and continue to exist, many of them) and assumes that identification will provoke change.

While the process begins objectively enough, the assumption behind it is basically idealistic and disregards the dynamics of the American belief system, the irrational underpinnings to false consciousness and the inability of reason to extirpate them. Kramer's approach reflects the moralistic puritanism of certain Movement thinking, especially that deriving from white, middle-class rebellion. Propaganda, by confronting people with the truth, polarizes and converts, or alienates, them. The enemy becomes defined and the hierarchy of capitalist contradictions are reduced to one final Manichean split between the children of light and the children of darkness. Then the apocalyptic revolution can begin.

Ice is thus Kramer's latest (perhaps final?) attempt to shape a grenade that will explode in people's faces. Ice seeks to shatter the facade of false consciousness through the form it employs far more than through its "revolutionary" (or counter-revolutionary) content. Kramer himself states that Ice "deals with just those aspects of things about people that are hardest to root out."

Kramer strives to create an artistically rendered reality that refutes more conventional "realism" and thus makes it false--false to reality and drawn by a false form of consciousness. Yet his artistic achievement lacks a correlation in the
consciousness of his characters. His empiricism leads to a definition of radicals as those who believe in the concept of false consciousness. It demands the viewer deal with the characters' perceptions and beliefs rather than they with his. The viewer must come to the film; it will not come to him. Likewise, he must accept the idea that the characters represent--despite their flaws and their own forms of false consciousness--a different, normative reality that renders his false. The nature of those norms, however, is beyond the grasp of empiricism, and hence, Kramer. For these reasons Ice may not bring these norms any closer for the viewer who does not share the sensibilities of the lifestyle revolutionaries that Kramer presents. For those who do share at least Kramer's sentiments, his aesthetic form may lead to a greater awareness of the contradictions within their own position. As a strategy of propaganda, however, among the unconvinced, among those with the thickest accretions of false consciousness, Kramer's method fails to open up viable alternatives.

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Ice was conceived in 1968, shot in January, 1969 and first shown in summer, 1969. Robert Machover, who may be the Coutard of the American underground, as one Newsreel member remarked after seeing the superb use of natural light in Ice which he shot, made his own "personal" film around the same time, In Passing. Irwon Silber summarized it as a "cinematic disaster despite a certain plausibility in its
portrait of a terrorist group that puts a liberal professor, claiming to be their ally, up against the wall by hiding out with him and his girl friend. Newsreel does not distribute it. Kramer, subsequently embarked on a visit to North Vietnam for a month in summer, '69 where he, Norman Fruchter and John Douglas shot the footage that was to become People's War. People's War, Army, and Oil Strike and San Francisco State Strike from San Francisco Newsreel were all released in the fall of 1969, about the same time as the Leviathan article appeared and represent some of Newsreel's best efforts.

People's War, like Threatening Skies, depicts the people of North Vietnam in their daily struggle against U.S. imperialism. Having traced Newsreel's development this far, and realizing the role Robert Kramer played in it and in this film, it may not be surprising to note that People's War actually has less analysis of the political-economic conditions than its British predecessor of some two or three years. The anti-correct line, empirical point of view that dominates Ice here receives its fullest documentary realization. Like Ice, People's War contains certain approximations of cinéma-vérité in its unstaged look, its attempt to record a reality rather than impose an interpretation through form, and in its effort to discover meaning and value in the daily acts of people who, like cinéma-vérité subjects, may know "the whole world's watching" and respond with standards for acquitting themselves that they consider
normative far more than exemplary.

Cinéma-vérité's principles are also rooted in empiricism and run strongly counter to Rotha and Grierson's arguments for documentaries that will "give the citizen his bearings." Cinéma-vérité leaves the citizen to find his own way, to determine his own meaning and the way to meaning usually runs back through the collective. The standards by which we size up the cinéma-vérité hero or assess a situation are strongly colored by the myths and the beliefs, the dominant ideology, of our society. As Steve Mamber in his study of the Drew-Pennebaker-Leacock films points out, the films work best "when the contradiction between the fictional hero myth and reality is exposed, when the real person fails and still has to acquit himself before the camera." It is for this reason that a radical propagandist runs into difficulty when he employs cinema-verite. It is also why the technique can work quite well, as Kramer himself points out in the Leviathan article, in films made in a post-revolutionary society: the people share a revolutionary ideology that can be drawn upon for value and meaning. The most consistent proponent of post-revolutionary cinéma-vérité is perhaps Cuban filmmaker Santiago Alvarez whose films like La Guerra Olvidados, Por Primera Vez, Hanoi 13 and 29 Springtimes reflect the heroic determination of struggling peoples far more than the fundamental issues or principles behind their struggle. That level is assumed to such an extent that the greater part of La Guerra Olvidados
has neither narration nor dialogue; the Laotian liberation forces's work is simply shown with a musical accompaniment. *People's War* has several very moving moments of a similar nature. We see women planting rice, their guns neatly stacked nearby, as we hear a strong, rhythmic poem, by Ho Chi Minh, about rice planting sung in a clear and forceful voice. Other shots of factory work, a theater piece about the war, and concluding shots of villagers hammering and sawing the felled trees from which they make their boats work largely in a cinéma-vérité fashion. They present a situation, simply and directly, and while the sound or music we hear colors the feeling we have for the scene it is only a minimal attempt to color our response to what we see.

Many other shots convey a less solid sense of straightforward documentation and we are forced to deal with Newsreel's presence more explicitly, not in terms of how they might have affected a situation as much as how they may have altered or obscured its meaning. Numerous scenes have sync interviews or voice-over narrations by Vietnamese individuals we meet, but with one exception (where there is a Vietnamese interpreter) the translation is done voice-over by Newsreel members. Not only do the voices sound mismatched by age, but the American patterns of stress and inflection distract us with their incongruity to the image. Though the problem is nowhere near as acute as in *A Film Like Any Other* (Godard), this solution to the foreign
language problem is less successful than subtitles or Vietnamese voices (interpreters) would be. Perhaps the greatest problem with this form of presentation is in terms of analyzing social relationships. Many sequences tell the story of Vietnamese individuals who have discovered deep reserves of strength through their participation in the war effort. Some are women, wives, who have lost husbands and fought two decades of enemies; others are students who nonetheless train to fight as well as think; one was at Dien Bien Phu; still others run the factories, till the fields and run the schools that sustain an effort requiring virtually 100% of a people's lives and spirit. But the testimonials we hear only reveal the surface emotions that cover the deeper sources of their belief. There is a certain amount of abstract appeal to heroism, courage and determined patience, but whether the words and songs succeed in moving us depends heavily on our predisposition to being moved. And the idea of being moved, inspired by daily, year-round acts of bravery seems to be the principal intent of the film. Understanding the societal structure that channels and sustains these acts seems beyond the scope of Newsreel's empirical eye.

A particular example is in a factory sequence where a woman worker describes the modern equipment, its underground location and the sacrificial spirit of the women that allows the vital cloth to be produced at maximum efficiency. The sequence is reminiscent of the Russian film Road to Life
(1931) where street urchins discover a new life when they take up manual crafts in a special "school." In both cases the basic questions of the producer's relationship to his product and to the means of production is overlooked. Instead there is a melodramatic emphasis on the emotional aura surrounding the work. By changing that aura (with music, narration, etc.) the very same images could convey the feel of a sweatshop. People's War consistently presents the emotional results of the war's demands without offering an analysis of how these emotions are sustained. Who controls the factory; who sets wages, prices, hours, fringe benefits; how do the workers relate to the factory and their fellow workers in their leisure time? Are there study groups, clubs, committees; are there problems of status and privileges and how are they resolved? The sort of question that could get beyond how a person feels to show how it is possible for him to feel that way, is not tackled by People's War. For those who are not convinced that Newsreel's sympathies are properly placed, it would be easy to ascribe the people's enthusiasm to false consciousness or outright deception. What is shown looks so positive, so much a model of communal spirit and national allegiance that the suspicious may well wonder how much of North Vietnam Newsreel was actually allowed to see. Likewise, the film fails to get beyond the surface of people and events; there is no standard for assessing values and the viewer can freely choose to call consciousness true or false, purposes misguided or
A final contradiction that surfaces in the attempt to create empirical propaganda is in the kind of revolutionary struggle that is stressed. This is far less a problem in People's War than in other films like Summer '68, Amerika, Columbia Revolt, No Game etc., since Vietnam is deeply embroiled in armed struggle, but here, too, there is a substitution of emotional impact for analytical insight. This approach stresses presenting a series of situations objectively, generally avoiding an analysis of their underlying contradictions and essence, while nonetheless seeking to provide organizing tools for the Movement. To the degree that Newsreel therefore would like events to speak for themselves, it tends to favor those events that are the most militant or most violent, with the greatest melodramatic potential. Newsreel's own adherence to a terroristic, or life-style adventurist brand of politics may be less than the films suggest, but the most effective way of crystalizing the confrontation and of showing the revolution without analyzing it, is by showing its most violent aspects—riots, barricades, police busts, militant acts or actual fighting. In People's War this tendency surfaces in the sequences of anti-aircraft battle where the images of muzzles flashing and barrels recoiling is matched to a moving folk song and concluded by a powerful, anti-imperialist speech. The montage structure is reminiscent of the Why We Fight series and
in both cases the stress is on the emotional.

This emphasis on militancy has another equally important root that, again, may reflect an inadvertent choice on Newsreel's part more than a carefully chosen "correct line." Newsreel has never made aesthetics a topic of open discussion; the general meetings invariably focused on the political or distribution aspects of the films. Partly, aesthetics had a once-removed, abstract ring to it, in much the same way as Marxism seemed idealist, divorced from the unique reality of the American scene. Also, few outside the nucleus had any training in film theory or practical experience in making films but developing a general level of proficiency had less priority than political education. Furthermore, what film training there was centered on skills and technique, not their application to aesthetic patterns and problems.

By divorcing filmmaking from film theory, Newsreel did not abolish aesthetic categories in the films themselves, but instead resolved them at an essentially intuitive level. In particular, the principle of involvement, tension and resolution--the dramatic curve--received haphazard treatment, sometimes occurring in a section of a film rather than in its entirety (Army, for example), sometimes not occurring at all (Wilmington). In general Newsreel appreciated its importance, just as cinéma-vérité's proponents, like Drew Films, do not dismiss the seemingly innate need for drama. In discussing the Drew Films, Steve Member observes that the
feeling was that "mass audience interest would not exist for less intense situations." A typical Drew situation was the crisis, not far removed from Newsreel’s use of the confrontation. Both situations draw upon external myths and values for an implicit pattern of how to best acquit oneself, conjuring up heroic, masculine, aggressive archetypes as models for behavior. Both focus on more labile situations than the Rotha-Grierson assumption that even everyday events contain a dramatic conflict of people and forces. But where as cinéma-verité often questions the individual and/or the myth by recording a disparity between the expectation and the achievement, Newsreel simply endorses the individuals who pursue the myth by romanticizing or at least uncritically portraying them. Hence, the basic, aesthetic category of dramatic conflict becomes realized in what many have termed the obligatory riot footage. What "bourgeois cinema" achieves through plot, character, development, mise en scène, etc., is boiled down to a simple equation of violent footage = emotional climax. The immense problems with the sort of rudimentary aesthetic have never been consciously attacked by Newsreel and have only diminished because violence has been more closely scrutinized politically. The aesthetic clumsiness remains unexamined and hence likely to recur in other, equally distorting forms. Whether an effective form of dramatic structure will emerge, remains unknown since Newsreel production has tapered off since late ’69, early ’70 and no clear pattern has yet emerged.
In order to convey a sense of revolutionary temperament and action, to provide some sort of emotional climax, Newsreel often presented events that in themselves conveyed more emotional charge than informational content. Not all footage of militant actions had these rationales—most of the San Francisco films, for example, carefully specified the class or racial nature of the conflict—but the closer a film came to an empirical yet confrontational, an anti-correct line yet didactic point of view, the more likely it became that these rationales were dominant.

Two other films released in 1969 reflect these trends in varying forms and degrees. Wilmington, for example, is another deeply flawed film, but one of the very few New York Newsreels with a singular point of view. The film explores the nine month long occupation of Wilmington, Delaware by elements of the National Guard and stresses the economic interests (E.I. Dupont) that control virtually the entire state at every level. Unfortunately, the entire discussion of the underlying conflicts is done in voice-over narration by a "third party" voice that summarizes and assesses in the economical but aesthetically disastrous voice-of-God tradition. Hence the riot footage has an abstract quality where no participants are known to us, only their momentary roles. There is no point of contact by which we can "get into" what we see.
The narration does not stress moral qualities of revolutionary valor and dignity as heavily as *Isle of Youth* did, but it works in a similar fashion to fragment our experience of the film. The sound and the image seemed match-ed desultorily; the tone of the speaker seems more judgment-al than scientific; and the tone of the film colder than *Ice*. The conflicts and the participants, the violence and the discussions, the institutions and people seem remote, impersonal, even alien. Perhaps the situation was experienced this way by *Newsreel*; perhaps economics dictated the film's form. In either case, there is little sense of a process unfolding, despite the occupation's nine month duration. The opposition that develops does not have a chance to articulate its position or recount its evolution. The events are summarized and the lessons drawn, but the lessons seem to have greater primacy than the events themselves. By undercutting the real, historical, human inter-play of classes and forces, *Wilmington* drifts away from the empiricism that gives *Columbia Revolt*, *Ice* and *People's War* their strength, as well as away from an analytic methodology that engages historical events. The film moves toward an idealist, dogmatic pole where the essence of an historical event is the lesson that can be detached from it (like the "message" from art), rather than the concrete, dynamic movement of the event itself.

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Army has been a widely used film with G.I. resistance groups across the country. It is a film that skirts many of the extremes that mar other Newsreel films, but it is not a major film. In many ways it represents a solid, substantial, well-made effort that could form a good basis from which to iron out the techniques of creating propaganda, but it does not seem to have played that role. Like so many Newsreel films its lessons seemed to have remained with its principal maker rather than diffusing through the group's collective experience.

The film describes the role of the Army as the military arm of U.S. imperialism abroad and the protector of ruling class control at home. Largely a compilation film using Army training films and selections of other materials (U.S. military intervention abroad, the Army in riot situations at home), Army reports on, or exposes, the general role of the Army. Unlike some Newsreel films there is little sense of process, of a particular, historical event or of a particular group or person's consciousness evolving through time and struggle. Instead a broad cross-section of impressions, reactions and ideas offer a framework for analysis and shape a general impression of a major institution. The film compensates for the dramatic stasis of its reportage with strong, sometimes melodramatic cuts and a rapid, upbeat pace.

The person responsible for Army, Alan Jacobs, spent several months at the Fort Dix coffeehouse where he showed
Newsreel films and other films and discussed the role of the Army with GIs and organizers (several of the GIs, in fact, appear in Amerika, which Jacobs helped to edit). From this information Jacobs wrote the narration which was then spoken by GIs and ex-GIs. And in Columbia Revolt, this method works quite well. The voices are not alien to the situation they describe (unlike, say, the voices in People's War or Wilmington). The voices reflect the consciousness of GIs, not of an omniscient Presence. They are varied, including Black and Third World voices, and are especially well suited for the film's intended audience—"high school kids facing the Army and guys already in." The narration becomes a kind of informal rap between peers rather than an authoritarian (Army-like) lecture taking cognizance of Richard Griffith's observation that Voice-of-God commentary seemed particularly grating to soldiers.

The structure of the film is to show how the Army trains men and how it uses them (Jacobs includes a long section of U.S. Army film on Basic Training and a shorter section on Riot Control which have self-enclosed but effective dramatic lines), while the spoken observations undercut the societal assumptions about these acts. We see nervous soldiers put on gas masks and enter a room filled with poisonous gas while a military voice laughingly reminds them not to lift their masks to rub their eyes. We see GIs learning to bayonet dummies while yelling "Kill!" But we hear speakers tell how they were forced by economic
circumstances to join the Army, how they felt harassed, isolated and brutalized. Instead of a neutral, cinéma-vérité presentation of a "crisis situation" where men match their mettle against the societal (ruling class) archetypes of heroism, the film exposes this ideology as one of the carrots by which the Army leads men not to heroism but to genocide and other atrocities.

_Army_ shows the American belief system in its most schizoid state, where God, idealism (patriotism), individualism, success and democratic principles become absorbed into an enveloping rhetoric that obscures the dominance of their opposites. The narrative voices strip off that rhetorical mantle not through didactic rebuttals but through a well-blended mixture of personal testimony and objective analysis. What it doesn't show as well are the alternatives, especially for the draft eligible youth. The film describes the fascist tendencies within the Army, but it offers no concrete description of how to counter them. Jacobs explains that this question was deliberately left open-ended so that "people working in and around the Army could adapt it to their own situation." But draft resistance is omitted while Army resistance is shown largely in terms of civilian support rather than in terms of soldier participation. Army organizing is a tremendously difficult question and the film finally backs off from tackling it. As it stands, _Army_, has proven an effective stimulant to discussion and perhaps, therefore, consciousness-raising.
Its tempo and style are well-suited to its audience though it shows a trace of racial bias (in the omission of the racial aspects of the draft or Army life) while its somewhat discursive skimming of numerous topics rather than in-depth probing of a few tends to loosen the otherwise taut design. Although it raises more questions than it answers, it also confronts basic contradictions unlike some of the more strictly empirical films. Like the majority of films made after late 1963, Army was not intended to stand alone but to be complemented by discussion and in that context it was a modest, but forward-looking achievement.
CHAPTER FIVE

NEW YORK NEWSREEL: RADICAL RESTRUCTURING

(1969-1971)

By late 1969 New York Newsreel could have looked back and noticed several parallels to their predecessors of almost forty years ago. Like Dziga-Vertov they exhibited an enormous quantity of sheer enthusiasm for their task. Like the Film and Photo League and Eisenstein, they began with a militaristic vision of the role of film as weapon—be it gun, grenade or can opener. The early fascination that Vertov and others evinced for a "New Man," born from the marriage of technology and revolution, though, had shifted somewhat. His parentage had changed to drugs and Karma, his family had become a counter-culture, not an entire nation, and his ideals more nostalgic and romantic than communist and future minded. Newsreel never fully identified with the announcements of a new, "post-political," Aquarian man's ascension, however, they continued to place great stress on the need for political action but without an equally vivid conception of what their New Man or New Society would look like—either their statements and programs or in the fabric of their films' aesthetics. In fact, the aesthetic and visionary rhetoric of the Film and Photo League was almost
totally abandoned in favor of a political (and immediate) rhetoric based more on morality and emotion than dialectical materialism. The change did not result in obviously better films and some of the earlier criticisms could still find application, especially the incisive comments of the New Theater editorial (see page 18). The Film and Photo League and the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theater's stress on discussion as a necessary contextual element to successful film propaganda had been retained and emphasized though little effort had been made to systematize organizing techniques or the gathering of feedback information. After two years then, New York Newsreel stood on a critical plateau where further advance would require new forms unused in the 30s and even unknown to much of the Movement a few years before.

During the next two years New York Newsreel's development followed to a considerable degree the pattern already evolving in San Francisco Newsreel and, to a lesser extent, in Los Angeles Newsreel. Whereas New York had typified many of the problems common to all the Newsreel offices at the start, a continuing process of differentiation saw New York Newsreel's development arrested in a stage that other Newsreels, and other portions of the Movement, broke through much earlier. New York City (Manhattan) was itself an impediment, for the reasons we've already discussed. The almost class division between the group's nucleus and the rest of the membership was another major obstacle and the
empiricism that prevailed among the key figures served as a set of blinders, narrowing New York Newsreel's vision to its immediate surroundings when the most far-reaching developments were happening elsewhere. As a result, major change was a slow, tortuous process that is still not complete and whose film realization has scarcely begun.

* * *

Prior to this point Newsreel, and the Movement, faced a challenge not unlike Stalin's: how to perpetuate a revolutionary process despite the continuing reappearance of revisionist tendencies toward elitism, opportunism, sectarianism and subjectivism—all usually concentrated within a bureaucratic and technological power elite. Stalin's response was violent, perhaps paranoid, and finally unsuccessful. As an essay prepared by the Bay Area Revolutionary Union (RU) notes,

In retrospect, the chief errors seem to have been that Stalin and the other party leaders tried to handle contradictions between the bureaucrats and the people administratively—by mobilizing one part of the bureaucracy against another. They failed to sufficiently mobilize the people and rely on them to resolve the contradiction.¹

The parallel is not that certain elements in Newsreel were revisionist bureaucrats in disguise but that a form, a methodology, for resolving contradictions within the Left had still not emerged which was not vindictive, autocratic and divisive in its own right. Despite its aversion to leaders, the Movement preferred a vacuum to the planned leadership of the masses or simply its own rank and file.
(not that the vacuum wasn't filled in any case). Stalin had struggled against the privileged bureaucratic class that foreign pressures forced him to tolerate, but he was ultimately vanquished by it. But Mao Tse-Tung, whose prominent leadership began in Stalin's time, was able to benefit from the errors of the first long term proletarian state in history. Chairman Mao succeeded where Stalin failed. He discovered a way "to fully guarantee the supervision and control of party and state functionaries, and economic managers, through developing mass action"—most dramatically seen in the Cultural Revolution. The theory and practice by which the Chinese people guaranteed their freedom from a bureaucratic class administering in the name of the proletariat, crystalized in the thought of Mao Tse-Tung, has had a profound impact on the American Left. While New York Newsreel was not the first Newsreel to adopt Maoist guidelines—and certainly not the first Movement group—the RU had already evolved a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist analysis in 1968—New York Newsreel's subsequent development is indicative of a pattern repeated many times over.

* * *

As New York Newsreel continued to redefine its political viewpoint, many of its earlier characteristics began to abate. In the Movement at large a process of polarization and confrontation took place, climaxing in the formation of the Weathermen. The fate of the Weatherman faction has already entered history while the bulk of the Movement
seems to have led a quieter existence since that point in the summer of 1969, but the relative quiet should not be mistaken for dormancy. The appearance of quietness is closer to a calm determination that has resulted from clearer politics and greater, internal cohesion. Zealous moralism and the need to fulfill a sense of calling have dissipated. "A man's emotions reflect his ideology," and that ideology has become more and more decidedly the scientific principles of Marxism-Leninist-Maoist thought. New York City has become less of a determining factor for Newsreel, now that a methodology has become sufficiently developed to offer a systematic rebuttal to empirical and idealist arguments, although a certain degree of adaptation to its peculiar conditions is still necessary as we shall see. And a more realistic prognosis of a long march and bitter struggle has overridden the euphoric proclamations of the Weathermen and counter-culture spokesmen that a revolution in consciousness, sexuality, family and personal relationships—everything, in fact, except the economic class struggle—was veritably all around us, and sufficient to bring the walls tumbling down.

*   *   *

Newsreel's course began to change most noticeably around the woman's question. At a meeting of representatives from the various Newsreel branches in summer, 1969, the New York representatives brought back a new consciousness about the importance of criticism and self-criticism.
Earlier in the year, the Los Angeles Newsreel had conducted criticism and self-criticism sessions, following Maoist guidelines and the practical advice of the regional SDS office, the only Maoist SDS group in the U.S. at that time.\(^5\) The sessions were quite beneficial to L.A. Newsreel and catalyzed changes, both personal and collective, that had been obstructing the group's work.\(^6\)

In New York the first application of the technique revolved around the woman's question, but it was not until late fall that the first sessions were held. The strength of New York Newsreel's nucleus left the women in the group fairly disorganized, despite the fact that several had come from the feminist movement to Newsreel.\(^7\) The women found that the other women often felt "beyond having sexist problems; they wanted to be revolutionary and felt that getting together as a group or discussing common problems was, like, wasteful."\(^8\) There was no active opposition to raising the woman's question by the men, but their emphasis on militant activism and personal initiative—in filming, in organizing, in supporting the Movement generally—tended to sweep a lot of internal contradictions under the carpet where they would not paralyze the group with theorizing, talk and procrastination.

By the fall of '69, after several important films had been completed and released (People's War and Army in New York; Oil Strike and San Francisco State Strike in San Francisco) and the pressure of meeting commitments subsequently reduced, the women initiated criticism and self-
criticism sessions inside Newsreel. By this point the women had enough insight into their role in Newsreel (as inside the Movement generally) to set certain conditions for the meetings. The primary one was that women would not criticize each other. Men would criticize men and women, but the women would only criticize the men. Their feeling was that such criticism "would have been criticism of our own oppression. Why begin criticizing your sister for her oppression if you've not taken any steps to deal with that?"9

The results of the sessions were a revelation to the Newsreel men and women. The women discovered that almost all the criticism the men had of them was a function of their oppression. Passive women who didn't express themselves very forcefully were criticized on these grounds while the women (very few in number) "who were active and spoke up, very eloquently at times, who worked and edited films, were not criticized at all. It became very clear to us that they didn't take any of the women seriously in the group. They had never really considered who the women were, what they did and what they thought."10 Only the men received substantive criticism; for the women the only question was why didn't they act like men.

On the basis of these revelations the women were able to form a strong women's caucus that gradually developed solidarity among all the women.11 They criticized the men's assumptions and struggled among themselves to sharpen their own consciousness and to understand how Newsreel's
internal structure failed to correct continuing forms of oppression. (At this point, filmmaking skills themselves—the most essential skills for any Newsreel member—were still very largely the province of the white, middle-class, male nucleus.)

No immediate changes occurred and in many ways Newsreel floundered into a period of structural chaos while redefinition and struggle proceeded. The work-groups continued but few considered them satisfactory. Other Newsreel branches, such as Detroit and Los Angeles, finally split up and dissolved over similar internal problems (not exclusively the women's question). In New York the women brought home a growing awareness of the basic, internal contradictions that had been present since the outset but largely ignored: there was almost no Third World members, no working class members and very few skilled women members.

This awareness demanded a new format. No longer could Newsreel speak righteously about putting people up against the wall and confronting them with a purified, visionary movement. The early moralism of the Movement now seemed a projection of internal contradictions onto the outside, bourgeois world. The false consciousness that Ice perceives within the Movement had become a felt reality and one that could no longer be neglected in the interests of solidarity and a high level of product output. Mao's comment that "what is correct invariably develops in the course of struggle with what is wrong" no longer meant a Manichean
battle with the children of darkness "out there" but a more ambiguous and far more difficult battle against the persistence of bourgeois ideology within the Movement and its members. And the instruments of war would not be the purge or inquisition. Instead they would be scientific, principled observations dialectically deployed in the struggle of criticism and self-criticism. Between authoritarianism and anarchy lies the narrow ridge of democratic centralism where legitimacy returns to its traditional meaning and where what John Schaar sees as the most fundamental issues for any human have a form and methodology available for their treatment:

[these issues are] the problem and mystery of becoming a unique self, but still a self living among and sharing much with others in family and society; and finally a unique self among some significant others, but still sharing with all humanity the condition of being human and mortal. Who am I as an individual? Who am I as a member of this society? Who am I as a man, a member of humanity? . . . the way a man formulates and responds to [these questions] composes the center and the structure of his values. 13

The internal struggle for power and dominance that characterizes bourgeois politics, and socialist politics that failed to find a socialist solution to the problem of authority, (where legitimacy is measured by "a system's ability to persuade its members of its own appropriateness") becomes instead an internal struggle for values whose correctness is a result of collective agreement, not of mystification or imposition. The difference between democratically determined values and arbitrarily imposed
ones can be a very fine one in practice and much more study needs to be done of the differences and interactions between the two. Criticism and self-criticism offers no panacea in its own right; only the actual application of the method among actual groups in specific times and places can determine its value. For Newsreel, however, we already have enough perspective to recognize that it has played a very significant role.

Mao's conception of democratic centralism irrevocably reverses the transmission of authority. It no longer flows from the charismatic leader or the controllers of economic power to their underlings and captivated masses. The majority of the people now constitute and legitimate their own authority deriving their principles and plans (or "correct ideas") from three ultimate sources: "the struggle for production, the class struggle, and scientific experiment."15

Within Newsreel all three forms of struggle began to take shape—over the acquisition of skills and filmmaking control, over the class composition of the group and over a question of the nature and role of women's liberation. To some degree, old habits and points of view persisted but the unresolved conflicts could not persist indefinitely. The old priority of maximum output was itself changed: "People began to talk about the importance of how that work got done, how people worked together and relate together and that became more important than the work itself."16
For many of the men, particularly those within the group's nucleus who had benefited most from prior privilege and the previous internal structures, the contradictions within their own behavior were extremely difficult to resolve. And the criticism and self-criticism sessions laid heavy emphasis on the falseness of the personal/political dichotomy. One member relates, "That was the point when it became very clear that some people would work with us and change and other people would leave because it was too threatening to them."\(^{17}\)

Not everyone left because they felt threatened. Some faced basic identity questions squarely but felt they could not work them out within the group (the men, for example, had little success in forming a struggle group, or caucus, of their own).\(^{18}\) Others felt they could not accomplish the kind of political work, primary organizing for example, that they most wanted to do. Still others had a deep-rooted resistance to reflective, critical discussion on any level. They were proud of their tangible achievements (the films and screenings):

> When it came time to respond to criticism, that was for The New York Review of Books. Those people could write their petty criticism and do a definition of cinéma engage. Fine. They'd get themselves a library and that'd be terrific. But that wasn't where Newsreel was at or ever thought of itself as at.\(^{19}\)

A resistance to theory and criticism at one level often carried over to theory and criticism applied at an even more personal level. Thus for a variety of reasons the majority
of Newsreel's original nucleus left the group during the winter of 1969-1970.

Criticism and self-criticism is a form that generally contains and tempers animosity and other negative feelings by providing a channel for constructive advances. With Newsreel this seems to have been the case and those who left and those who stayed did not feel antagonistic toward each other. Those who stayed felt the others had fulfilled their function which had been progressive at the time but which they could not extend any further. Those who left continued with Movement work and bore no grudges. There had been no purge, only a self-arrived at adjustment of consciousness and a redefinition of workable roles. (Robert Kramer is doing primary organizing in Vermont; Norman Fruchter is doing the same in Newark again; David Stone continues with commercial and semi-commercial distribution work and Robert Machover is working with a collective in St. Louis where several other early Newsreel members also work, but not in film.)

* * *

New York Newsreel was still approximately a year away from creating an actual Marxist-Leninist collective, but the momentum was plainly in that direction. Other groups had already organized on a local basis as collectives, including the RU in San Francisco, the Black Panthers, and the Young Lords in New York. The tendency grew in dialectical opposition to the life-style or terrorist anarchism that
that the Weathermen, Yippies, Crazies and other similar groups represented. The collective structure fostered the development of a refined political analysis and presented a stable situation with priorities and discipline.

The increased utilization of Newsreel films by on-going political groups also completed the movement away from commercial and semi-commercial exhibition. The adoption of Silber's category of "outlaw art" was less a matter of principled decision, however, than of the flow of events. The moralistic argument against commercial screenings had diminished, but there was no longer much need for such screenings. The filmmakers who had formed the group no longer sought to preserve their distinctive forms of filmmaking within it, and the bulk of the films simply did not qualify for such screenings. Not until San Francisco Newsreel released The Woman's Film early in 1971 did Newsreel have a film that could be shown in theaters or museums and by then there was no puritanical resistance to the idea although no one considered it the best means of reaching people either.

* * *

The struggle to make the acquisition and utilization of filmmaking skills more democratic within Newsreel resulted in greater awareness of the need for further demystification and dissemination of these skills among working class and Third World peoples. The struggle within Newsreel had given individuals from these sectors greater control of the group's direction and the emergence of political groups
within working class and Third World communities provided the opportunity to work within a definite context to transmit technical skills that could be used in a class struggle. Newsreel's own members no longer were outsiders going in to be with the people; they were, in background and worldview, one and the same with those they served. The transmission of skills was attached to Mao's principle of "from the masses, to the masses" and made into a priority. The members felt that for "too long Newsreel has been an elitist organization in Manhattan making films that whites brought into the community, then split. The priority was established to pass skills on and to make equipment available."22

This organizing shift marks a major change in Newsreel's orientation. The effort has only been underway in a thorough-going manner for a year and the process of redefining roles is still taking place. Newsreel does not want to identify totally with the groups they serve, whose levels of political consciousness vary considerably. They still want to make their own films "that can be used all over the country"23 (like The Woman's Film). At the same time they want to move away from reporting on local struggles with their words and their eyes (as Wilmington and Lincoln Center did, for example) and to help the people involved in those struggles create their own propaganda. (San Francisco Newsreel actually did something close to that in PDM a short, silent film they shot of a steel strike and then gave to the workers to use in their efforts to gain
citizens outside of a school context. His system, ideally would be thoroughly democratic with guarantees of access for all and widely diffused equipment (tape recorders for thousands instead of a single television station, for example). His ideal however, is probably only possible within a post-revolutionary society and even the present examples of such societies have not given good indications of how it might work.

Newsreel's effort also coincides with the traditional viewpoint from which Rotha's and Grierson's theories derived, that of the educated citizen capable of intelligent participation in a genuine democracy. While Rotha and Grierson assumed that direction and perspective had to be provided, Newsreel assumes it is inherent within the people but that it is suppressed by ruling class ideology (especially as it is broadcast in the mass media). Sociologically, Rotha and Grierson belong within the camp of the mass society theorists as opposed to the Marxists (other members include Ortega y Gasset and T.S. Eliot). The mass society theorists stress the lack of a shared system of values, a lack of community and a lack of intermediate groups between the individual and the ultimate sources of societal power. The documentary filmmaker as an intermediate group (a special form of outwardly oriented elite not closely enough integrated to be a vanguard), would work to overcome these absent qualities and move the individual toward meaningful participation in his society.
support. There were Newsreel members instead of workers behind the cameras, however.) Likewise they prefer to have ongoing political groups conduct discussions after film screenings rather than do it themselves although the basic stress on discussion has not lessened.\textsuperscript{24} Ideally New York Newsreel sees their own filmmaking being co-ordinated by a revolutionary party's propaganda needs while their skills training becomes a part of the party's community organizing program.\textsuperscript{25} At present, without such a party, they hope to mediate between the two directly, deriving guidance for their own filmmaking efforts from the insights that their community organizing provides. The practice is more difficult than the theory, though, and members still feel they are too reactive to crisis situations and too prone to concentrate on groups that happen to be most prominent at a given moment.\textsuperscript{26} (An example they cite is the recently completed film on the Young Lords, \textit{The People Are Rising} which was begun precipitously as a reaction to a particular event.)

It is too early to say whether New York Newsreel may be embarked on a new exercise in ultrademocracy where skills are passed on to and utilized by a community in theory, but by the most militant, conspicuous individuals in practice. New York Newsreel's approach to community organizing through skill training does parallel the ideas of a certain school of communication theorists, however. Ivan Illich (in \textit{The New York Review of Books}, in fact) has consistently argued for a free flow of information, skills and wisdom between
A more Marxist approach to the media at this sociological and theoretical level involves a class analysis of communication that can diagnose the ratio of givers of opinion to receivers; the organization of the community to allow free rebuttal; the degree of autonomy from institutional authority for both senders and receivers. This analysis perceives that mass communication strives "[to reduce] feedback to the lowest point compatible with the system." TV, radio and film become part of means of distribution—for ruling class ideology—rather than reciprocal forms of communication. The Movement has recognized this and cried "manipulation." But the Movement's underlying assumption seems to have been that "there is such a thing as pure, unmanipulated truth. It is the unspoken basic premise of the manipulation thesis." This form of moral puritanism considers any involvement with the media as a sign of taintedness and has subsequently left much of the Underground media in the firm control of counter-culture rather than Marxist or even politically engaged groups.

The alternative proposal is to accept the propagandistic "bias" inherent in all communication and to allow everyone to become a manipulator. This democratization would abolish bourgeois control of culture and the abhorrence of "mass culture." Unless it became a collectively organized process, however, (a proviso that again underscores the importance of democratic centralism) it might remain a source of inconsequential hobbies like ham radio
operating or home tape recording.

Enzenberger warns that the Left (with the exceptions, for him, of Walter Benjamin and Bertold Brecht) has "been aware only of [the communication industry's] bourgeois-capitalistic dark side and not of its socialist possibilities." The field has thus been abandoned to often avant-garde, but non-Marxist efforts ranging from Warhol to McLuhan and from Vigo to the Rolling Stones. The idea that technology can be shaped by existing forces to provide salvation for all has become the Rousseauian rubric for McLuhanesque double-talk. Enzenberger's final exhortation is for the artist to make himself redundant as a specialist in one-way communication: "The author has to work as the agent of the masses. He can lose himself in them only when they themselves become authors, the authors of history." Enzenberger's analysis can thus give a sharpened theoretical focus for practical action. It cannot help with problems of equipment and facilities which remain a major obstacle, but it can help clarify the optimal degree and quality of interaction between Newsreel and other groups which has remained an unsettled question. New York Newsreel feels "[We] can no longer make a film about a group but rather we have to talk about the problems of the community or ethnic group, and not in Marxist language, not in its codified rhetoric..." Newsreel wants to incorporate a "revolutionary analysis" in their forthcoming drug film, for example, "linking [drug use] to capitalism, racism, genocide
and pacification. But we don't want it to come on in a way that's too rhetorical. We want it to be as personal and human as possible." Balancing this dialectic will be a matter of time and practice but the Maoist axis along which it runs is plainly evident. Likewise the dialectic does not have an underpinning in communications theory (at least one is not articulated) as much as in the Maoist principle of "serve the people." Whether a theoretical basis will become desirable or necessary as the possibilities of manipulating the media to bring power to the people grow, cannot be predicted. We can note, however, that Newsreel's, and the Movement's, shying away from communication and propaganda theory have not noticeably strengthened their capacity for pragmatic, effective action within the media. Quite the contrary, an absence of theory is only one dimension to an understanding of the Left's general abandonment of the mass media to their enemy. Perhaps as questions continue to arise and balance remains more wobbly than stable, Newsreel will turn to more specific, supplementary thought on the role of the media to add to their more classical study of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

**Newsreel's Internal Structure**

The struggle to evolve a new form capable of promoting the gains that criticism and self-criticism had won proved long and arduous. That greater discipline was a prerequisite was generally acknowledged, but with reluctance.
The former attitudes of anti-authoritarianism, anti-leadership, anti-bureaucracy, anti-compromise did not die easily, even as the group's make-up slowly changed. Discussions dealt with the problem of restructuring the work-groups, but "when the talk built around forming a central committee, the general reaction was 'YUK!'" 36

For the better part of a year, until late in 1970, Newsreel's formal structure remained essentially the same. At the same time changes were occurring in other areas that helped facilitate the final shift to democratic centralism. Male chauvinism was broken down decisively. Many of the most articulate men left the group, opening up more "space" for those remaining. And among the men who stayed there was a tendency to over-adjustment and exorcism of guilt: "Many of the men became passive, many of the very men who had been critical of the women for being passive, became passive themselves." 37 This left the group in a more plastic state where the internal struggle could be advanced with a minimum of intransigence from those unwilling to change. It led, in fact, to an awareness essentially similar to that which making The Hour of the Furnaces gave Solanas and Gettino:

A revolutionary film group . . . cannot grow strong without military structures and command concepts. The group exists as a network of complementary responsibilities, as the sum and synthesis of abilities, in as much as it operates harmoniously with a leadership that centralizes planning work and maintains its continuity . . . All this means that a basic condition is an awareness of the problems of interpersonal relationships, leadership and areas of competence. 38
The Argentenians have a perception closer to guerrilla warfare because of their own country's circumstances, but the essence of their insight is very similar to Newsreel's after they aired the woman's question. The elimination of white, male, middle-class chauvinism from the leadership of the group also precipitated a change in the group's overall composition along the lines of "like seeks like." As we have observed (page 108) the Third World work-group was the strongest one at this point and consistently pushed for more rigorous political analysis. They eventually formed a Third World caucus (composed of only Third World members, as opposed to the mixed work group) and pressed for recruitment priorities. At present the priorities are for Third World and working-class people and the Third World caucus has grown from three to nine (out of a membership of roughly thirty). 39

One Newsreel member observed that they hoped to change the politics of the group by changing its racial, sexual and class background. 40 Although the change was not easy (most Third World people, especially women look at filmmaking as something totally alien, reserved for the white bourgeoisie) the result has been profound. By late 1970 Newsreel had reached the point where the concept of a central committee could be taken seriously. By then there were also the examples of other Newsreel offices such as San Francisco and Los Angeles to guide them. Defining leadership and roles, however, became a slow, deliberative process.
precisely because the entire group felt just how serious it was, and there was still more than a little fear left over from anti-authoritarian attitudes.\textsuperscript{41}

Eventually, after a lengthy period of nominations followed by criticism and self-criticism, a central committee of three white women, one black, one white and one Third World man was chosen.\textsuperscript{42} The work-groups were dissolved and the group broke down into sections. Everyone working on incomplete films went into a film section. The Third World caucus became a separate section and a community section that concentrated on skill training was also established.\textsuperscript{43}

Distribution formed another section with a priority to expand the number of screenings. The community section used screenings in conjunction with skill training. An effort was made to increase the number of college rentals which formed the bulk of the rental income (and Newsreel income) since community groups were often unable to pay.\textsuperscript{44} Community distribution became the key to political organizing work while other forms of distribution became regarded as semi-commercial, principally a source of revenue.\textsuperscript{45} What had been an area of considerable political agitation (the college audience) had been shunted to the periphery of a working class focus.

The move indicated reemphasis on well managed distribution since Newsreel was more dependent than ever upon rental income to sustain its operations. Very few members remained who had the financial resources to make a film.
(and those who did no longer operated in semi-autonomous fashion as their money had previously enabled them to do).\textsuperscript{46}

Newsreel film projects were decided collectively and underwritten by the collective.\textsuperscript{47} For the collective, rentals, together with the occasional sale of prints overseas or to other groups, were the prime sources of income, followed, somewhat distantly, by contributions.\textsuperscript{48} Attempting to increase the quantity of college rentals while deemphasizing their political importance was the logical outcome.

Newsreel is perhaps the only film distributor in the country that will waive or reduce rental fees when groups cannot pay but want to see and use the films for political ends. This has become a major distinction between Newsreel and other political film distributors like American Documentary Film who are bound by contract obligations to charge fees in virtually all cases and to charge relatively higher fees, even when they do make reductions. It is also one aspect of Newsreel's work that has made them invaluable to organizers and helped to forge a concrete link with Third World and working class people.

* * *

By the spring of 1971 New York Newsreel looked like a new organization. The group's original leadership was gone; their class base had shifted to the working class as had their orientation; a priority was set for Third World membership and they already constituted a substantial minority; skills were usually acquired within the group.
(not brought to it) and made available to everyone; organizing was oriented toward the community and skill-training rather than toward the Movement and screening-discussions. Most important, the electoral (president, secretary, etc.) structure of the Film and Photo League; the de jure participatory democracy and committee rule but de facto elitist rule of early Newsreel, had been surpassed by a combination of the old and the new. Democratic centralism had been tried before but had floundered on contradictions within the use of bureaucratic power. Marbling the formal structure with a constant process of criticism and self-criticism suspended this contradiction in a workable dialectic. Members of the Central Committee were criticized and self-criticized before being appointed and were not above further criticism. The most persuasive or charismatic personalities could not exploit their traits opportunistically, even by unintentionally intimidating the less seasoned, when an ongoing process of analysis questioned their political actions, their personal relationships and the dynamics of their understanding and articulation of Newsreel's purpose. Each member was guaranteed a voice and the foremost characteristic of Newsreel, like that of other, similar collectives, was no longer empiricism, confrontation theory, elitism, etc., but struggle. Idealist and other non-dialectical theories and methodologies receded as the principles of dialectical materialism became incorporated into the very heart of Newsreel's structure. A new dynamic methodology
that no longer contradicted but grew from Marxist ideology (through Mao), began to power Newsreel's efforts and the possibilities that it both contains and foreshadows can only be encouraging.

Films

In Newsreel the evolution of the internal structure lagged behind the consciousness and activism of the most advanced members. In a similar manner, Newsreel's "product," the films, lagged well behind the change in structure and political orientation. The phenomenon of cultural lag has many aspects, however, not peculiar to Newsreel while the prolonged period of ill-defined structure (most of 1970), the need for largely unskilled members to acquire the skills previously concentrated within the group's nucleus, and the gradual transition from confrontation politics to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist politics are specific aspects of that lag. The increased attention to principles and methods also lead to longer and more intense deliberations which, together with the practice of criticism/self-criticism, served to break the plunge into rapid-fire film production that had characterized the group earlier. The consequence is that between winter, 1970 and summer, 1971 there have been fewer films released than in the earlier period and that many of these exhibit flaws that characterized earlier films as well.

The Wreck of the New York Subway examines the fare increase of January, 1970 (from 20 to 30¢) in terms of
workers' wages and subway bonds. The conclusion: wages are still too low and subway bonds represent easy, non-taxable income to the banks that underwrite them, that payment of interest contributes heavily to the Metropolitan Transit Authority's debt and that commuters and workers need to unite to restore reasonable fares rather than turn against each other as the management encourages them to do. The most analytical portion of the film deals with the bank profits realized from subway bonds (at the commuter's expense) but the explanation is troubled by the murkiness of the sound track. Poor sound has been a consistent problem in Newsreel films and it is most vexing when a carefully arranged, step-by-step analysis is spoken. Subway's sound track is far from the worst, however, and the images are more helpful in conveying the significant ideas than usual. Instead of shots of the monolithic exteriors of banks there are cartoon representations of the money transactions that clearly convey the central process as Newsreel perceives it.

The majority of the visuals depict the subways and their riders where Newsreel's grainy black and white format creates a highly appropriate mood. Although the film makes a major point of the workers' scapegoat role—blamed by management for high costs (instead of bank interests) and for accidents (instead of outmoded, faulty equipment) and blamed by the public for poor but costly service (instead of management policies)—the film treats the worker at a considerable distance, one almost more befitting a mythical
rather than material reality. As in Lincoln Center we can watch the workers doing their job, but the camera never approaches more closely, never establishes the rapport of an interview, or of prolonged contact and extended study beyond the job situation. We are told by the Newsreel narration that the workers are exploited as much as the public but we do not hear what the workers themselves have to say about their situation.

Similarly, the narration explains that the subway system has been primarily designed to shuttle workers to and from work (at no expense to the employer) rather than to offer a convenient travel system. For most commuters, though, this may seem a rather abstract criticism when the urban society itself is built around the work relationship. Any subway map will bear out Newsreel's contention, but there is no reaction or corroboration of this viewpoint from commuters. The only complaints recorded from them center around personal inconvenience--the noise, the crowdedness, the hazardous equipment on certain runs. The consequences of Newsreel's analysis are therefore not clear in terms of political action and the narrated statement that the subways herd workers about hints at a continuing disdain for the victimization of the working class, people ignorant of their own exploitation, rather than an attempt to suggest that the workers themselves have the power to transform the nature of the subway (as well as their work).

This abstraction of the needs of the working class
(for survival, for more humane transport and unalienated labor) is perhaps most clearly conveyed in the solution offered. We see people slip under turnstiles and hold exit doors open for people to stream in; we see small bands of leafletters and pickets (mostly college students by appearance), but we see no larger collective action and no action directed against the MTA or those who either control or profit from its policies. The actions are anarchist and adventurist. They are to a large degree an extension of campus politics to the metropolis, and, we might note, they did not reduce the fare or change the system of bond issues. Newsreel in this film focused sharply on the working class and the urban situation but they brought campus-bound movement politics with them. Other films (The Squatters Film and The People are Rising) offer a political perspective derived from the insights of the people filmed rather than from the assumptions of an outside group, but how successful Newsreel will be in creating this form of community oriented propaganda cannot be assessed until a wider variety of films has been made and put to use.

The Wreck of the New York Subway has found varying degrees of organizing usefulness. In New York it is frequently shown; in Los Angeles where the transit problem is different and where the present Newsreel distributor, The Long March, has an advanced political position critical of adventurist solutions, the film has only been shown a couple of times; in San Francisco it is very popular and the city's
bus driver's union has purchased a print for their own use. The different responses indicate the importance of context as a supplement to form and content. When the issues or problems are immediate, the film's depiction of the situation can serve as a springboard for consciousness raising and organizing and even the flaws, when accurately analyzed, can become an integral part of the process. When the problem is more remote in its own right, the reportorial dimension takes on greater importance since a body of everyday experience that will validate criticism is absent. Hence, the flaws stand out even more baldly at a theoretical level, and the film's usefulness drops proportionally.

This question of 'for whom' is fundamental; it is a question of principle. Mao Tse-Tung

Chairman Mao placed great stress on scientific study of existing conditions and for the artist, or propagandist, "for whom" is a central question that such study should answer. A second observation of his, however, clearly indicates more is required than reaching the right people: "Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically." During late 1969-1970, Newsreel came closer to an accurate assessment of "for whom" they sought to make propaganda while the artistic rendering of their political analysis remained less well resolved.

Lincoln Hospital reflects this contradiction very clearly. The film relates the attempt by staff members of
Lincoln Hospital to take over the hospital and administer it themselves. Previously the hospital (the only public one in all of the South Bronx and Westchester) had been administered by Albert Einstein Medical School for whom it provided "liberal window dressing." The narration (a variety of voices, many of them Newsreel members) claims the hospital to be a "slaughterhouse" which "conspires to keep people sick." Not only the callous administration is at fault, the staff cannot provide care in outmoded facilities nor can they accept the prevailing concepts of health and illness. The narration hints at a recognition of the depths of the health problem as Sartre also perceived them: "Illness is social, not only because it is often occupational, nor because it expresses by itself a certain level of life, but also because society—for a given state of medical techniques—decides its sick and its dead."53

This awareness of the problem is less succinctly put in the film (whose sound quality is again very low) and the solution suggests a certain degree of confusion introduced by empirical biases. The narration calls for a redefinition of health (there are no sync interviews and when the narrators say "we" it is not clear if they refer to Newsreel or the hospital staff), but the only action which we see staff members carry out is their six day take-over of the hospital. The concept of community health is stressed and while

*quoted from the sound track of Lincoln Hospital.
the failure of the take-over suggests that this concept requires elaboration and connection to a broader pattern of class struggle, the connection is only made in the most general terms. New York City, or even more narrowly, "communities" in the city are taken as a totality and solutions are framed within that context. The time (historical) dimension and space (national/international) dimensions that constitute the single, ultimate totalization are pared from the film and its impact thereby lessened. Community control is a thorny issue involving broad questions of redistribution of power and class and racial interaction within a given area. They are the fundamental issues which Lincoln Hospital does not tackle even though "for whom" in this case is clearly the ghetto or semi-ghetto community.

Subway and Lincoln Hospital were far less concerned with legitimizing the Movement by hinting at its power and diversity than Amerika or Summer '68. They clearly represent an interest in working class and community problems that large elements of the Movement had not yet squarely faced. While they lacked political astuteness and artistic vigor, they did signal a less self-enclosed frame of reference for Newsreel, one which began to establish a body of films that working-class and Third World audiences could respond to, at least in content, more directly than films showing college students or anarchist, life-style groups doing "their own thing." (As early as 1968 Marlyn Buck and Karen Ross of S.F. Newsreel noted that young Chicanos were
not turned on by Garbage which they described as "a cultural exchange between the Motherfuckers and Lincoln Center: . . . they are bored by it and finally walk out," but their insight did not immediately lead to any principles of subject or audience selection.) The linkage to a different, non-Movement audience was far from fully forged, however. To some degree a lingering tendency to equate revolutionary art, or propaganda, with sloppy "battle front" footage persisted, where clarity, audibility and aesthetics were regarded as bourgeois, Hollywood contaminants. The media were not only synonymous with "manipulation" and therefore tainted, but also with perfection and therefore anesthetic. But once this conception of the revolution began to change, along with the other changes taking place both inside and outside of Newsreel, Newsreel began to actively seek for less crude and less self-righteous formats.

Two women's films reflect this search quite well. The first, She's Beautiful When She's Angry, was made in early 1970 and reflects many problems we have seen earlier. Make-Out was made in early 1971 and indicates several new directions for Newsreel. Both films reveal Newsreel's movement away from agit-prop and toward edu-prop, where underlying issues and basic questions are raised for discussion rather than simplified in a call to action. Like The Woman's Film and Finally Got the News, these films, especially Make-Out, indicate possibilities and obstacles
far more than they trace a course of action or advocate a particular tactic. As such they call more for a reflective interaction with their content than an emotional reaction to it and thereby signal an important development in New York Newsreel's approach to propaganda.

She's Beautiful When She's Angry contains this development in a more latent form than Make-Out. The film records a street theater skit put on by a group of women at an abortion rally in March, '69. The skit is intercut with a discussion with the actresses that indicates their own personal experiences with sexist oppression and exploitation.

The skit itself revolves around a young white woman whom The Teacher praises for being "a good Listener," The Mother for doing her housework, and The Capitalist for being subservient. A fellow black worker tries to unionize her but she resists. Then she begins to see her situation more clearly; The Mother and The Husband leave her. The Capitalist notes amusingly, "She's beautiful when she's angry," and the skit ends with The Woman determined to struggle alongside her black sister.

The skit is succinct and makes its point clearly although some of the actresses seem inexperienced and self-conscious much as some students in Columbia Revolt were when acting out the police bust as street theater. They may still relate to the experience of oppression more with empathy and intellect than with visceral commitment. The film, though, is a strict recording of the skit and lacks
imaginative portrayal. The bulk of the skit is shot from a single, front row position with virtually no cut-aways except the interview. The interview only confirms what the skit portrays, as though to validate the artifice of theater, and does not advance the analysis or raise the question of how women can organize around this question. The sound is sometimes indistinct and while the sync interviews are a welcome shift from estranged narration they seem hastily conceived. The film's organizing usefulness would depend heavily on the context in which it is shown; without more careful examination of the latent content, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* could represent an unfocused protest where the enemy and the course of action are equally ambiguous.

Newsreel has always been aware of the need to go beyond the original conception of the newsreel as straightforward observation. As a Newsreel member remarked, "I don't think we can be political filmmakers and not recognize the limitations of the newsreel film. This type of film requires us as filmmakers to impose something on it." In Newsreel's case what was imposed, sometimes with a resounding thud, was a political perspective. Like the Film and Photo League, Newsreel valued the extra depth of the documentary form but, like them, it seldom experimented with other forms like the agitki and film farces of Vertov's time that might perform a similar function. And despite their own aversion to authoritarianism their political perspective, or line, all too often sprang out of the narration
like a domineering warlord. For these reasons the innovations of form and the disappearance of an explicit line mark Make-Out as a significant experiment in Newsreel production.

Make-Out is Newsreel's only fiction film done on a collective basis. The others, Ice and In Passing, were primarily personal projects to which the group lent their aid. Its structure is simple and its point unmistakable despite its lack of a political point of view transcending the situation portrayed: we see a boy and a girl in a parked car. The boy begins to neck with her while we hear her thoughts on the sound track. She wonders what he's heard about her; she wishes he would say something, say he likes her, for example, but no; instead he plods awkwardly along and her thoughts remain self-enclosed, impossible to communicate. The film (only ten minutes long) ends with a disc jockey's voice announcing a commercial: "You're finding out all about what it's like to be feminine and it's a gas."

The conception and realization of Make-Out is economical and provocative. Narration works in effective counterpoint to the visuals, suggesting the dialectic of sound and image that Godard advocates and practices:

Our duty as Marxist-Leninist filmmakers: to begin putting sounds which are already correct onto images which are still false. The sounds are already correct because they come from revolutionary struggles. The images are still false because they are produced in the imperialist ideological camp.

Make-Out exploits this contradiction in a more muted form.

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where the sound represents a budding consciousness beginning to detach itself from the imperialist ideological milieu that seeks to dominate it. Its mutedness also lends itself to the blossoming of another quality seldom found in Newsreels: a sense of humor.

By the same token, Make-Out reaches no conclusions, offers no models, gives no answers. The girl in the car is left to struggle out her budding consciousness essentially alone, much like the more politically advanced heroine (relatively) of Godard's Struggle in Italy. But instead of reacting to this less demonstrative, less analytical film by scuttling it, Newsreel has recognized that it has an important role to play. Make-Out can be highly effective within a screening context where the girl's thoughts in the film can be completed and studied, where women in the audience do not leave with their thoughts about the film short-circuited inside them as the character's were, and where they gain a sharper understanding of the need for collective action by the very process of discussing the film. New York Newsreel, for example, has screened it for high school girls who identify with it immediately and where it opens up a wide range of questions that allow a perspective or line to build up around the film. Make-Out opens up many possibilities that New York Newsreel may explore further as its internal coherence, political theory and community orientation continue to develop.

*   *   *
(A later version of this chapter may conclude with the Squatter's film and The People Are Rising both of which are on the verge of distribution at this time.)
CHAPTER SIX

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SAN FRANCISCO NEWSREEL

San Francisco Newsreel began when Robert Kramer and Robert Lacativa from New York Newsreel organized the first meetings with the help of the local SDS chapter in early 1968. They remained for a few months and were instrumental in the production of Black Panther (also known as Off the Pig). But after the film's completion they returned to New York and San Francisco Newsreel was left on its own.

San Francisco Newsreel, like New York, began with an intimate relationship to their most proximal environment, and one event in particular captures the electric atmosphere of romantic adventurism in which they found themselves; during their first year Newsreel had a truck in which they could either project films or transport their screening equipment. One night several Newsreel members went to Berkeley to show a film. The film was *The Haight*—a short (six minute) description of a police riot in the one-time center for the drug counter-culture, Haight-Ashbury. While a crowd of 50-100 people watched the riot footage playing against a building wall, a real life riot suddenly swept around and past them. The projection site happened to be between two police barricades and as the Newsreel members
shut off the film, the sting of tear gas and cries of battle created an eerie connection between film and reality.  

The Newsreel members were full participants in the anarchist counter-culture which flowered so prolifically in the Bay Area a few years earlier. They wore the long hair, full beards, and freak clothes of their tribal brothers and sisters. They had no great fondness for Marxism-Leninism which still resonated with the cliched labels of authoritarian, dogmatic and irrelevant. In these respects, they bore a close kinship to New York Newsreel as well as most of the Movement, but these similarities quickly become overshadowed by differences when we extend our examination further.

San Francisco Newsreel never saw its membership swell to the same unwieldy proportions as New York. While New York Newsreel usually had from 50-70 members, San Francisco seldom exceeded 20-25. The difference is not merely quantitative. Just as the qualitative difference between the cottage-industry and factory system derives from quantitative changes, many of New York's problems and programs were a function of their quantitative numbers. Internal structure, for example, becomes more critical in large groups where individuals rely on the structure to pattern relationships; and a skill-training program depends upon personnel who are not required for the day-to-day management of film production and distribution. San Francisco never had sufficient personnel to consider a systematic skill
training program but they didn't need it either. All of their members were hard pressed to complete the films and get them shown. When financial reserves became more restricted (and film production less than full capacity) finding meaningful work for everyone did present a problem. But in these cases the question of survival itself made the problem secondary, a not altogether desirable situation. The pressures of daily commitments can easily obscure the long-range objectives toward which these commitments tend, by vague intentionality or even accidentally, and Newsreel on the whole has seldom dealt with these larger issues forthrightly. But despite these quantitative considerations—which have worked to bring the personal/political schism much more into the spotlight inside New York than San Francisco Newsreel—San Francisco managed to develop a distinct, politically advanced position well ahead of its East coast counterpart.

A very central factor in San Francisco's ability to evolve, and evolve relatively rapidly, was the composition of its membership. There were no independent filmmakers such as formed the nucleus in New York. Some individuals had various filmmaking skills and others learned some fundamentals from Kramer and Lacativa, but to a very large degree San Francisco Newsreel was self-taught. Ignorance is never truly bliss, however, and San Francisco's strength was not in what they did not know, but in the absence of the matrix in which that knowledge has normally been lodged. They did
not have members with independent wealth or with developed artistic sensibilities who worked uneasily within a collective mold. They did not have the manifestations of elitism, chauvinism and sometimes opportunism which these factors nurture. Nor was there a class difference between privileged white, male, middle-class filmmakers who expected and assumed positions of leadership and responsibility and a larger body of unskilled, working-class, Third World, black and/or female followers. San Francisco Newsreel was not a pillar of the radical community without flaws or dissension, but from the start the membership was primarily working-class in background and far more conversant with politics than filmmaking. Ironically, San Francisco has also produced the bulk of Newsreel’s best films (discussed later in the chapter), a fact that sometimes fuels the argument that aesthetics and technical finesse are largely irrelevant. That conclusion, however, may be too sweeping. A more secure one is that the particular aesthetics and skills which New York Newsreel’s nucleus contributed proved more harmful to Newsreel’s propaganda work than those a political activist acquired and utilized in the group situation.

The absence of private wealth made San Francisco’s financing a critical area from the start. Funds came largely from wealthy liberals and from what income distribution generated. Film production depended heavily on these sources rather than on the resources of the person in charge, a fact that involved more people in the shaping of
each film and which helps account for certain similarities among San Francisco Newsreels.

Not only did the entire group participate in the income generating processes of distribution and fund raising, and thus share the need to articulate the group’s politics and the position of final say reserved for those who control the moneybags, they also collectively acknowledged certain developments in the Bay Area as highly significant. This common recognition and openness to influence helped stamp San Francisco’s films and the group’s politics quite strongly. The most important Bay Area development was the growth of the Black Panther Party from their national headquarters in Oakland. In the course of approximately one year Newsreel made three films on the Black Panthers (Black Panther, Mayday, Interview with Bobby Seale) and acquired a fourth (Staggerlee--from N.E.T.). Not only did the Panthers expose Newsreel to the black community (Newsreel was, and is, almost exclusively white) and the different strata of that community’s proletariat, they also introduced Newsreel to dialectical materialism. This alone was an accomplishment almost no other group could have possibly made. On the one hand the Black Panthers nurtured the adventuristic, macho guerrilla warfare image that most Newsreel members wanted to see themselves in. They could film close-order drills and have their photos taken with armed Panthers. On the other hand, the Panther leadership had an analysis and a program founded on the principles of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Tse-Tung.
When the latter program could be sugar-coated with the former image, it constituted a delicacy Newsreel couldn't resist.

As one Newsreel member confessed, "If anyone else had said, 'Let's do some P.E. (political education) in historical, dialectical materialism,' we'd have thrown them out the door." Newsreel was anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, but also anti-Marxist at this point (1968). And while the Panthers did not lead them in an abrupt about-face, they did begin to break the potentially head-long plunge into anarchism. The P.E. class was brief and not very detailed. But it aired compelling arguments that could not be ignored, especially in the face of the Panther's power and prestige. Nothing changed over night, but San Francisco's orientation was already, in early 1968, turning in a direction noticeably different from New York's.

* * *

The Black Panther's strength in the Bay Area was not an isolated phenomenon. Ever since the days of the I.W.W. and Western Federation of Miners, San Francisco has been a strong, militant union town. In the last decade the Free Speech Movement, the hippy culture—which many mistook for a political movement or saw as an alternative to one, the Black Panther Party, the Revolutionary Union (RU—the principle Maoist group in the U.S.), and the most working-class, Marxist oriented Newsreel office all emerged here. Newsreel's proximity to all these other groups plus several
militant unions such as the Longshoreman's and transit worker's, situated it within a very different context from New York Newsreel's Manhattan base. Exactly how and why San Francisco and the Bay Area fostered so much radical activism is beyond the scope of this study, but the general tradition and the specific, individual contacts that it promoted gave a definite advantage to San Francisco Newsreel in its struggle to create radical propaganda.

Even in 1968 when San Francisco Newsreel's organization and direction were not clearly oriented towards Marxism there were noticeable differences in practice as well as in the general milieu and ideological predilections. The Film Quarterly article that appeared at the end of 1968, and from which we have already quoted statements by Robert Kramer and Norm Fruchter, also contained excerpts from interviews with two San Francisco Newsreel members, Karen Buck and Marilyn Ross. Both women left Newsreel in 1970 during a split between (crudely simplified) supporters of life-style and Marxist politics. That they both favored the less Marxist alternative would suggest that their attitudes might be reasonably similar to New York's, and yet a markedly different point of view nonetheless emerges.

The New York spokesmen, Kramer and Fruchter, speak separately, and at greater length than the collective voice of the two women. Their concern is with confrontation—films as weapons, activism as battle, propaganda as forcing the audience to deal with where the Movement is at.
Militarism and highly charged emotions (hate, anger, frustration, above all, arrogance) dominate what they have to say. Buck and Ross, on the other hand, speak in cooler tones and, despite New York's empirical bias in their films and anti-correct line position, with a more pragmatic bent. They share the view of Newsreel as an "alternate medium" but rather than speculate about the purpose of that medium behind an ultra-left facade, they analyze its demands and achievements on the basis of their own Newsreel experience.

There are two points which they stress. First, that the Newsreel concept of a collective instead of a co-operative creates disturbing questions of assimilation: "assimilation of the filmmaker and the radical, assimilation of the individual into the collective. In making film together which reflect a collective movement of ideas and actions, rather than the individual reality of the artist, we must develop new values and forms, new criteria for individual interaction." They articulated what San Francisco's films realized: a dissolving of the crux of auteur theory, personality, into a collective endeavor. Even without the entrenched filmmaker nucleus of New York to react against, they recognized that "private political fantasies" could not suffice and that their destruction was a principal concern for the entire collective.

Secondly, they muted the arrogance of confronting people with Newsreel's attitudes and judgments by stressing the need to "confront people who are not motivated to go see
[Newsreels].

They had two proposals for achieving this end: taking the films to the people on the streets and in their community, and evaluating audience reaction to learn what makes effective propaganda. Neither idea received systematic development in San Francisco's subsequent history, unfortunately, but both ideas reflect an open, outward looking, more humble spirit than the wrenching metaphor of films as "can openers" that Kramer coined.

Buck and Ross cited the example of San Francisco's mobile truck as a means of reaching people who might not seek Newsreel out. It resembled the agit-train concept that flowered twice in Russia (during World War I and in 1931-1932) and the Film and Photo League's work among midwestern farmers and migratory workers (see page 14). But it never became a dominant form of distribution for San Francisco, perhaps because a truck did not create the fanfare of a train in post-revolutionary Russia or have an homogenous audience to connect with. Reaching street people (and people on the street) did not require a truck. A projector could be put in a car and the film thrown up on a wall. This proved easier and San Francisco abandoned the truck idea within their first year. (They also began to put less stock in reaching heterogenous masses of people on the street altogether.) Nonetheless, the idea reflected a conception of the propagandist's role that differed from much New Left militancy. Had they gone on to analyze which classes and social strata within classes such a method
reached, we might observe that the audience was not much
different from those they reached by more conventional means
on other occasion and the difference one more of attitude
than end result.

Their comments also contain a rudimentary attempt to
evaluate audience reaction. It is largely empirical and too
fragmentary to draw conclusions about propaganda work in
general. They note, for example, that middle-class groups
respond to the sync sound draft resistance films quite well
whereas young, draft eligible Chicanos do not. The
Chicanos, however, become very animated when the Haight Riot
(also known as The Haight) is shown. And yet, another
"action" film, Garbage, leaves them cold (see page 164) and
middle-class audiences befuddled. These responses are not
arbitrary or unfathomable (Third World people may have less
interest in symbolic actions than a counter-culture group
like the Motherfuckers), but Buck and Ross do not advocate
the kind of systematic study that would make the information
most valuable. They do, however, indicate a more responsive,
two-way perspective on the role of screenings that seemed
lost in New York Newsreel's initial confrontational fervor.

Ironically, San Francisco's structure resembled New
York's--anarchic, ultra-democracy. There were nonetheless
leaders, as in New York, and these leaders tended to be male,
but they were far less readily distinguished from the member-
ship by education, filmmaker training or wealth. This
prevailing homogeneity made change a far less wrenching process and by the end of the first year San Francisco Newsreel had raised and acknowledged the importance of the woman's question. Women began to occupy leadership roles and move away from relegation to "shitwork" assignments. Although the eradication of male chauvinism persisted as a goal rather than an accomplishment in some cases and areas, the priority was set and agreed upon without the compounding difficulty of class background and skill proficiency.

The slack nature of the structure, however, left considerable leeway for interpreting Newsreel's role within the Movement. As in New York Newsreel, many felt a primary allegiance to the Movement and only secondarily to film (a way, perhaps, of discounting the importance of understanding the principles of propaganda and filmmaking thoroughly). Much of the day to day film work was done sloppily—films shipped late, or in bad condition, speakers who failed to turn up at screenings, etc., a situation, of course, not unique to San Francisco Newsreel or even Newsreel as a whole. Everyone acknowledged the problem but few were prepared to face the alternative of tighter organization. By late 1969 small factions were exploring various organizing alternatives such as running a repair garage to organize neighborhood youth, managing a movement center, a printing facility and a health clinic. Programs for direction and action came and went with alarming frequency. Film work-teams had been organized by early 1969, principally
a "youth work team" and a "labor work team." They did not reflect a staunch policy of commitment to particular goals or constituencies, although the labor work team did become the germinating soil in which a Marxist orientation began to mature. Newsreel began to seem to be an organizing unit that happened to have some films. When this diffuseness of purpose became coupled to an absence of funds in late 1969, early '70, San Francisco Newsreel moved into a period of crisis that only slackened many long months later.

**S.F. Newsreel's Transitional Phase**

By the beginning of 1970 San Francisco Newsreel had completed a considerable number of films (12) and had begun to develop a Marxist orientation within those films. In fact, the only film completed since that time has been *The Woman's Film*. The evolution of a Marxist orientation took place through most of 1969 and by the end of that year it became clear that structural changes had to be made. (The actual development of a Marxist approach to propaganda can best be seen in the films themselves and will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.) Since funds had dropped to a dangerously low level by December, 1969 the group decided on two basic changes: a Steering Committee would oversee Newsreel's functioning and maintain priorities and procedures, and secondly, resources had to be restricted to the completion of two films already decided upon—*The Woman's Film* and a labor history film (presently in production).
Thus San Francisco Newsreel instituted a structure bordering on democratic centralism a full year before New York, at a time when the woman's question was the central question was the central issue in New York. Their tightened structure and the shearing off of some of their non-film related activities did not resolve all the differences of opinion, however, and a deep breach was still in the making.

There was sufficient solidarity and a clear enough point of view for San Francisco to take marked exception to the Leviathan article from New York Newsreel in Oct./Nov., 1969. In December, 1969 San Francisco printed an article of their own in The Movement that explored some of Buck and Ross' earlier points and clarified their differences with New York.20

The most striking difference is in San Francisco's openly Marxist-Leninist-Maoist rhetoric. While New York adopted an idiosyncratic, anti-correct line position, San Francisco forthrightly stated, "Our principal task is to help build a working-class movement that will address itself to the questions of imperialism, racism, women's liberation, and socialism in America."21 The article cites their working-class films, Oil Strike and PDM as effective tools for striking workers to use to win support and to form their own radical organizations. They cite their student oriented films (High School Rising, San Francisco State Strike) and community oriented film (Los Siete) as further examples of their Marxist orientation and dedication to Mao's principle
of "from the masses, to the masses." 22

The article conveys an open, adaptive attitude toward both filmmaking and organizing that contrasts sharply with New York's more abstract (yet anti-idealist) generalizations on, say, what a film about "Housing" or "WORK" must be like. San Francisco discusses their work with the GI movement, for example, and points out the great difficulties that exist. (They acknowledge, for example, that many GI's are leery of naive organizers but denounce politics hidden beneath a bushel basket as "stoned opportunism.") They discuss, as did Buck and Ross, the GI's response to various films and offer concrete suggestions on how to run a screening-discussion in that particular situation.

Their concluding quotation from Ho Chi Minh reflects the kind of attitudes that inspired their working-class films and is a good indication of the values that New York and San Francisco still consider most important (as well as a fairly transparent attack on Kramer's tone):

They [revolutionary cadre] must be kind-hearted, open-minded and sincere. Each gesture, each attitude must conquer people's hearts . . . Before the people, a revolutionary cadre has no right to assume a haughty and arrogant attitude as if he were a revolutionary warlord. He must be modest. 23

It is perhaps an indication of San Francisco's relatively advanced position that this article and a considerable string of Marxist-oriented films could be produced while the collective contained members basically lifestyle and anarchist in orientation along with others more
decidedly Marxist leaning. Both groups (they were not visibly definable as factions yet) shared an appreciation of Marxism, even though their differences in methodology and emphasis eventually pulled them into contending factions.

San Francisco continued to operate with a steering committee (or central committee) and work teams through the early part of 1970. The contradictions that had begun to emerge between life-style and working-class politics had already fomented the Weatherman split from SDS and the Cleaver-Seale debate about lumpenproletariat vs. industrial proletariat as principal agency. As Newsreel continued to experience financial hardship—a fund raising drive failed partly because of insufficient planning—with a concomitant curtailment of film production, its own contradictions came into sharper focus. Finally, in June, 1970, they came to a head.

Newsreel ran out of money altogether. At the same time they were committed to completing the two film projects they had already decided on. In spite of this dilemma a group of members (largely from the youth work team) proposed making a film of an Armed Forces Day rally sponsored by MDM (Movement for a Democratic Military). They argued that "it's important and the GI's need it" as well as that they would provide political leadership, something Newsreel, with its limited personnel and resources, had already decided against. The remaining members insisted on dropping the project but its advocates decided to send a film crew anyway.
During the next week or so, the group divided into two factions where each group analyzed their position and prepared a statement of how they proposed to function. When the two factions met together it became clear that co-operation was not possible (essentially, those supporting the GI film did not approve of the proposed tightening of discipline) and the collective split.²⁷ The majority of the members (about 15) remained to regroup into the present Newsreel structure. The dissenting minority disbanded and, although some of them made a woman's film, Herstory (sic), they have not continued as a filmmaking unit.

The new structure relied upon democratic centralism (criticism/self-criticism, the continuation and strengthening of a central committee) and a division of labor that reflected the group's economic crisis.* The majority paper in general reflected the continuing influence of the Bay Area RU and the Black Panther Party as well as the pervasiveness of the thoughts of Chairman Mao. Its political analysis is brief and essentially digested from these sources; its concept of propaganda work is, of necessity, more directly their own creation.

San Francisco Newsreel envisioned three types of film (note the difference to New York's initial categories of news, education and tactics): films about National

*See Appendix A for the majority paper from San Francisco Newsreel.

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Liberation struggles (e.g., MayDay, and their Fateh film, currently in production); "films for other classes designed to win support for the proletariat" (no completed films are given as examples); and, third, films "aimed at the white segment of the working class because we are best equipped [being white] to serve them . . . Our films will comment on the racism, male chauvinism and the petty bourgeois ideology of the white working class which we see as the three main obstacles that divide the working class."28

Since San Francisco has only released The Woman's Film since the split, measuring their achievement of these goals is still premature, and their perception of what their goals and politics actually are may well have shifted since mid-1970. The decision to acknowledge their own racial composition and work primarily with the white working-class is a major one, however, and reflects an important step away from the adventuristic, romantic tendency to glorify other races and other cultures from the outside (see Lincoln Center, People's War and Isle of Youth for examples). On the other hand it is perhaps a very obvious decision that blacks have been urging white radicals to accept for several years, but for film propaganda work it could be a momentous one. A great number of Newsreel and radical but non-Newsreel films have dealt with imperialism and the domestic colonies of black and Third World people (The Murder of Fred Hampton, Bushman, Angela, and Newsreel's Black Panther films are a few examples) rather than the filmmaker's almost
invariably white background where there seems to be, perhaps, a dearth of "action." Other films on the New Left itself like Amerika or Columbia Revolt were often about whites but seldom confronted racism as a specific, vital issue. While groups like the Panthers have been urging whites to organize working class whites in order to form a basis for principled, united action, film propagandists have been slow to heed the call. And while many now recognize a need for multi-national, radical groups it may be difficult for film propagandists to make that leap when there are still compelling needs for organizing material that boldly confronts the three stumbling blocks to working-class unity that Newsreel perceives (racism, sexism, petty bourgeois ideology).*

New Directions

In order to realize their more strictly prescribed objectives and to overcome the economic crisis that threatened to destroy them, Newsreel took a bold step into the unexplored region of a planned economy.29 The move advanced them well beyond the organizational principles of the Film and Photo League in the even more desperate thirties and required greater stringency than other, less hard-pressed

*Of these, sexism and racism are undoubtedly the most fundamental obstacles. See Shulamith Firestone's book, The Dialectics of Sex and a pamphlet with two articles, "White Blindspot," by Noel Ignatin and "Can White Workers Radicals be Radicalized" by Ted Allen (Radical Education Project, Detroit, Mich.) for cogent arguments on the nature of each.
collectives expect today.

Economics and politics found a remarkably balanced treatment in the Newsreel economic plan. The members would be divided into three groups: work furlough, film production and distribution. (See Appendix A for further details of the plan.) The latter two groups are relatively self-explanatory. The Woman's Film remained the highest priority and in distribution greater emphasis on mass, commercial screenings (to generate income) and on expansion into the white working-class were made primary goals.

Work furloughs were a more innovative step that overcame several problems: the discrepancy between members who had to work and those who did not (such as occurred in New York); the desperate need for income; and the politically important need for exposure to the working-class milieu. On page six of the majority paper San Francisco Newsreel quotes Chairman Mao's remarks that the test of a revolutionary intellectual is his day-to-day association with the workers and peasants. There are three degrees of association according to Mao: looking around or "looking at the flowers while on horseback;" staying a few months or "dismounting to look at the flowers;" and finally "settling down." Since members were expected to take working-class jobs, the work furlough program allowed them to dismount "to look at the flowers." Some of their earnings would be used to support those working in the other two areas and the remainder would form a personal stipend. Film production
itself, however, still requires outside financing and has been largely stymied by the lack of available funds. The decision to submit to the discipline of the Central Committee and to support comrades economically as well as politically, clearly took the flippancy or as an ex-New York Newsreel member called it, "the fun" out of revolution. And while it did not demand that members be solemn and poker-faced, it did promote a consciousness of participating in a serious endeavor, one worth doing well, with total commitment and pre-determined policies. This still burgeoning form of consciousness has prompted San Francisco Newsreel to reread many of their political texts and to inaugurate a prolonged, carefully planned program of political education. It has even (for the first time in Newsreel history) prompted them to begin a study of film theory and propaganda. Such stirrings are a solid indication that Newsreel is beginning to take its responsibility to produce quality propaganda seriously rather than rely on others to point out the issues which their own, largely intuitive skills will put on film. San Francisco Newsreel has given continuing evidence of a desire to learn from how their films are received. Perhaps they will now begin to study the principles that govern how film structure can elicit responses and contain a point of view in order to broaden and deepen that reception instead of depending primarily on political timeliness for a following of faithful.

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Since the split in the middle of 1970, San Francisco Newsreel has also formalized an earlier tendency within the filmmaking procedure. Films like Black Panther, San Francisco State Strike, and particularly, Los Siete, were made with the advice and assistance of people directly involved in what the film shows. Scripts and structure were arrived at by a collective, inter-group exercise that attempted to mediate between Newsreel's political analysis and the priorities that the film's subjects perceived themselves. Los Siete, for example, has a very limited amount of political analysis but gives considerable stress to the community's problems and the personal dimensions of the seven brother's imprisonment.

As Newsreel regrouped its forces around the woman's film project and, secondarily, a labor history film, they put this principle into even greater practice. Instead of relating to their constituency through a skills training program they chose to do it primarily through their filmmaking projects. For the woman's film months were spent talking with women and women's groups before the script and the actual subjects were chosen. Then, after the rough-cut was made, the women in the film viewed it and made further suggestions. For the labor history film, the procedure has been intensified to the point where approximately fifty groups or individuals have been asked to comment on their proposed script.

This form of pre-production consultation seems an
excellent way to avoid making films that excite their makers but wind up miles away from those they are made for. At the same time, it flirts with several dangers. First, depending upon a group’s seriousness and sense of direction, it can become a way of hoping for others to provide guidance. If a group feels insecure about its own ability, it is prone to accept criticism before asking what are the interests and background of the particular critic(s). Second, the criticism or suggestions may ignore important considerations for the propagandist. If too much emphasis is given to particular kinds of criticism, and it is taken at face value, the film product may reflect that distortion. The most obvious example is that other political groups will have even less understanding of film as an art or propaganda medium. (Significantly, S.F. Newsreel has consulted a wide range of political groups and individuals but no leftists working in the film medium themselves like Landow, Wexler, and de Antonio whose politics they would obviously disagree with but who might be able to supply technical and aesthetic advice. Consequently, their political advisors will scrutinize the political analysis or "line" most thoroughly, but have relatively little to say about matters such as style or pace. For a group like Newsreel which has always tended to emphasize the political over the aesthetic, this can be a hazard. Although a long line of critical thought (both bourgeois and Marxist) has argued for the unity of style and content, this form of suggestion-gathering may
encourage the already manifest tendency to place the two in hierarchical relationship.

Jay Leyda comments on a similar situation in Russia when film scripts, and subsequently, the completed film were submitted to worker's committees for approval. The bureaucracy itself was one problem, but aside from that the method meant that less attention went to style, method, technique, etc., since content and subject matter preoccupy the lay mind (a fact also observable in much criticism written by non-film specialists whether radical or reactionary). In Russia the only anomaly was a continuing admiration for a "showy photographic manner" regardless of its purpose or effect. 36 For Newsreel, the sync interview seems to be becoming equally unquestioned as an important technique. In both cases the danger is not that the filmmaker(s) will be unaware of the built-in biases of his advisors so much as that he will lose the motivating energy to go beyond those biases--just as a Hollywood filmmaker knows the extent to which he can be innovative. Overcoming this danger will depend upon the openness of Newsreel to other filmmakers whose politics they may not share. If Newsreel assumes an aloof attitude and points to its advanced political line for self-justification, the danger can only grow. If Newsreel is as open to aesthetic inquiry as it is to the influx of political suggestions from other groups; if Newsreel seeks technical and formal advice as well as political suggestions, then an essential process of dialogue will be soundly begun. (Please consult Addendum.)
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FILMS OF SAN FRANCISCO NEWSREEL

San Francisco Newsreel's first film, Black Panther, is the only film not made by the ongoing members of the group. It is nonetheless integral to the group's development and represents a significantly different starting point than New York's draft resistance and counter-culture films. San Francisco Newsreel, from the start, abandoned the campus citadel for the oppressed community and the protagonist as street fighter for the analytical Marxist.

We have already discussed some of the Black Panther's contributions to Newsreel's growth. The personal strength and spiritual vigor behind those contributions dominate Black Panther. The film is simply conceived, interviews with Huey P. Newton (in Alameda County Jail), Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale, intercut with each other and with shots of Black Panthers practicing close order drill and demonstrating outside the Alameda County Courthouse. The film is spiced with sufficient cut-aways to keep the interviews from creating a static impression; a particularly effective combination is a long tracking shot (from a car) of a black ghetto area coupled to Bobby Seale's description of the Party's 10 Point Program. The connection is
oblique but not obscure. Instead of an obvious translation of Seale's description into shots of police brutality, avaricious businessmen, overcrowded jails and welfare lines, we only see the outer shell, the general milieu, within which the struggle for black liberation must take place. The image leaves the Panther's program unfixed to specific examples, joins it with the entire black community and unifies it through a single take. It is, I believe, one of the rare examples of superior artistry in Newsreel films.

The spokesmen who were emergent leaders then are household words today. They may not be very much better understood, however, and one of the film's great assets (evidenced by its extensive use by the Panther's for recruitment) is that Black Panther introduces us to these three individuals in an unobtrusive, personal manner. They are not demagogues inciting mobs nor extremists mouthing absurdities. Each man conveys something of his personal reserve of humor, humility and determination that scale the caricatures sketched by the mass media back down to human size.

The film's aesthetic appeal derives largely from a rhythmic structure. Other Newsreel films often lack a coherent rhythm for a variety of reasons but here fifteen minutes of film time sweep past in rapid succession. Each interview is fortunate to have a speaker whose delivery is distinctive and lively. Cleaver has an assertive, parrying cadence while Newton uses a more gentle, instructional gait.
Seale has a straightforward, mildly inflected rhythm that finally rips into an explosive conclusion that also ends the film: "We’re gonna say to the whole damned government, 'Stick 'em up, motherfucker; this is a hold-up!' . "

By intercutting the interviews regularly and by introducing the cut-away material, these internal rhythms are built upon to form a structural rhythm for the film as a whole. The cut-away images also contain compelling rhythms of their own, usually militaristic ones: the drilling and Panthers chanting in front of the Alameda County Courthouse,

The revolution has come,
Off the Pigs!
It’s time to pick up the gun,
Off the Pigs!

And finally by building the separate camera shots into a rhythm of their own (notably the long tracking shot joined to static interview shots), the filmmakers create a unified, absorbing whole. There is no riot footage to spellbind the unmoved. The charisma of the men’s personalities works a powerful spell of its own and their arguments stand in clear view, unobscured by the emotional thunderstorms of confrontation theory. We are invited to relate to them and the Black Panther Party not solely on the basis of our presuppositions but also by virtue of their reasoned explanations and the fresh, lively cadence of the film. As much as any Newsreel, it fulfills Dziga-Vertov’s exuberant conception of newsreel films as "fragments of actual energy (not theatrical energy)
with their intervals condensed into a cumulative whole by the great mastery of an editing technique." This combination of assets has made Black Panther the most widely screened of all Newsreel films.

Making a first film, raising funds to support the group, and acquiring a few elementary film skills occupied the bulk of 1968. Black Panther was released in the fall of 1968, (number 19 in the national catalogue). It and the slightly earlier Columbia Revolt helped stabilize Newsreel as an organization by stimulating interest and guaranteeing rental income.*

The greatest proportion of San Francisco Newsreel's film production to date took place in 1969 when eight major films were made. Prior to the release of most of these films San Francisco also produced a few short "turn on" films such as Haight Riot (also known as The Haight) and Zulu. These films were deliberately gimmicky, usually intercutting disconnected events to create ironic or satiric juxtaposition. The sound track usually consisted of rock music with no commentary. The bulk of the "turn on" films came from New York Newsreel and their intention was just that—to turn-on the audience before going on to the

*A crucial supplement to this rental income was the rental gained from the supply of Third World films that Newsreel often had exclusive distribution rights to, e.g. Medina Boe, Nossa Terra, Story of a Battle, Threatening Skies, etc.
"heavier" documentaries.

Although they were relatively cheap and easy to make their production was discontinued in 1969 as Newsreel recognized the need for more analytical presentations. The "turn on" films never even attempted to analyze the historical forces which they portrayed. Emotional impact was placed at a premium, but for those still unconvinced about police brutality or capitalist decadence, the films could be more accurately termed "turn off" films. Today these films are no longer listed in the catalogues and are seldom, if ever, screened.

In 1969, San Francisco Newsreel's production burgeoned in several directions--toward the campus, the community and worker. The first film made that year, Oil Strike, reflects the latter direction and is cited by Newsreel members as a major catalyst in their growth as a Marxist collective. Newsreel had already become involved in the San Francisco State Strike which had begun in fall, 1968 and through contact with the students there joined in support of a wildcat strike by oil workers in Richmond, California which they subsequently recorded in Oil Strike.

The film describes the worker's demands, documents the worker's disillusionment with democratic processes and concludes with a rally where a call for student/worker unity is made, a fairly uncommon call in early 1969 at a worker's rally rather than a campus meeting. The structure resembles Black Panther and in some ways improves upon it although
Oil Strike lacks the tight-knit impact of the former film. Like Army (released in fall, 1969), Oil Strike uses "enemy" footage to great advantage. The introduction consists of the concluding minute or so from a pro-company documentary that describes the many advantages of working for Standard Oil. A voice-over narration then describes the worker's demands, which are traditional, trade union ones—a pay increase, medical insurance and a pension program—but the company refused to negotiate and the wildcat strike began.

The most revealing part of the film for a Movement with many voices urging radicals to give up on the reactionary white worker, lies in the interviews with white workers and their wives. One woman says, "I have no more respect for the law." A man explains, "I was a law-abiding citizen. I always figured the cops were there to protect me, but now I see that's only if I don't get out of line." Other workers say they've discovered that both the police and their own lives are controlled by corporate giants and invisible businessmen. Whereas the insights may be old hat to the New Left, they are searing indictments from the forgotten worker. His rhetoric may be less catchy, his analysis less penetrating, but for those who consider revolution impossible without working class leadership they are the most exciting words of the film.

The emotional climax of the film comes when we learn that a worker died after being run over by a scab-driven oil truck. The camera follows the funeral procession in
tracking shots that parallel the company gates, draped with black ribbons. The sequence is reminiscent of the tracking shot that accompanies Bobby Seale's description of the 10 Point Program and effectively conveys the worker's solidarity against a backdrop of corporate domination (The refinery plant with its long, slender chimneys is plainly visible in the background). This emotional climax is fitting in that the strike also died without winning its objectives and it has far broader impact than the more usual climactic montage of riot footage (very little police brutality is recorded at all). Nonetheless, the climax turns from a study of process—the radicalization of white workers—to an emotional and moral appeal. We do not hear from workers how they responded to this unnecessary death. The event is related directly to the viewer by voice-over as though this were our "real" point of contact (sympathy, outrage) rather than an understanding of our common cause with the worker's revolutionary consciousness that the film has already surveyed but left dangling. Overlaying a Beatle song, "Hey Jude," while obliquely appropriate on one level, further tends to sublimate Dick Jones' death into an abstracted emotional effect rather than exploring the ramifications of that death within its particular context. Had the death been situated within the context of the worker reaction, the song may have helped intensify the emotional effect of the funeral on the workers, and by extension, us. Without that situating effort, however, the death takes on a
timeless quality (the Unknown Worker sort of idea) which can be moving but only at the expense of its most integral rootedness in historical conflict.

The Oil Worker’s union (The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union) is predominately white, a fact which the film does not stress and whose implications it does not explore. The degree to which racism has been an effective barrier to working-class unity may not have been fully apparent to Newsreel at this stage, but their familiarity with the Black Panther Party’s Program should have alerted them to the importance of tackling the question. It may not have been possible to show black and Chicano workers where none, or few, exist, but the realignment of the white workers’ allegiances could have been easily analyzed in terms of racism.

Irwin Silber pinpointed the film’s importance when he wrote, "I can see [the film] having particular value with student groups who may still have some confusion about the central role of the working-class in the revolutionary process." While the film does not really set out to convince anyone of the white worker’s central role in such a process, it certainly helped persuade Newsreel itself and has worked to dislodge biases from others also. For San Francisco Newsreel it also served the very important role of providing them with an entrée to the working class that the other Newsreel films failed to offer. In 1972, Oil Strike remains the most explicitly working class oriented film and
consequently, of great organizing value. (Newsreel also distributes *Finally Got the News*, partially made by Newsreel members, which is a much superior film, aesthetically and politically, but not strictly Newsreel made.)

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The tendency toward working-class propaganda that *Oil Strike* represented remained well obscured by the range of San Francisco's other films. These films, however, unlike *Amerika* and *Summer '68*, did not dwell on the Movement's leadership but on the conditions and processes by which large numbers of individuals become radicalized. The Panther films are the primary exception to this rule and they are now the films with the strongest historical flavor. The attitudes and analysis of the Movement's leadership had changed noticeably since 1968-69 whereas the radicalization process has remained more or less the same.

*High School Rising*, for example, is a film that seems to gain in currency as the crisis in the public school system continues to deepen. Regretably, *High School Rising* is one of San Francisco's weaker films (its budget was extremely small) and it lacks the dynamism of *Oil Strike* and *Black Panther*. The film couples a considerable number of stills and live footage from Mission High School in San Francisco to a sound track of student voices explaining the school system's "pacification program". As in *Army* and *Columbia Revolt* the voice-over technique is relatively successful (the voices seem to belong to the environment under
examination unlike the Newsreel voices in *Isle of Youth* or *Lincoln Center*) and the use of popular songs entirely appropriate.

The film dwells on the irrelevance of education for working-class youth, repression by the police and administration, and the racist and class nature of the tracking system. It is aimed at those who experience these situations, the students themselves, a fact that caused the House Internal Security Committee considerable alarm. The brevity of the film (15 minutes) and the liveliness of the songs are its greatest assets, but the static, generally unrevealing images are a heavy burden. They are mute testimony of the hasty planning and uncoordinated shooting and rob the film of sound/image counterpoint. The images merely supplement the sound track the way silent films sometimes translated their titles into visual equivalents—reading, for example, "He was more depressed than ever," then seeing the hero sitting extremely morose in an arm chair.

Some of the student voices are uninteresting, without emotion or clarity, and the mixture of complaints, insights and thwarted ambitions lacks coherence. The complexity of the values that teachers and administrators harbor, and the levels of complicity at which students interact with this hierarchy are not nearly as richly probed as in Frederick Wiseman's documentary *High School*. The latter film, however, records their interplay without commentary (it is a cinéma-vérité film), an approach Newsreel
could not accept since it severely limits the opportunity to impose an interpretation to images that have been made in the imperialist ideological camp, as Godard reminds us. Wiseman's achievement might well serve as a useful study aid should Newsreel decide to return to the contradictions of public education, though.

* * *

A third film completed in the spring of 1969 was Mayday, a sequel, as it were, to Black Panther. The film begins with a general, voice-over explanation of Mayday's history and then moves to this particular Mayday on which the Black Panthers hold a rally. The speakers include Bobby Seale and Kathleen Cleaver and the power of the film rests squarely on the power of the speakers. Their voices are militant, determined and self-confident. They describe the Panther Free Breakfast Program, the police raid on the Panther headquarters and why Huey P. Newton must be freed while members hand out the little red book to the crowd. The largely black crowd cheers and chants in unison, "Free Huey/Off the pig." Clenched fists fill the air and the atmosphere seems electrified with emotion.

Unlike Black Panther the film's structure is loosely woven and poorly paced, leaving no means of arousing interest outside the political rhetoric itself. Hence, although the speeches are crammed with violent rhetoric, they seem dropped within an aesthetic cludge that dissipates their power. In comparison with a film like High School
Rising, however, the visuals are crisp and to the point. Close-ups are tightly framed, crowd shots well composed. Few shots have the diffuse aimlessness that dominates the other film. Cut-aways illustrate what the speakers describe (the Free Breakfast Program, the shoot-out at Panther headquarters) without falling into the simplistic, one to one correlation that exists between image and sound in High School Rising. The Free Breakfast Program for example, is shown not simply with shots of black children eating at a table, but with shots of black men and women preparing the food and serving the children, illustrating the principle of "serve the people" that underpins the speaker's points and the program's purpose. This superiority, though, is to a definitely inferior film and Mayday consistently fails to match the even greater use of visuals in Oil Strike or Black Panther.

By centering upon a political rally, Mayday virtually builds in certain limitations. The political speech is a familiar form and not well-known for its rational structure or personal openness. The political speech exists as a carefully assembled emotional weapon which, like advertising, is usually most explosive at unconscious levels. It is seldom the first instrument to emerge from a politician's or organizer's arsenal since what a sympathetic listener, one who has already begun to feel his needs can be filled by the speaker's proposals, may consider deep-seated truths, the sceptical listener may easily construe as demagoguery. The
political speech is thus a form best suited to fueling the vigor of cadre, not to winning the sympathies of the broad mass of uncommitted. The sceptical are not likely to get beyond the form whose caricature-like resemblance to normal discourse intrudes upon their identification with its "message." As much as in any medium, in fact, the form is the content and to be put-off or disquieted by the former is never to assimilate the latter. Hence, the underlying content, the articulate analysis and carefully conceived program which fuels the emotional form/content of a rally speech never really surfaces and contact is never made. Even the speakers are less likely to emerge as many faceted individuals and more as fanatics. *Mayday* is an example of "tailism" as much as *Summer '68*, its greatest virtue, however, is that it tails after the most advanced political group at that time. For those not already familiar with the Panther program, though, its usefulness ranks well below that of *Black Panther* or *Interview with Bobby Seale*.

The danger of isolating a film from the context in which it appears can be succinctly illustrated by *Mayday*. Although it has seen far less use than the other Panther films, it nonetheless appears to have the power to open up minds and transform perceptions within certain situations. For example, *Newsreel* took it to the first meeting of an MDM chapter (Movement for a Democratic Military) near a Marine base. A Black Panther led the discussion which began
with the black Marines on one side of the room and the white Marines on the other. After some general comments a white Marine got up and said, "I'm glad I came, because I thought the Panthers were racists, but the film specifically lays out that they're not the real racists." According to a Newsreel member present, "A black Marine then got up and said, 'Yeah, well so did I,' and it was the beginning of one of the most fantastic discussions I ever heard in my life." The story illustrates the disparity between a group's identity when it describes itself and when the mass media describes it. When the context shifts from the six o'clock news in the living room to a Newsreel film in a meeting place, even a weak film can have considerable impact.

* * *

Some of San Francisco Newsreel's best films result directly from their opportunity to document a wide range of Bay Area activism. The Black Panther films and Oil Strike exemplify this and so does San Francisco State Strike (also known as State Strike). The strike began in November, 1968 and stretched out until the spring of 1969. Newsreel made their film near the latter part of the strike after their contacts with the strike leaders had already led them to the making of the Oil Strike film (the striking students actively supported the oil workers and manned the picket lines in considerable numbers). The San Francisco State Strike film examines the reasons for the strike—the general miseducation, racism, and tracking policies as well as the
most immediate issue, a hamstrung black studies program. Spokesmen are heard speaking at rallies and directly for the film; President Hayakawa is seen tearing up student petitions and throwing them into a crowd of listeners; and, for a climax, the police swarm across the campus clubbing students, professors and sympathizers from the community.

The film affords a good opportunity for a comparison of New York and San Francisco's political environment and their film response since both groups filmed college strikes. It should be clear from the start, however, that they did not film identical situations. Columbia Revolt was shot a year earlier. Columbia University is an elite institution, a traditional fount of ruling class entrepreneurs and managers. Columbia's rebels had two goals--stopping gym construction for the blacks, radicalizing other students for the whites--although both groups agreed on militant tactics. Community support was relatively weak (non-militant, few in numbers) and the strike lasted only two months.

San Francisco State College is a working-class, commuter college whose graduates fill lower echelon bureaucratic posts, teaching jobs and skilled labor positions. Minority groups have strong representation and they resent their continuing proletarianization at the college level. The strike had strong community support and lasted almost an entire school year. There is no evidence that S.F. Newsreel considered counter-culture ideology a vital force as New York did in beautifully rendering the candle-light wedding
of two student activists. There is ample evidence of black and Chicano leadership and of strike solidarity across student/faculty and college/community boundaries. The film's voice-over narration and the strike spokesmen stress the explicitly repressive nature of the school's role, a role that affects each student in his daily life, unlike the exploitative nature of Columbia's external policies which only affect the students with a social conscience. Accepting and adopting ruling class ideology may also be crippling to an individual, but it on a different, less easily perceived and experienced level from that of becoming an object of ruling class ideology.

These differences help explain some of the differences between the films. State Strike views the conflicting forces from a more Marxist position and reflects little concern with issues like amnesty (moral justification) and confrontations (emotional release) that surface throughout Columbia Revolt. The film is briefer (22 vs. 50 minutes), with a quick pace that is something of a disadvantage in that many issues are touched upon but few receive elaboration. Whereas Columbia Revolt may have less advanced politics, they are more fully developed and clearly presented than in State Strike.

The later film however, contains the most graphic and the most provocative riot footage of any Newsreel. Rather than presenting an action montage to represent "violence" as a concept, the camera follows specific actions
to their completion. The result is less aesthetically complex but its very simplicity lends it a transparency that makes the violence all the more intense. We see a woman student pulled and shoved by a policeman from the street to a police van and as she is pushed inside another policeman appears shoving and grappling a male student to another van while he bleeds profusely from the face and head. Likewise, as the police charge through a wooded area a black student turns, blocks an officer's blow, kicks him in the groin and wrestles him to the ground. The camera does not cut-away, though, and the shot continues until four or five policemen catch the student and beat him mercilessly.

The intensely emotional quality of the riot footage, in fact, can overwhelm the film's predominantly analytical tone. When Newsreel members in Los Angeles screened the film, for example, they found that white or liberal audiences generally became uneasy over the black student's counter-attack in particular. The audience's beliefs often had a pacifist tone and an organizer attempting to discuss self-defense would invariably find the discussion centering on that scene. On the other hand, black or Third World audiences generally responded with great enthusiasm, the way many cheer when the bugle sounds and the cavalry charges out against the Indians--except that the charger and chargee, have been reversed. In this context, the film provides a perfect occasion for agreeing on the necessity of self-defense. In either case far more interest is
directed at this moment of violence than at the long sequences preceding and examining the causes leading up to it.

It may not be entirely coincidental that so much of the photography of *The Strawberry Statement* resembles that of *Columbia Revolt* (see page 79). A Hollywood film about maturation through the assimilation of experience is not that far removed in theme from the life-style politics that *Columbia Revolt* documents. It would be difficult to conceive of a Hollywood film, however, with as similarly consistent a cinéma-vérité documentation of violence or as equally great a stress on historical, material analysis as *State Strike*. It is a measure of *State Strike*’s superiority as a propaganda weapon that it retains a currency in its examination of the student’s changing situation and a particular, violent response to that shift while *Columbia Revolt* has largely faded into historical artifact as the specific issues that made the Columbia gym a controversial project have subsided or been displaced.

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San Francisco Newsreel’s other campus-oriented film involved the widely publicized people’s park in Berkeley, California. Called *People’s Park*, the film once again indicates the degree to which San Francisco Newsreel followed after major political events to which there were only infrequent counterparts in New York. San Francisco had not yet articulated a priority of exploring the underlying
contradictions (the causes) rather than the surface eruptions (the effects) in their films, but the importance of the eruptions, at least internally—for the Movement—was frequently considerable and San Francisco was there to see the story told.

People's Park attempts to do what State Strike does more successfully—examine the underlying struggle between corporate interests and the students. It is handicapped in that many of the student participants in building the park do not see the struggle very clearly. Many are anarchists or counter-culture advocates with more interest in doing their own thing than in understanding why "they" want to stop them. (The students involved are also almost exclusively white with very few black or Third World representatives.) Newsreel's solution was to begin with a sync narration: a student stands by the fence that finally settled around the once-bustling park and explains the university's corporate ties and the essential role that the concept of private property plays within that matrix. He concludes that the anarchic take-over of private land, even if it is dormant, represents a threat, even though symbolic, that had to be countered with brutal violence. Hence the battle of people's park.

People's Park's peak distribution period did not last much more than a year, partly because the Movement had left the campus and partly because the confrontation was more of a happening than a revolutionary event with
continuing importance in the historical flow of events.

Outside of the introductory comments the film is also short on analysis and the actual violence is less forcefully recounted than in State Strike. Because the interpretation of the nature of the conflict exists further outside the participants than in State Strike, the film conveys a more subjective tone. The meaning seems more arbitrarily imposed, less visible to the participant's consciousness. Our reaction to the film also operates in a more subjective manner; our predispositions count for more since there is little argument and minimal evidence to overcome them.

Whereas the better part of State Strike is devoted to the root causes of the strike, the bulk of People's Park dwells on the youthful exuberance of the students and the grim authoritarianism of the police and soldiers. It is reminiscent of the Columbia Revolt scenes that record communal life inside the buildings. Both sequences disclose and glorify a very important source of Movement energy but they neglect the most vital ones—the class struggle, the struggle for the means of production and scientific experiment—\(^{17}\)—the ones that provide the tactics and strategies as well as the energy.

After the worst of the violence has occurred, the filmmakers interview a local resident who praises the police for shooting at the "kids." There is little in the overall form of the film to persuade a viewer with similar sentiments to question, let alone change, his views. People's
Park raises the nagging problem of making films that only work for the already committed without offering any clear indication of a solution. Tacked on analysis seems far too inadequate. Stronger consideration to what is selected for filming and how the material context is perceived by the subjects would seem an avenue suggested only in a negative sense, by the failure of this material and these subjects to overcome the foremost obstacle to the propagandist—people’s preconceptions.

* * *

Preconceptions do not materialize out of thin air and another San Francisco Newsreel examines precisely this point in some detail. Los Siete (the Seven) is set in San Francisco’s multi-national ghetto, the Mission District, and revolves around the arrest of seven Latino youths for the murder of a plainclothes policeman. The film was made to build community support for the seven before they went to trial, it was San Francisco’s first attempt to make an explicitly local film with a singular purpose.

The film was shot in the summer of 1969 and released that fall. The filmmakers were already known to the community and friends of Los Siete from earlier activities such as organizing a street theater and following the struggles at San Francisco State College and San Mateo Junior College. They knew the background of the Mission’s diverse population of Central Americans, South Americans, and Indonesians and the persisting conflicts fomented by the problems of

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immigration, a generation gap and racism. Many of the Mission inhabitants came from racist countries like Ecuador where blacks can stay no more than three days. Their vision of America had come from the movie screen—an all-white nation of mobility and affluence—but they found themselves trapped in the Mission where white skin is the exception and affluence a dream. Many parents disapproved of school strikes because education seemed the ladder to success. Many youths grew bitter towards schools worse than the ones they'd left behind but in which they failed because their English was rudimentary. Older youths, many in their twenties, were strung out between two worlds, one left behind, the other inaccessible. It was a community divided against itself by age, by race, by nationality. Without unity in the community the seven youths would be quietly shunted into prisons to be forgotten and their political organizing work abandoned.

Los Siete expresses the perceived reality of the people in order to begin with preconceptions that can then be reshaped into new patterns. The film opens in South America with stills of peasant farmers, then moves to a family in the Mission District discussing the problems of adjustment (in Spanish), to interviews with youths in a street gang, to conditions in the high school and the college. There is no voice-over narration. Each aspect is described by the people who experience it most directly—the bewildered parents, the frustrated young men, the activist.
students. Into this careful progression an incident intrudes: the death of a policeman and the ensuing influx of police with cries of terrorism, vandalism and anarchy by Mayor Alioto and the press. Six of the seven organizers accused of the killing are apprehended and held in custody. The film contrasts the newspaper stories of virtual lawlessness with the loosely structured but humane web of relationships that the Mission community itself recognizes and describes. The contrast between newspaper accounts and the descriptions by people themselves makes an effective commentary on the role of the media.

The comparison also initiates the turning point in the film. A voice speaking over black leader tells us, "Out of this a revolutionary group was formed." The film then proceeds to describe the work of Los Siete de La Raza, to defend the seven brothers (in the figurative sense) and build up a portrait of the seven through interviews and description. Because the film began where the average viewer (in the Mission District) would begin and describes his problems and the myriad, small contradictions between preconception and material reality, the leap to the political organization is not forced. Within the context of the film, in fact, it appears as a resolving vector, moving the people to a clearer view of the forces that propel them in contradictory directions.

The natural, inevitable tendency toward resolution along a political vector is best expressed by the concluding
images. A speaker stands in front of a rock band at a local park. Throughout the park people are clustered enjoying picnics and conversation. They have not come to a political rally; the political rally has come to them. The speaker and his cause have come from the community and are returning to it. As he speaks of the aspirations of the seven brothers to help the people of the Mission District, of the need for decent housing and an adequate diet, we see two children at a park bench eating their picnic lunch. The shot's simplicity and unplanned simultaneity effectively links the political and personal, the community and the individual, the seven and the many. It makes the perfect ending to a very fine film.

Measuring "success," however, with any precision is virtually impossible with Newsreel films. There are no statistics of persuasiveness and no studies of response. Los Siete, however, saw considerable use within the community as the trial date approached (each of four prints was screened several times weekly). It also stimulated the legal defense and community organization, Los Siete de la Raza, to articulate its principles into a 5 point program and, by taking the camera eye and ear to people who had begun to give upon themselves, it testified to their worth and dignity far more powerfully than any tract could do. Los Siete detects the drama, the conflict, that exists within a given situation with great precision and links it to the resolving forces of social and political action more
skillfully than the great majority of Newsreel films. No "line" is imposed; no single act is demanded. The line and action that evolve do so organically from preconceptions, dawning realizations and the active struggle to alter conditions and consciousness. Los Siete answers the question of "for whom" it is made from the start and more peripheral audiences must look on as, in a sense, admiring voyeurs.

This admiration, however, would be greatly increased and perhaps made less detached were it not for two audio flaws. The most crippling is the low quality of the sound track and may be beyond improvement. The second is that large portions of the speeches are in Spanish, but Newsreel is attempting to put out a dubbed or subtitled version. As it is, groups outside the Mission District generally find the film too difficult to follow and not worth screening. That the film was otherwise assembled with considerable care is perhaps indicated by the fact that it took months to shoot but only one week to edit. Had this care extended to the sound track, Los Siete could very well rank as one of Newsreel's most important films.

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By late 1969 San Francisco Newsreel had explored a variety of approaches to propaganda: recording the exemplary fusion of thought and action in the leaders of a vanguard party (Black Panther, Mayday), showing the emergent buds of radical consciousness that may bring the dormant white working class to revolutionary life (Oil Strike),
examining the rationale for black and Third World solidarity in the face of repressive intransigence (State Strike), praising the spirit of the counter-culture and connecting its suppression to the necessary requirements of ruling class ideology (People's Park), and, finally, mustering around a specific community's unique problems and the plight of those who seek to cure them (Los Siete). It would be incorrect to say that one approach was better than the rest. Different people can be reached in different ways and even the same people may lend an open-mind to different methods. Nonetheless, the great range of the films' subject-matter—from hippies to first generation immigrants—suggest something of the diffuseness of Newsreel's objectives. To a greater degree than New York, however, San Francisco Newsreel profited from the experience of each film. There was no nucleus that took their skills and experience with them but a large aggregate of peers who profited from each other's mistakes and insights. By the end of 1969 the group had begun to clarify its aims and methods and another People's Park or another Los Siete without adequate technical quality and political perspective were not likely. The orientation was turning toward the working class and a deeper appreciation of the need for film mastery as well as political insight.

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The two final films made in 1969 represent a consolidation of past tendencies more than deeper probes into a
new orientation. Both were also made at a time when the group's resources were rapidly dwindling and they reflect the need for economy quite openly.

Interview with Bobby Seale was shot in December, 1969, in the San Francisco County Jail. The film deals with Seales' personal experience in jail, his views on black nationalism, women's liberation and the struggle against fascism. Intercut with the interview are shots of guerrilla units and police violence. The correlation is not particularly relevant; there is nothing comparable to the tracking shot accompanying Seale's voice in Black Panther. The power of the film rests squarely on the power of the man, and he is a formidable man: incisive but open, determined but patient. There is no introduction to Seale as a man or as a prisoner, perhaps because Newsreel assumed familiarity and perhaps because they expected the Panthers themselves to use the film. While the film obviously evolves from the earlier Panther films, it nonetheless seems slack and haphazard by comparison. The charisma of Bobby Seale's personality manifests itself more forcefully in this film, but it is a more abstracted quality, linked only by somewhat heavy-handed editing to actual political struggles. Even the linkage is less immediate than in the previous films: instead of the black community and the Panther's work within it, we see Third World liberation forces and government troops in countries that are not even identified. There may be a need for international solidarity that Newsreel wants to
communicate, but when it is based on abstract categories instead of concrete issues it becomes a disembodied unity that cannot command our interest or curiosity. Interview with Bobby Seale differs from a Warhol film or Shirley Clarke's Portrait of Jason both in the intense political commitment of Bobby Seale and in the imposed association of the individual and the collective. All the same it bears an uneasy resemblance to these other films where our primary source of engagement is the fascinatingly different world of the protagonist. Interview with Bobby Seale does little to encourage us to share that world. Unlike Black Panther, Oil Strike or Los Siete the film tends to request our attention and little more. Its method recalls a criticism of Communist Party propaganda made many years before, "They have too easily assumed that their policy and beliefs would determine their technique . . . they have failed to consider how people actually do become Communists or Communist sympathizers." While many Newsreel films could be the subject of this criticism, as could much leftist propaganda in general, Interview with Bobby Seale clearly reveals the obstacles that remain after an exemplary figure or noteworthy event is projected onto a screen, tied to other issues and left to do its work of persuasion. There is no process to engage us, no logic to compel us and, with Newsreel, very little artistry to absorb us. How people (and which people) come to the point where they are willing to hear an argument out let alone want to hear that
argument is seldom questioned in this type of film. The film becomes an artifact of a different worldview that shows us what it is but not how to join. San Francisco has seldom showed that world with the arrogance that New York sometimes did, but the barriers to persuasion nonetheless remain.

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PDM, (referring to the Pittsburgh-Des Moines steel plant) like Los Siete, was made for a specific group at a specific time. Even more than the previous film it was made cheaply and quickly (there is no sound track for example) and it is not distributed for someone outside the particular events described PDM would have very little meaning. In fact, PDM is perhaps the Newsreel film closest to a home movie since its purpose was to create a visual aid that the workers themselves could use to describe their situation to others.

PDM was shot during a strike by workers at the Pittsburgh-Des Moines steel plant in Santa Clara, California. Newsreel completed the film in three days and showed it along with Oil Strike and San Francisco State Strike at a union meeting. The films helped build solidarity and PDM in particular helped the strikers gain support from other unions and students. PDM begins with historical footage of the Republic Steel Strike, concentrating on police brutality. It then shows the picket line at the steel plant—the scabs and the antagonistic police, the workers and their wives. There is nothing noteworthy about the footage and
most of the violence that erupted sporadically was not even recorded. For the striking workers, though, it was extremely useful, and again underscores the key role that context can play.

A particular example of PDM's usefulness centers around the workers' wives. Many had not ever been on a picket line for a variety of reasons, but a few had. Those who had showed the film together with Oil Strike to women who had remained at home. For the first time many of them saw the violent extremes to which police would go to quell an "unstable" situation. Some of these women later joined the picket line although many husbands were still reluctant to have them. A Newsreel member reports that some of these same women began to describe their experience in the exact words of women from the Oil Strike film: "I have no more respect for the law," for example. These incidents give some indication of the power of film to transform a viewer's preconceptions and shape his perceptions when it is directed to the core contradictions in everyday experience, told in a style and from a personal viewpoint with whom there is identification and contains the seminal clues of how to work a resolution. PDM's usefulness exists despite the fact that it may be the crudest and most incomplete of Newsreel films, again pointing to the great importance of context as well as content. A film made specifically for a certain situation and used vigorously within that context can often overcome a formidable lack of technical or aesthetic sophistication.
as both PDM and Los Siete illustrate.

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After these films San Francisco Newsreel went through a non-productive period of financial and political crisis (which included the split within the group) from which they did not emerge until the spring of 1971. During this barren stretch production inch ed ahead on the women's film, a Palestinian guerrilla film and a labor history film (the latter two still in production). The three women in charge of the women's film were supported by the remainder of the collective through the work furlough program, but they still needed production funds. These were slow in coming. Also, their filmmaking procedure had become far more systematic than that of Oil Strike or People's Park. Many months were spent seeking out women and gaining sharpened insights into the woman's question. Instead of simply finding women to echo ideas already circulating in the Movement, the filmmakers sought to discover women with an articulate consciousness of the questions but not necessarily with the rhetoric or priorities of prominent leaders. Their approach was like learning what the black man on the street who had thought about black nationalism, repression and self-defense had to say rather than presenting the coherent strategies of the vanguard party's leadership.

The completed film, The Woman's Film, fulfills this primary objective admirably, but a few other early considerations were cast aside. The first plans for the film
envisioned a history of women's oppression with interviews to illustrate this oppression today. By the time the filmmakers had gotten to know some of the women who appear in the film, however, this idea was abandoned. Judy Smith, one of the three women filmmakers explained, "We saw the strength of these women and the vitality was much more important than any kind of facts."

This response may have a familiar echo when we consider how many Newsreel films have been more captivated by the heat of the moment than its historical context. The woman's question like Chicago, People's Park, the occupation of Wilmington, Delaware, the subway system or the Black Panther Party all emerge in the crystalline purity of their present moment. What came before belongs to the lost continent of history, submerged beneath a sea of impressions and feelings, cut off from the sputtering fuse that is the moment. The Woman's Film, however, represents a less infatuous romance with the moment than many of its predecessors. The arduous process of filming and financing, coupled to a more consciously analytical methodology, resulted in a situation in which some of the essential features of the initial, historical perspective remained intact.

Basically, the film is a series of intercut interviews like Black Panther with occasional cutaways. The interview material is placed within a matrix that reflects a certain line of progression and definition of contradictions, an important carry-over from the historical format.
A montage of commercials idolizing women begins the film, coupled to Aretha Franklin's version of "Satisfaction." We then meet the women themselves: Florence, a white mother working with "Why Not Whites?" a group trying to encourage white women to overcome racist biases and demand welfare aid they are entitled to; Vonda, a twice married white housewife and factory worker whose first husband tied a string across the door to check on her whereabouts and whose second husband was involved in the strike shown in PDM (where Newsreel met her); Vivian, a black welfare recipient and mother who describes the indignities of the welfare program; and several other women whom we learn less of—a publishing secretary, a telephone operator, a Chicano mother and migrant worker.

The interview material is arranged into a pattern that forms four parts: personal oppression and economic oppression on the job, then a break while we plunge briefly into the past—a slave auction song coupled to drawings of the slave market-place and the women slaves. The sequence is well timed and enlivens the overall rhythm of the film as well as forming an effective link between the primarily personal experiences of the first two sections with the more collective outlook of the final sections. As a means of linking the present exploitation of women with its historical roots, however, it is more a token gesture than a total one. After this interlude the remaining two sections deal
with political oppression and solutions that range from a hospital workers strike to Vonda's conclusion that nothing will really change until the workers pick up the gun.

The overall film gives evidence of two main strengths: the warmth, humor, openness and resilience of the women it presents, and the careful interweaving of parallel narratives toward similar conclusions, a technique that creates a sense of dialectic process and lends an organic unity to the film. The former quality is crucial to sustaining our interest and to presenting the question of women's liberation as far more than "sour grapes" complaining. The anecdotes and stories which the women tell are unique condensations of deep-felt experience into capsule time-bombs that continue shaking the foundations of preconceived notions long after they have been heard. Almost every review singles out Florence's dream of mountains of Coca-Cola and candy bars after becoming married and then discovering that marriage was so far from her dreams that "I forgot all about the candy and Coca-Cola," but that is only one of several memorable accounts.

The structure of the film has received less attention, but for those concerned with merging art and propaganda, it is of no less importance. The Woman's Film probably comes closer than any other Newsreel to cinéma-vérité technique. There is no voice-over narration and the greatest stress is on drawing drama and insight from the women themselves rather than imposing it. There are
important differences, however, especially from the Drew associates form of cinéma-vérité, where interviews, music and montage sequences built from drawings or commercials would be taboo. And where the Drew film usually involved minimal research, The Woman's Film was extensively researched in the tradition of Flaherty. Nonetheless, The Woman's Film minimizes the self-consciousness that extensive forethought can often breed. The women are in their homes; they are ironing, cooking or watching their children, not simply standing before a camera. Thus there is a certain candid unguardedness about their actions that indicates their trust in the filmmakers and their lack of nervousness before the camera. Within such a context we find insights and meaning emerging slowly, from nuance and gesture, more than from extreme stress or from behavior at a crisis moment. We also anticipate that the film as a variant of cinéma-vérité will provide a continuity to their thought and action rather than manipulate them into original categories through Eisensteinian montage. The ability of Dziga-Vertov to "detect" rather than "invent" plot, becomes the virtue that preserves the integrity of the subject and liberates it from artistic manipulation. For the raw material of film, life itself, unlike stone, clay, oils or words, has form and content, values and meanings, inherent within it. While life itself can be fictionalized in film as readily as in words it can also be captured whole or documented. It is in
unlike the examples of the strike or the arrest of the seven, there are no galvanizing incidents and no indication of which, if any, slower process of edification and redirection led them to their conclusions. Hence the sections become like a series of stepping stones stretched across a stream of false consciousness. But the stones lack a connecting handrail or underwater linkage; the passage requires great leaps on a long march that, as in so many other cases, biases the film toward the predisposed, if not the already convinced.

The nature of the material within the section reflects a few other problems that are quite central to Newsreel's progress. For example, there is one Chicano woman interviewed who speaks of her fear of *gringos* and her training to "not cause trouble." While she is aware of the socializing forces that shape these attitudes, her awareness has not carried her as far as the principal women in the film have gone. This leads to several nagging questions. Is the sequence meant to imply that white and black working-class women are more advanced than Chicano women or was it tacked on simply in order to give acknowledgement to Third World in general without really examining their situation (there are no Japanese, Chinese or other nationalities represented). The latter seems more likely from the brevity of the scene and the sense of detachment that it conveys; at one point the camera tracks past a series of migrant huts in
a shot reminiscent of the tracking shots in Black Panther and Oil Strike. In this case, however, the effect is to stress the parallel, non-meeting lines of the camera and the Chicano community. Unlike the black and the white women who are featured in close and medium shots the Chicano woman and her problems seem more remote, somehow detached from the mainstream of Newsreel's preoccupations.

At the technical level the film also suffers from the frequent Newsreel problem of poor sound, although it is far less troublesome here than in, say, Los Siete. The dearth of cut-away shots is another matter that tends to weaken the film's pace but which the slave auction montage helps to overcome. We see and hear the women talking synchronously far more than necessary to differentiate them and the surfeit does not provide enrichment. The women remain subjects of the camera rather than autonomous individuals with distinctive life-styles since we only see a minimal fraction of their daily lives and even in that the women give most of their attention to the camera, not the rest of their surroundings.

Finally, the film brushes against but never tackles what San Francisco Newsreel had defined in its position paper as a priority: creating propaganda for the white working-class which would combat racism. Although Florence is active in "Why Not Whites?" a group that obviously must deal with racist arguments, the film never explores this issue or Florence's impressions of it. None of the other
white women in the film discuss racism specifically nor re-
fect any particular awareness of the importance of the
question or their situation and objectives. The omission
perhaps indicates the central dilemma that the filmmakers
faced—to let the women speak for themselves and yet to pre-
sent their own, Marxist perspective on the situation and its
resolution. Nonetheless the omission is an egregious one
that blunts the film's organizing importance and reflects a
tendency toward "tailism"—following after advanced elements
in one area without introducing central ideas that are
available, and known, from other sectors of the same general
movement. After making three films on the Panthers which
clearly establish the central importance of overcoming
racism, Newsreel would seem to have a poor memory of their
own history.

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The weight of these criticisms may seem to relegate
the film to the second rank of Newsreels but, in fact, the
intensity of critical engagement with the film is a measure
of its strength. The Woman's Film represents a more serious
attempt at a fusion of art and propaganda than the majority
of Newsreel's films and as such invites more sustained
criticism. The failings are relative to the scale of the
project and here the scale is quite impressive. The film
does not present charismatic leaders who have advanced far
beyond the average viewer's consciousness. The film has a
coherence and a revelatory quality that, at moments, can be
astounding, especially when the women relate some of their own, very personal experiences. Their stories, in fact, have a captivating quality similar to the anecdotal tales in Godard's films and with far less oblique political implications. The protagonists are strong, perceptive women who bear witness to the strength and self-awareness of the working class. They conquer stereotypes and demolish myths. Despite its flaws, The Woman's Film is one of Newsreel's most important accomplishments.

Because The Woman's Film has answered the question of "for whom" and yet done so in a manner that embraces an appreciable audience (all women, but especially working-class women), it promises to have a very wide circulation. Already it has been screened at the Museum of Modern Art, several movie theaters and the Los Angeles Film Festival (Filmex). As propaganda it may lose many who have not traveled as far along such widely spaced stepping stones, but within the proper context, when the film is discussed and analyzed and when women have a chance to compare their experiences and conclusions with those shown on the screen, the film can have considerable impact. The acclaim, and even more, the critical response—in distinction to the uncritical indulgence that greeted many earlier Newsreels—has encouraged San Francisco Newsreel considerably and reinforced their belief that they have begun to work at a new plateau of politics and art.

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An examination of San Francisco's entire film output leads to a few general observations. First, San Francisco appears to have taken note of the difference between agitation and propaganda. Outside of the turn-on films (and perhaps Mayday and the violence in San Francisco State Strike), San Francisco Newsreel has shied away from emotional and moral arousal, the clear clarion call to action that many hear and few heed. It seems that they have also begun to differentiate between propaganda (which draws upon preconceptions for its effect) and education (which attempts to shape or reshape those preconceptions) in films like Oil Strike, Los Siete, The Woman's Film. The latter distinction still lacks clarity or consistency within their film work, though, suggesting the essentially intuitive level at which Newsreel correlates politics and art.

Language is of critical importance to the propagandist. It is his means of establishing communication and promoting dialogue. The silence pervading the form of works expressing bourgeois stultification and decay (e.g., most of Antonioni, Roeg's Walkabout, Pasolini's Teorema) yields to the sounds of a revolution in the process of construction. But how these sounds are communicated is also of crucial importance, as San Francisco Newsreel has begun to realize. Emile de Antonio commented about Newsreel films, "what they're doing is making film for the smallest possible audience, themselves and a very tiny minority of people who share their aesthetic. The people who share their politics
is a much wider audience; the people who share their aesthetics is very tiny." Mr. de Antonio's conception of Newsreel politics may be very different from Newsreel's own while still touching upon a vital point: aesthetics can become a barrier as easily as a mediation. Newsreel, again except for the "turn-on" films, has generally rejected the ironic or sometimes satiric counterpoint between sound and image that characterizes de Antonio's films. (It probably seems too detached, too prone to find fault without exploring alternatives or causes.) Newsreel has, however, learned the importance of how sound and image are joined and has utilized two methods that seem particularly noteworthy.

Neither one is new and the use of each reflects a policy of common sense more than aesthetic ingenuity. That they were abandoned for other, less successful techniques in many instances may be a more remarkable fact than their utilization. The first is counterpoint and includes music (the slave auction song in The Women's Film), words (Bobby Seale's enumeration of the 10 Point Program), and presence (the picnic sounds in the final sequence in Los Siete). San Francisco Newsreel has learned to skirt the easily contrived irony as well as the disconnected parallel: these become extremes of distractingly self-conscious linkage. Both frequently convey an "unfair" quality—either by manipulating the context in an overt way (combining a Presidential speech on the prisoner of war issue with the torture of Viet Cong prisoners by American soldiers, for example) or by imposing
an outside judgment upon a situation (the inevitable result of resorting to "Voice of God" narration). In general, San Francisco Newsreel seems to have concluded that counterpoint between the off-screen voice of sound and the image must be a plausible, natural one (as in *High School Rising*), not an alien imposition (as in *Isle of Youth*). This stress on the organic interconnection of image and sound also militates against balder, ironic juxtaposition which can be a different form of "Voice of God" commentary since the juxtaposition arises solely from the filmmaker's discretion and not the event's internal integrity.

The second tendency is toward direct sound and synchronized speech, the staple of American cinéma-vérité. While both tendencies move away from an Eisensteinian montage of images as a basic pattern, preferring the continuity of an event, they are not entirely compatible. Eisenstein argued that sound must be used contrapuntally when early sound films turned into all-talking and all-singing. Newsreel's second tendency, most clearly displayed in *The Woman's Film*, is toward all-talking with very little contrapuntal relief. The resolution, though, may be a matter of proportion more than strict subordination. Sync sound has the powerful appeal of recording testimony where charges of manipulation—within the shot—are effectively silenced. But by itself sync sound can become tiresome. The image may even restrict our range of association by tying the sound to a particular situation or individual when a contrapuntal
structure could suggest a spectrum of applicability. Newsreel has not yet settled into a comfortable pattern for itself, but films like *Black Panther*, *Oil Strike*, *Interview with Bobby Seale* and *The Woman's Film* indicate an effort to find a balance between counterpoint and synchronization.

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San Francisco Newsreel's experience has also brought it up against the aesthetics of selection. Artists like Warhol and before him Duchamp, discovered the artist's capability to play off the art object against its context, or, more precisely, to create an art object simply through context--placing a toilet bowl in a museum or painting a soup can--as the Drew films play off their subject against what the society expects from a hero. In a similar, but less systematic manner, San Francisco Newsreel (and New York Newsreel which now favors the community over a particular organization for its subject) has come to realize the importance of who or what they select as their subject and in what context they place it. Mission District families in *Los Siete*, rank and file workers in *Oil Strike* and non-glamorous, working class women in *The Woman's Film* all gain an aura of importance simply by their transference to celluloid as significant film subjects. Newsreel imparts a heroic quality to those whom Hollywood films have seldom treated heroically, simply by casting them within the slot the hero normally fills. The effect is potentially an excellent synthesis of the conflict over whether the
individual hero or the masses constitute the most appropriate film subject (a debate that goes back at least to the thirties in Russia when Eisenstein was criticized for his abstract treatment of characters). When Newsreel chooses women like Florence or Vonda or families like the Rios's in the early scenes of Los Siete, it effectively transforms the masses into heroes. Most importantly it does so not by singling out the exceptional or charismatic leader nor by praising the "masses" as an abstract, impersonal quantity—the choices between which the Russian film flip-flopped. Newsreel's alternative represents, I believe, an important synthesis of the difficult and seldom explicated dialectic between the individual and the collective. It provides figures with whom a broad spectrum of viewers can identify in explicitly personal ways, not merely in an extrapolative or wishful sense, and it places these figures within the frame customarily reserved for the hero. The result, when coupled to another Newsreel alternation of context—to the formation of a "liberated zone" of discussion and debate—can mean a very important breakthrough in the creation of propaganda. It may mean an extension of Richard Griffith's observation that the average soldier "will accept concepts only on his own terms and in his own conception of his interests," to include not only the voice the viewer hears but the person he sees as well. It provides a means of identification that can unify historical process and the personal life, the movement of history with individual
experience. Newsreels' studies of the ordinary man's struggle to become aware of himself and his historical moment have begun haltingly; how much more precisely they will be defined and portrayed will be a critical measure of the group's continuing maturation.
CHAPTER EIGHT

A SHORT HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES NEWSREEL

Both New York and San Francisco Newsreel became major film production centers while the large number of additional centers did not. (Newsreel offices have numbered between eight and twelve for most of its history.) In most cases production was never a serious possibility. Lack of experience, limited membership and minimal funds combined with the aura of mystery behind which the secrets of filmmaking remained untouched to stymie production. Boston Newsreel is the only exception and it has released a few films which have been received with faint enthusiasm. (Most criticism complains of an absence of political analysis and an incorrect view of "for whom" the film is made.) Aside from Boston, the only Newsreel center that had the capacity to produce films was Los Angeles Newsreel. To study why Los Angeles Newsreel failed to make a single film that went into distribution is to reexamine many of the problems that faced New York and San Francisco Newsreel from a somewhat different perspective.

Los Angeles Newsreel began in the fall of 1968 when a member of San Francisco Newsreel came to Los Angeles with a few films and called a meeting of interested parties.1
Unlike Kramer and Lacativa's strategy of remaining with the new group to see it get off the ground, the San Francisco Newsreel member left shortly after the first meeting.² He left behind him, though, a large, energetic group of considerable potential. The bulk of the early membership was white, middle-class, male and college educated.³ Only a few had any political background or experience, but a large number had filmmaking skills. Many came from the UCLA film school and several had their own equipment.⁴ In background and composition the group resembled New York Newsreel. In practice, appreciable differences began to emerge almost immediately.

For one thing, Los Angeles Newsreel found itself operating within a sea of sectarianism from which the group itself never fully emerged. Los Angeles is a very different city from either San Francisco or New York and these differences had great impact on the group's development. Los Angeles is geographically dispersed; people and groups are isolated. Labor unions have had a far less militant history than in San Francisco. The industries themselves are distinctively different. (One reason sometimes advanced for the film company's original move to Hollywood was the greater pliability or sometimes non-existence of Los Angeles unions.) The Communist Party had a very great influence on the area for a period of decades while the New Left has made less noticeable inroads. The liberal establishments that make San Francisco and New York conducive to a wide range of
avante-garde and radical work is not nearly as prominent in Los Angeles and the extent to which political groups may be harassed or suppressed is correspondingly greater. All of these conditions promote a climate of sectarianism and dogmatism, and the worst kinds of unprincipled conflict between various Movement groups were even more pronounced in Los Angeles than in either of the other two cities. This climate helped shape Los Angeles Newsreel from the very start and continued to be an important factor in 1971.

For a group with as much filmmaking talent as Los Angeles had it was natural to give lengthy thought to making political films. Several films were proposed and individual members also set out to cover news events on an essentially ad hoc basis. Four films reached a detailed planning stage and were included in a prospectus for potential contributors: Breakfast for Children, about the Black Panther Party and US--Ron Karenga's cultural-national group; Venice, about the urban renewal plans that would destroy the existing community; Mexican Rebellion, about the political situation in Mexico; and Natural Childbirth, an educational film on the Lamaze method of natural childbirth. Considerable research went into the Venice project and a special work team handled all screenings in the Venice area in order to gather information. Only the Breakfast for Children film ever reached a completed state, however, and that was only after stormy debates that altered and realtered the film. The footage was alternatively denounced and defended; the group that
succeeded Los Angeles Newsreel denounced it and its present whereabouts is unknown. But internal dissension reached a critical peak well after Newsreel began and the primary reason why films were not made had less to do with warring factions than a general agreement that other efforts demanded a higher priority.

Foremost among these was distribution. Los Angeles Newsreel may well have done more distribution (up to 60 showings per week) than any other group, a fact all the more remarkable when we consider that they invariably sent a speaker to accompany the film. They distributed films to colleges, junior colleges and high schools, to the Chicano and black communities, to unions and to Movement groups. Whenever possible they invited a speaker from the race or nationality of the audience they were working with. They therefore worked closely with the Black Panther Party and several Chicano organizing groups. Numerous screenings were scheduled each week and an active member might wind up showing a popular film like Black Panther 30 to 50 times in the course of a year's work.

Priority was given to distribution for a variety of reasons with which few of the members disagreed. Los Angeles Newsreel worked from the same building as the Los Angeles chapter of SDS which, at that time, was the only Maoist-oriented chapter in the country. Mao's precepts of "from the masses, to the masses," and "serve the people" correlated quite highly with an intensive distribution
program. Los Angeles Newsreel also discovered very quickly that simply sending films out resulted in difficulties. Often they failed to receive their rental fees and they also discovered that others with whom they had ideological differences (notably the Communist Party and Socialist Workers Party) frequently sent speakers to organize the film discussion and promote their party's point of view.\(^{12}\) Due to their appreciable strength in the Los Angeles area, this was a threat that Newsreel could not afford to ignore. Intensified attention to distribution thus became a matter of both economic and political survival.

Furthermore, Los Angeles Newsreel quickly became the most politically advanced Newsreel center. The group's leadership fell into the hands of a few individuals who were serious, articulate students of Marxism,\(^{13}\) giving the core leadership a distinctively different character than that of New York's filmmaker nucleus. These individuals initiated political and economic study that raised the consciousness of the entire group and they conducted the study in a more thoroughgoing manner than San Francisco's early efforts. This heightened theoretical understanding gave Los Angeles Newsreel a vantage point from which to gaze across the sweep of Newsreel films. They quickly came to the conclusion that the films were invariably deficient or defective in political analysis and that a speaker was an essential part of fleshing out the film's embryonic formulations.\(^{14}\) A slogan Los Angeles Newsreel used to describe the films was that
"It's not the showing of [the film's] structure that's important, but the structure of the showing."

Consequently Los Angeles Newsreel took up the idea of using the film as an organizing tool that Newsreel itself would wield, as New York Newsreel proposed, and carried it to an extreme that was both justified and intensified by the specific conditions in which they operated. The general expectation that the revolution would erupt at any moment which prevailed on the New Left up through 1969 further intensified the effort to reach and mobilize as many people as quickly as possible. Los Angeles Newsreel members consequently gained a vast wealth of experience in using the films "in the field." However, like Duck and Ross's observations on various audience reactions, this experience never evolved into a more systematic understanding of the interaction between film and viewer, between propaganda and preconceptions.

Los Angeles Newsreel's advanced political position gradually began to redefine the group's original intentions and many of those with a filmmaking background who were not prepared to engage Marxism at a serious level drifted away. A proposed film on AWOL GI's and the Resistance effort helped create a demarcation line between those with pacifist, humanitarian sentiments and those with a more explicitly Marxist perspective who considered pacifism a dubious tactic and the Resistance as a predominantly white, occasionally sexist movement that did not connect with a proletarian
constituency. Nonetheless a sizable number of individuals remained (approximately 20-25) and two were even paid a subsistence wage in order to devote full time to the office work.

Los Angeles Newsreel's political keenness was more than a result of a few members acting as catalysts. The nature of the Los Angeles situation also contributed in that isolated, suppressed groups are frequently thrown back upon study in the face of the obstacles to organizing. Leftist groups in Los Angeles generally seem to have an advanced theoretical understanding, a great familiarity with Communist texts and a predisposition to dogmatism. Newsreel required comparable sophistication simply in order to survive and, like these other groups, it turned to study in order to understand why Movement tactics and programs found Los Angeles such an impenetrable city.

In defending themselves against other groups, Los Angeles Newsreel also partook of some of their coloration and the other Newsreel chapters looked at Los Angeles as something of an oddity. A former New York Newsreel member commented, "Los Angeles was a very pure, theoretical Newsreel. It might have been only that. I never saw it or any of its practice. All I saw were statements." A San Francisco Newsreel member added;

Los Angeles came from a bookish sectarian position that the rest of the country couldn't understand. They might present the questions, but they were meaningless to the other Newsreels. To them it was all rhetoric. They came on with the national question, the women's
question; they came on with question after question, but to someone who had not gone into political theory, it just doesn't mean anything, especially when our own ideology was still largely anarchist or petty bourgeois.20

These reactions to Los Angeles Newsreel are of particular interest because they echo so closely the most common criticisms of Newsreel films—that they don't begin with what people perceive and understand now, that they are limited to those who are largely radicals, that they may be rational and present all the correct arguments but still they do not consider how people's consciousness is altered, they neglect the irrational and mythical sources of false consciousness. When these criticisms were leveled at Newsreel films, the filmmaker's response was limited. Newsreel members had little conception of what else they could do and such sweeping criticisms seemed like sheer obstinacy to new ideas. Los Angeles Newsreel responded in much the same way. They could see what was wrong with New York Newsreel and could help precipitate discussion in New York on the women's question or on elitism within the group by working closely with members at a level comparable to their own. But they could not discover a form through which to convey their analysis to the majority of the members in the other Newsreels. The predicament is reminiscent of Mannheim's observation that "precisely those forms in which we ourselves think are those whose limited nature is most difficult for us to perceive."21 This can be particularly true if we adopt the Marxist world-view that stresses its
own totalizing potential, its capacity to synthesize all components of human enterprise into the single process of history, where the failure to comprehend relevant phenomena is all the more incomprehensible. This form of limited self-understanding has, therefore, not only restricted the usefulness of Newsreel films, but also the intensity and clarity of internal dialogue that could have served to propel Newsreel forward at a faster pace.

Simply telling people that their perspective is wrong and then diagnosing the "real" problems seldom works no matter who it is tried upon. Advanced theoretical understanding, at any level, cannot be transferred by a direct process of grafting when an alteration of basic attitudes is involved. What Engels said of the socialist utopians, like St. Simon, Fourier and Owens, could apply here as well:

"Socialism is for all of them the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and need only be described in order to conquer the world through its own power."22 It is an observation Newsreel members can be quick to make when they are the objects of this kind of attempted conquest, and yet one which crystallizes very slowly when they initiate the process. More than elementary success with propaganda work, however, may rest squarely on the assimilation of this insight.

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While Los Angeles Newsreel's immediate impact upon other Newsreel groups did not lead to abrupt conversions
or even clear understanding, they did eliminate a lot of underbrush on the path to a more explicitly Marxist orientation. Los Angeles Newsreel was the first office to establish a Marxist collective\(^2\)\(^3\) embracing democratic centralism with principles, priorities and discipline. The move to a collective structure occurred in the summer of 1969 after the group had already, by a natural process of attrition, lost most of the individuals who were not receptive to economic and political study.\(^2\)\(^4\) The great stress that went to distribution and post-screening discussion also led to a recognition of the need for a clearly delineated political line. Not only did Newsreel want to differentiate itself from the policies of other groups, it had to be prepared to debate those policies and also to guarantee that its own members did not contradict each other. For all of these reasons, the move to democratic centralism became necessary and desirable, and lacking the opposition of a skilled nucleus as in New York or of life-style activists, as in San Francisco, Los Angeles which started half a year after the other two adopted the structure six months ahead of San Francisco and a year and a half ahead of New York.

Not only did the change-over have an exemplary influence (which may have been minimal at first), it introduced concrete forms for tackling specific, internal problems that had not been used previously, notably the principles of criticism and self-criticism. To work effectively, criticism and self-criticism requires a disciplined
approach. Otherwise it can quickly degenerate into personal attacks and self-defensive rebuttals. Los Angeles adopted strict procedural rules that eliminated these dangers and it was this combination of the technique and an awareness of how to use it that they were able to pass on to the other centers. The most important case where this occurred was with New York Newsreel where, as we have seen, criticism and self-criticism sessions in the fall of 1969 played a decisive role in resolving the women's question and radically altering the group's composition and direction.

Los Angeles Newsreel itself dealt with male chauvinism and elitism early in its development, but its analytical discussion of these and other questions never had the same impact as its development of a form through which the questions could be handled. The form could be integrated into a process of transformation that grew organically out of the local situation and personalities. Its integrative capacity was far greater than the rational arguments supporting it, just as a film showing how the protagonists changed their views, like Oil Strike, works more deeply into our consciousness than a film that tells us how we must change our views, like Wreck of the New York Subway. Los Angeles Newsreel thus had an inter-Movement influence that was more oblique than it may have liked and yet it may be that this is the level at which "influences" are best achieved.

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Los Angeles Newsreel continued to stress film screenings and to serve as a gadfly at national meetings where its views often ran into stiff resistance from the New York nucleus. The Leviathan article which Robert Kramer wrote, in fact, appeared a few months after a national meeting in which Los Angeles stressed the need for rigorous Marxist study and, in some ways, was a rebuttal of Los Angeles's position. But Los Angeles's internal coherence proved to be short lived and by the end of 1969 the group was on the verge of collapse.

Ultimately, Los Angeles Newsreel sank back into the sea of sectarianism from which it had struggled to emerge. Another political collective infiltrated its membership and began to dominate its policies, a phenomenon from which the other main Newsreel offices were remarkable free. Whereas Los Angeles Newsreel had functioned in a non-sectarian manner, making films available to almost the entire range of Movement groups, the group seeking domination (the California Communist League, CCL), wanted to reserve the films for groups they agreed with exclusively. In fact, the sum effect of their priorities was to throw the whole concept of a Newsreel organization into question. They proposed turning the Breakfast for Children rushes over to the Panthers without completing the film. They proposed destroying all old catalogues and incorrect films. Instead of following events, they wanted to make educational films on topics like "Wage-Labor and Capital" or "The State."
They insisted that everyone take a proletarian job and that the middle-class members be excluded from leadership. They saw the foremost task to be the building of a Marxist party and therefore proposed that Newsreel be placed under the political supervision and control of the group working most explicitly in this direction (which proved to be the CCL).

The proposals were intensely sectarian and dogmatic; they replaced mass screenings with highly restricted screenings of a limited number of films and a united front approach with more clandestine, factory organizing to which filmmaking would be subordinated. The proposals, in fact, reflected a radically different diagnosis of the situation in America than either "the revolution is imminent," emotional, film-as-weapon response of early Newsreels or the Marxist-oriented, non-sectarian, united front approach toward which New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco were evolving. The proposals implied that fascism, not revolution or a phase of legal Marxism, was imminent or already upon us, that cooperation with "revisionist" Movement groups played into the hands of repressive elements, that small scale, proletarian organizing was the correct means of building a revolutionary party. This meant that films were only one, minor tool in the hands of the individual organizers who would rely most heavily upon personal contacts. In fact, since the strength of their personal ties would be the leading edge of their efforts at base-building, the exact nature of the film became less important. As one former
Newsreel member explained, "A good liberal film can be more effective than a radical film if it gives you more openings for discussions." In a way, this approach carried Newsreel's recognition of the importance of context to an extreme. The film's content became a minimal consideration as the rapport between organizer and audience became the major one. (And if films were going to be made by the group, they might as well capitalize on their advanced political knowledge and make them as explicitly Marxist as possible--hence the topic suggestion.) In either case, the films would be visual aids, instead of the necessary catalysts for discussion, and the debate between primary organizing vs. propaganda work that persisted in New York for so long was firmly resolved in favor of organizing. In fact, the very concept of Newsreel was termed "opportunist" when there were so few organizers situated within the working class prepared to utilize radical films.

Over these issues Los Angeles Newsreel dissolved. Many of the members took up working-class organizing with the group that took over the Newsreel organization while others dispersed themselves among various Movement groups. The films fell into disuse and a group from New York (not associated with New York Newsreel) came out to reorganize the Newsreel office. This group, called Power and Light, distributed the Newsreel films during most of 1970 before themselves dissolving over internal conflicts. When they dissolved, they searched for a group to take over the
distribution work and finally settled on a Marxist collective called The Long March. This latter group is now responsible for Newsreel distribution in Los Angeles and most of the Southwest.

The Long March conceived of itself as a service group for the Movement. They rented a building with an auditorium and meeting rooms where various organizations could assemble and where Movement-oriented programs could be conducted. Their analysis of the present political situation led them to believe that a period of legal Marxism such as has occurred in Europe would precede any radical change and that, as preparation for a long march, theoretical understanding was a primary need. Hence cultural-educational programs have centered on American imperialism abroad and consideration of various strategies for the Movement at home. The Long March has utilized film quite freely and from a wider spectrum than what Newsreel offers.* They also conducted study classes on various aspects of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought.

Working out of this context, The Long March has been able to interact with other Newsreel groups in a mode similar to that of Los Angeles Newsreel. They see the necessity for artistic propaganda. They take Newsreel films

*Some of the films used with recent programs include Nothing But a Man, The Hour of the Furnaces, Hawks and Sparrows, The People and Their Cans, The Red Detachment of Women, China (Felix Greene), 79 Springtimes, Blood of the Condor, To Die in Madrid, and The Inheritance.
seriously and distribute them widely. They have consequent-
ly demanded that the other Newsreels take their work seri-
ously and give close, critical scrutiny to their work. The 
Long March is probably the first Movement group to take a 
constructively critical attitude toward Newsreel and their 
carefully made criticisms of Newsreel's political and 
aesthetic shortcomings have been the first such criticisms 
received by San Francisco and New York Newsreel. (The 
Marxist elements within the Movement press have generally 
ignored Newsreel in favor of attacking Hollywood or praising 
Third World Cinema while the broader underground press has 
most often followed the counter-culture of rock festivals, 
"hip" writers like Richard Brautigan and the "New Holly-
wood.")

The Long March's theoretical study has also helped 
them structure film screenings more intelligently. Although 
they do not have the staff to send speakers to most screen-
ings they have studied the available films carefully them-
selves and advise groups on what films would be most ap-
propriate. In some instances, they have even suggested a 
screening order when that seems politically appropriate. 
For example, a woman's group was advised to show Make-Out, 
She's Beautiful When She's Angry and Day of Plane Hunting 
(a North Vietnamese film about the women's role in all as-
pects of the war) in that order, a suggestion that lends 
greater coherence to limited fragments even without the 
post-screening discussions that are also encouraged.
The Long March has not yet begun to consider film production as more than a long range possibility but they have started to lay a firm foundation for that stage. Whereas other Newsreels conducted political education classes as a means of creating a unity between theory and practice, The Long March, drawing upon more politically advanced individuals has sought to forge that unity from a study of film and propaganda theory. San Francisco Newsreel has also begun a similar program recently and the shifting emphasis in study indicates both a greater political sophistication on the part of the members and a more serious attitude towards the specific problems of propaganda work.

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The Long March is a unique Newsreel center in that it has taken on Newsreel distribution as a partial fulfillment of its fundamental purpose. Other Newsreel centers have been exclusively concerned with Newsreel work and have formed for that purpose. The Long March's broader, non-sectarian perspective is a difficult one to maintain in Los Angeles, but it had served to leaven Newsreel's more narrow focus. Newsreel offices have, until The Woman's Film, shunned semi-commercial distribution as an undesirable compromise and have likewise taken only minimal initiative in acquiring non-Newsreel films. In fact, New York Newsreel's original policy of acquiring Vietnamese and Cuban films has not been vigorously pursued into the burgeoning arena of
Latin American Film. The great deluge of Latin American cinema, films on China, and anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist films made by independent, American filmmakers has simply swept past Newsreel. When Newsreel began in 1968 they were one of the very few sources of revolutionary films in this country. By 1971 groups ranging from Third World Cinema to New Yorker Films maintained a greater inventory of recent revolutionary films from abroad. In fact, Newsreel appears to have grown somewhat complacent, and perhaps sectarian, and thereby forfeited an opportunity to be the principal source of revolutionary film in America as they once were.

The Long March, however, has consistently seen the value of these films, used them in their programs and pressed the other Newsreel offices to take greater initiative in acquiring them. It is a vital step if Newsreel is to have films capable of generating more than a subsistence income, if it is to serve the largest number of people possible and if it wants these films regularly shown outside the traditional 16mm circuit. Newsreel is the only distribution network capable of providing these films at prices that many Third World and/or working-class groups can afford. The Long March's deep commitment to a united front approach to education-propaganda work has helped prod other Newsreel offices out of habitual practices that had begun to encrust them with a dangerous layer of isolationism. Many of the earliest Newsreels have limited usefulness now. Both San Francisco and New York have cut back on film production
appreciably. If Newsreel does not move to fill the vacuum, others will, at perhaps lower levels of consciousness and with less clearly formulated political objectives.

The fate of Newsreel in Los Angeles is thus markedly different from both New York and San Francisco Newsreel. Even the appearance of three separate groups to handle Newsreel films is a peculiarly distinct phenomenon. A study of Newsreel in Los Angeles could logically lead to a study of Newsreel in the dozen or so other cities where it has or has had offices. None of the other offices have developed an approach to Newsreel film work as distinctive as Los Angeles, however. Most of them are primarily distribution centers filling a role closer to a mail order house than what has been the case in Los Angeles. Los Angeles Newsreel and its successors have had an impact on Newsreel itself and the area they serve that cuts far deeper than their production, or non-production record would suggest. As the struggle continues, the Los Angeles arm of Newsreel may play an important role in advancing Newsreel's understanding of propaganda and in linking their work to a party formation. At least that is how the stage is set. With the abatement of New Left euphoria and puritanism, with a calmer view of the role of violence and a more patient scrutiny of the future, it appears as if one act has ended and another just begun in which Los Angeles's type of work will play a prominent part.
CHAPTER NINE

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS, POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS

Deciding on what grounds we can compare Newsreel films with those of independent, leftist filmmakers or with Third World cinema is not as simple as it may seem and some of the comparisons can be very misleading. Many have noticed the tremendous surge of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, sometimes Marxist Third World cinema and called Newsreel's effort negligible by comparison. Closer to home, many have admired the artistic conceptualizations of Godard, Bertolucci, Wajda, Pontecorvo, Bellochio or Pasolini—even if their politics were sometimes askew. By comparison, Newsreel seems a pale imitation without artistic fire or political relevance (for the uncommitted). Even political filmmakers like Emile de Antonio, Saul Landau, Peter Watkins and Hollywood directors like Arthur Penn, Sam Peckinpah and Sam Fuller raise vital political issues with a force and urgency that clearly transcend the tacked-on ending or the once de rigueur format of anti-Communism. But such comparisons, while they raise central questions about Newsreel's role and relevance, have often obscured other questions that are no less vital.

Perhaps the most incriminating aspects of such
comparisons have involved the areas of personnel, aesthetics and seriousness. By seriousness I mean the degree of earnestness with which Newsreel has defined its role, mastered the necessary skills and diligently refined them to the point of excellence. Many strands of Newsreel’s attitudes and policies have reflected a willingness to let others, "out there," define what Newsreel's function would be. The organizer theory was the prime example but there have been other examples as well. In some cases post-screening discussion seemed to be regarded more as an opportunity to defend and/or explain a film than to probe the political issues it raised. In San Francisco's case, the urgency of economic survival and the power (in theoretical study and practical accomplishment) of Bay Area groups like the Panthers and RU have fostered an attitude of "getting by" while others set policies and directions. Newsreel has not had the time and energy, all else aside, to join the political vanguard and yet their work has required sophisticated political awareness based on a collective understanding rather than on thinly examined "tailism." Without such understanding, the actual synthesis of politics and film will be forced or unprovocative at best.

The distinction which many Newsreel members made in 1968 between allegiance to the Movement and allegiance to Newsreel--which lingers on in practice if not in theoretical expression--has had crippling ramifications. While the Movement deserves greater priority than the survival of any
one organization, the placement of the highest allegiance in the most abstract categories drains the Movement of its most indispensable quality—concrete, flesh and blood vehicles with their inevitably complex marbling of contradictory tendencies. While these contradictions demand and determine a continuing process of redefinition and a rebalancing of priorities, they also require a working out at the level they exist on, not a more abstract one. When Newsreel members decided, "The Movement" needed primary organizing more than films, the assumption was made that the entire category of propaganda might be unnecessary. While it may be true that any given individual "needs" to do one kind of work more than another, cloaking personal preference with abstract, metaphysical ghosts like "The Movement," "The Revolution," etc., bankrupts Newsreel. It is deprived of seriousness of purpose when that purpose becomes a function of individual choice rather than the objective need of any political movement for propaganda which can persuade the unconvinced and strengthen the committed.

This kind of obfuscation of Newsreel's vital role within a revolutionary political movement has deflected serious study of how to fill that role most adequately. Discussion has often centered on how Newsreel should carry out community organizing, whether it should provide a Movement center or whether it should exist at all. Obviously, this is partly a function of the specific people who join Newsreel as well as the general direction of Movement
thinking. Often, Newsreel appeared to offer glamour and adventure; sometimes it seemed to be the best alternative to sectarian or nationalistic groups. Newsreel thus attracted people for a range of reasons wider than its goals and the latter were continually being stretched to accommodate the former.

The membership in Newsreel has resembled that of other Movement groups and in many cases it was short on quality, especially knowledge or even interest in propaganda. The New Left began among college students and while many were brilliant and articulate, many more were not. (Psychological and sociological surveys of the New Left that stress its members emotional and subconscious weaknesses, problems, etc, can lead to dismissal of the ideas embodied within that movement; many of the conclusions reached by these surveys however, seem to be born out in practice.) The rise of the New Left did not create a serious brain drain for the American Establishment, nor did it produce legions of theoreticians and spokesmen for its cause. Hence Newsreel did not enjoy a superabundance of artistic talent or even experienced technical craftsmen. While certain individuals in New York and San Francisco Newsreel have occasionally demonstrated masterful control of the film medium, many others have been content with mediocre results and garbled effects. No one with the intellectual prowess and creative drive of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, of Glauber Rocha or Santiago Alvarez has emerged from Newsreel
(with the possible exception of Robert Kramer who has emerged totally—he has left the group, and it can be argued, as I have, that his films, unlike those of the men above, are inferior propaganda despite their artistic merits). This is not a problem unique to Newsreel, however, and the Movement's general inability to nourish intellectual refinement and artistic excellence may involve more factors that we cannot consider here.

The failure to clearly distinguish Newsreel's prime role as the production of film propaganda, and the absence of the catalyzing potential of highly talented individuals dedicated to that role, has long stunted Newsreel's growth. And for a variety of reasons (at first a sense of moral purity, then perhaps a sense of artistic inadequacy or of confused political priorities) Newsreel has failed to engage in dialogue with other revolutionary filmmakers. Many of them, like Godard or Watkins, may seem badly compromised by their sources of funds or be too liberal from a Marxist point of view, and yet they are serious artists engaged in serious political struggle. While most political filmmakers have been discussed, interviewed and themselves commented on their work, creating a stimulating climate of new ideas on political strategies and film structures, Newsreel has kept to itself. Newsreel relates to other political groups but seldom to other filmmakers, certainly not to the extent of studying them in depth.

San Francisco and Los Angeles Newsreel have begun,
have been Newsreel's greatest impediments to greater excellence and, thus, effectiveness. On the other hand there are distinct differences between Newsreel's approach to film propaganda and that of most of the individual filmmakers with which it is compared that works in Newsreel's favor. For example, Newsreel's early aura of moral puritanism pushed them firmly into the camp of "outlaw art" where their exploration of alternatives to the bourgeois production and distribution apparatus, whether by choice or necessity, opened up new possibilities for audience interaction which seem to be utilized in few other instances (especially among European and other American filmmakers; in the Third World, Newsreel's tactics are frequently duplicated). Irwin Silber asserts that "using" the system only produces commodities that "contain the intellectual-emotional response to the artwork within the confines of the institutions of the social system," an echo of John Howard Lawson's highly polemical attack on Hollywood in *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (Masses and Mainstream, 1953). His reasoning may underestimate art's power to disturb and provoke, especially at the levels of values, norms and myths--levels beyond the scope of much propaganda. If capitalism is on the decline, and if the artist is a man who can express what others feel, then we will not only find evidence of that decline in art but experience the unsettling moral effect of that discovery as well. (One scarcely requires microscope and tweezers to pick out minutes flakes of "social protest"--modern art is
in 1971, to study film theory and propaganda, three years after the group was founded, but the general attitude has been that this is one form of theory that is unrelated to practice. Economic limitations have sometimes been used as a rationalization against such study (the expense of building up a library, subscribing to magazines and renting other films for study were considered too great and the return too small\(^1\)). This may be another indication of the tendency to deflect seriousness from filmmaking to a romanticized image of outlaw status. Various film schools like UCLA, USC and NYU produce hundreds of films every year, in almost every conceivable style and format, many with very low budgets (well under $1000, sometimes less than $100); underground filmmakers have almost always made their explorations of film's possibilities on very limited budgets—all of which offers a far more liberating perspective than the observation made by a San Francisco Newsreel member, "It's a real luxury to think you have the whole range of techniques at your disposal because you have a theory about which are best for revolutionary cinema; that's not the case at all."\(^2\)

* * *

The reluctance to take the objective of producing the best possible film propaganda seriously, the absence of any extremely creative personnel, the general neglect of film theory and aesthetics despite a tradition of Marxist aestheticians and theorists of relevance, including Lucas, Althusser, Cauldwell, Sartre, Benjamin, Fisher, etc.,—these
predominantly disturbing art, and even Hollywood films reflect these disturbances.)

Nonetheless Silber and Lawson are right when they are discussing not the breadth of art but the more specific case of Marxist propaganda. The experience of the Hollywood leftists (loosely identifiable with the Blacklist) gives ample evidence that leftists who want to work within the system are often not Marxists at all and that even if they are, their ideas are diluted and distorted beyond recognition (albeit they frequently provide the distortion on their own). And even when a Godard renounces bourgeois films and attempts to make revolutionary ones, he is hamstrung by economics. Once Grove Press advances the production money for Pravda, for example, in return for distribution rights, we can be relatively certain of who will see the film and how much it will cost them, or, more precisely, who will not see the film because of how much it would cost them.

Newsreel has been the only Marxist, or even leftist, filmmaking group in America to avoid this problem. By distributing films (their own and those of others who consent to minimal return) to Movement groups for nominal fees, or free of charge, and by actively seeking out these groups, Newsreel has been able to reach an audience that a Godard or Watkins or Bellochio can only reach on rare occasions. The Newsreel offices in mid 1971 had a combined circulation of approximately 300-350 prints per week. Even with an average audience of only twenty people that would make 6,000
people per week or over a quarter million per year. A radical union caucus in San Francisco, a Black Workers Congress in Columbus, Ohio, a factory study group in Atlanta—all have far more probability of seeing and discussing Newsreel than any other kind of film. Grove Press may peddle "revolutionary" films but they are not prepared to organize with them. Hence the film, regardless of form and content, has some of its revolutionary potential sucked from it. The context is changed; it becomes a consumer commodity. While it may still have importance, it simply cannot operate at the same level as a Newsreel screening.

Context is all important and many Marxists have come to realize that form and content are not the sole, or even primary, vehicles for a point of view. Newsreel's political viewpoint may help shape form and content, but without leading them on to recognize the central importance of context, it would be a largely self-contained viewpoint, capable of didactic monologue but not dynamic interaction. Very likely, Newsreel's most positive contribution has been its continuing effort to control the context within which its films are seen. Solanas and Gettino speak of context as the quality that can today open up the media to the people and create dialogue (the two-way transmission that Enzenberger and Illyich hope to realize more idealistically by liberating the production and distribution apparatus itself—without necessarily going through a period of general revolution):
This cinema of the masses provokes with each showing, as in a military incursion, a liberated space, a decolonized territory. The showing can be turned into a kind of political event, which according to Fanon, could be 'a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard.'

Although Newsreel has not been as eloquent in describing the function of context, it has clearly been a persistent and topmost priority. They formulated the concept before the examples of Third World revolutionaries began to surface and without knowledge of their historical predecessors. Consequently, they have fumbled and groped their way along more than they need have, but without ever abandoning the principle.*

When the context is molded into a "liberated space" where spectators become actors, a great range of films can assume revolutionary implications, and when those films also embody a revolutionary point of view and solid, political content that space can become the nexus for the transcendence of outmoded consciousness and commodity relationships.

Hence, Newsreel's aim is somewhat different from that of the independent filmmaker who expresses his political concern as artistically as possible and then sets his finished work adrift amidst the flotsam and jetsam of the commodity marketplace. Newsreel has carried the fragmentary

*See Appendix B for a letter describing the importance of this principle to those who benefit by it--the people who would not see any films otherwise.
incomplete nature of Godard's films beyond an enclosed aesthetic principle into practical realization. The incomplete fragment (the film itself, its form and content) is joined to the remaining fragments (the spectators) to complete the form and create a synergetic, revolutionary act. Wherever Newsreel films hollow out a decolonized territory, they fulfill the principal role of propaganda (and a major role of art and magic) -- the collective identification of a formerly fragmented mass with a singular set of values and a common purpose, at a higher level of consciousness than the usual locus of spectacle-spectator would allow.

Newsreel, especially in its early days, wanted to be on the barricades when the revolution seized political power. What Solanas is arguing and what Newsreel has come to realize, is that power can also be seized inside the liberated lacuna of a film screening and that while the two struggles are complementary each demands a total commitment to strategies and tactics that only suffer from being combined: the one seeks state power and economic control, the other seeks the transformation of an ideological superstructure and the awakening of class consciousness. The former inevitably demands violent confrontation with the ruling class; the latter depends upon persuasion and respect for all oppressed classes. The one teaches people that power is theirs to legitimize; the other leads them in the actual recovery of their lost power. The revolutionary can fight with guns or film; when he describes his film as a
gun, however, he has begun to confront when he should be teaching.

Obviously, the screening context does not automatically induce unanimity or even approval in overcoming the resistance (false consciousness) of many viewers. Nonetheless, Newsreel has discovered and preserved the central importance of context without which all their artistry and all their persuasiveness would remain divorced from its material objective.

Similarly, Newsreel's collective structure has brought considerable redirection to the nature of political filmmaking. It has perhaps not dealt the death blow to an auteur theory of cinema that some might wish or suspect, especially in New York Newsreel where individual filmmakers manifested their personalities and viewpoints on film for a considerable period. Even in San Francisco Newsreel, each film has been made in practice by a few people who retain maximal control and authority. Nonetheless, their social context is not without its influence and the personal statement and personal vision that provide the nourishment for auteur appreciation have had negligible manifestation. While individuals or small groups within a collective structure retain actual responsibility for particular films, they do not consider themselves autonomous spokesmen. There is a continual process of collaboration between the one and the many that relegates the category of personality to a tertiary level.
A Newsreel member's frame of mind is thus significantly different from, say, Frank Capra's when he worked for Harry Cohn; there is no preoccupation with placing a single name above the title and no consideration given to imagining what kinds of films would make that possible.

Personal films are not wholly impossible for a Marxist operating in a Newsreel-like manner, however. Dziga-Vertov and Santiago Alvarez are examples of the merger of an individual vision with a collective purpose. Newsreel's lack of similarly distinct personalities may be less a characteristic of Marxist art than of particular attitudes related to Newsreel's specific circumstances in present-day America. The inability to detect the presence of artistic capabilities with the distinctiveness of an auteur's, in other words, may be less a sign of Marxist virtue than an indication of political and aesthetic callowness, a feature not unexpected in a phoenix still learning to fly.

While the collective structure has not yet created an entirely new method of filmmaking, it has created a context within which filmmaking can function quite differently. The preservation of personal idiosyncrasies, flaws, biases, etc., while engaging in political work is no longer feasible. A Newsreel filmmaker cannot drive down from a hill-top house to film black workers and then return without being answerable for his own racism, sexism and elitism. If there is any truth in Marx's observation that consciousness is shaped by the social milieu, economics above all,
then the necessary unity of the personal and political becomes apparent. Fencing off private preserves whose nature is irrelevant to political action becomes a contradictory form of self-defensiveness. Newsreel has begun to cope with this false dichotomy and may thereby overcome many of the patronizing and alienated attitudes that characterize many works of art that cross class lines in a downward direction.

Newsreel has also extended the fundamental question for any propaganda of "for whom" to include "by whom?" By using Chairman Mao's guideline that the artist must dismount from his horse and at least examine the flower he always ignored or measured by use-value, Newsreel has attempted to function "for the people" and "by the people." The effort to do so is far from easy as the tumultuous results of airing the woman's question in New York Newsreel testify. People will struggle to retain old habits as long as they feel uncertain of the security which new ones will offer. That is what gives liberation its dense and yet exhilarating significance. Newsreel has not yet produced enough films from within a principled, collective structure to measure this interaction in any detail. Interviews with Newsreel members indicate that the effects have been deeply liberating on a personal level, however, and it is entirely likely that they will be on film as well.

*   *   *

Newsreel has taken a view of the unity of production and distribution which, although it does not excuse their
artistic weaknesses nor explain them, alters the terms by which we can make comparisons. For this reason it may be instructive to compare Newsreel's achievement with two others more similar in approach than that of independent filmmakers. The first, American Documentary Films (A.D.F.), has done much less film production but they have acquired and distributed a wide range of specifically leftist films from other sources. Like Newsreel they recognize the crucial importance of how the films are distributed. A.D.F. attempts to provide films for Movement groups particularly and their acquisitions often reflect the current topics of interest of debate on the left. They have even experimented with a mobile truck, like San Francisco Newsreel, in order to expand their contact with people in working-class and Third World communities where screening facilities are often at a premium.

Unlike Newsreel, however, A.D.F. had not operated as a collective. Decision-making is done by a relatively small handful of administrators and its workers require salaries (a major expense) which Newsreel had only infrequently provided for one or two people. A.D.F. has not attempted to produce only films reflecting their political point of view but has produced and acquired a very eclectic range of material. A.D.F. has also entered into contractual obligations to return money to its client filmmakers which severely limits their ability to discount prices for Movement groups. These differences make A.D.F. more similar
to the larger 16mm distributors like Audio/Brandon or Films, Inc. than to Newsreel. While there are presently a proliferation of small distributors each with a handful of revolutionary films, they generally lack Newsreel's flexibility in terms of rates and court the more lucrative audiences (especially colleges) far more actively than Movement groups that can sometimes not even afford postage. Their proliferation, in fact, may be partially a symptom of Newsreel's reluctance to broaden its range of acquisitions to film with variant political viewpoints. While Newsreel has come to recognize the need for semi-commercial distribution, if only for survival, there may still be lingering traces of puritanism that encourage Newsreel to shy away from less explicitly Marxist films. Consequently, while these other groups have not contributed significantly to Newsreel's goal of serving the Movement, especially in its expansion into minority and working class areas, they do represent substantial competition for the bordering markets (institutions with liberal constituencies) that sustain Newsreel financially. (These other groups are often the ones who distribute the films of independent leftist film-makers but their distribution pattern usually estranges them from Newsreel's primary constituency. Instead of "from the masses, to the masses," they circulate films from the intellectuals to the intellectuals, virtually ignoring the "flowers" Newsreel has chosen to cultivate.)

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A second effort similar to Newsreel's but even less successful than that of the groups above, was the film production undertaken at university film schools during the student strike of spring, 1970. Essentially, these efforts (at UCLA in particular) lacked these important qualities: organization, political consciousness and distribution. Consequently, they had minimal impact. (The films were of low quality and few got off the campus or were screened more than once or twice.) The significance of the student strike lies primarily in how much more Newsreel has accomplished with fewer resources and less talent but a membership roughly comparable in background.

In comparison with the Newsreel experience the student film strike establishes several important prerequisites for political filmmaking in a collective situation: a firm background in political analysis; a well-defined internal structure that can cope with elitism, opportunism, and subjectivism; and an integral relationship to the people whom the films are designed to serve. Newsreel has only acquired these characteristics after years of struggle. Perhaps the student's effort would have been less unsuccessful if the Newsreel example had been better known. Its overall failure, though, demonstrates that moral outrage or political sympathies cannot sustain a concerted effort and that while Newsreel's record has lacked the deeply rich luster its supporters have hoped for, it has nonetheless moved beyond the pitfalls into which the ardent but undisciplined, the
angry but unanalytical can tumble.

* * *

Newsreel still has many problems left to resolve. Its period of sharpest growth and most frenzied productivity seems past, and the danger of extinction has never disappeared. In fact, the process of creating a sharper self-definition may also be a process of increasing sectarianism and limited impact. It is a danger that can only be tempered, not avoided. The earlier productivity however, was spurred on by the ecstatic climate of imminent revolution, of intense activism and still inchoate politics that perfused the life blood of the Movement. Political maturity has begun to rest its potentially burdensome weight upon Newsreel's shoulders and to quiet some of its earlier frenzy. It will inevitably provoke Newsreel's consideration of several important issues such as the exact nature of propaganda they plan to make.

Marin Karmitz, director of a French, Marxist film, Comrades, suggests that there are two types of political film—the "militant" film and the "democratic front" film. The former is usually a tract aimed at the activist; it would include agit-prop and less volatile but still action-oriented propaganda. The latter seeks to unite people around certain issues, needs or principles regardless of their prior militancy and would include much consciousness-raising propaganda that is essentially educational. Oil Strike, Los Siete and The Woman's Film are the only
substantial examples of the democratic front film that Newsreel has made to date, but they indicate the direction in which Newsreel had been heading. The revolution is no longer just over the hill and The Long March's eponymous reference to the arduous trek of the Chinese Communists is no doubt a more accurate assessment of the time span involved. In this context the former type of propaganda seems pre-mature, if not dangerously extremist, while the latter offers an opportunity for base-building and consciousness-raising among large segments of a population still fettered by what all but those caught within it call false consciousness. Democratic front propaganda also invites the filmmaker to make his film politically, not simply make political film as Godard urges, or, as Karmitz puts it, to wage the struggle within the media's production and distribution apparatus as well as without. (San Francisco Newsreel's distribution of The Woman's Film to theaters and museums indicates a willingness to open up this front.) It is a form of propaganda work that presupposes a certain amount of freedom for the filmmaker from suppression and co-optation and fits well within an emergent phase of legal Marxism. While Newsreel has started to move in this direction, it has been a slow, hesitant movement that has not yet even begun to replace the great bulk of earlier films of restricted usefulness.

It has been a faltering process of redirection for the Movement also as it has come to grips with the
contradictions between anarchism and Marxism. The parallel once again indicates the extent to which Newsreel has been a reliable barometer of the Movement's growth and a revealing microcosm of its tensions, polarities, struggles and contradictions. It is a role we can expect Newsreel to continue to play. Even its final demise, should it occur, would no doubt be highly symptomatic of changes within the Movement as a whole. (This is suggested by the political prognosis for the U.S. that the California Communist League used as a rationale for effectively destroying Los Angeles Newsreel. Were their prognosis to be born out, we might expect other similar events from which Newsreel would most likely not resurface as it did in Los Angeles.)

As this question of what kind of propaganda to make receives more conscious and deliberate consideration Newsreel's relationship to the rest of the Movement may require redefinition as well. For the most part Newsreel has operated beneath an umbrella of non-sectarianism that has shielded it from a great deal of the faction-fighting that inevitably develops. This non-sectarian stance, although of signal importance to Newsreel's survival, has been the result of unclear politics and disagreement on principles within the group as much as of wisdom. The resurfacing of the Los Angeles Newsreel within the context of a Marxist-Maoist collective that stresses service work and theoretical study may signify a direction other Newsreel centers will explore. While the actual fusion in Los Angeles was largely
accidental in origin, its continuance points to the possibility of symbiotic cross-fertilization between film propagandists and Marxist theorists.

Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York Newsreel all anticipate the emergence of pre-party structures and, ultimately, a nation-wide, multi-national, proletarian party of a Marxist nature. All express their willingness to cooperate with such a party or, possibly, pre-party by subordinating their work to the political guidance of the party. The transformation from relative autonomy to party discipline is a major change, however—like the adoption of democratic centralism—and one which Newsreel may not survive in its present form. It is also entirely possible that groups like the Panthers, Republic of New Africa, Black Workers Congress, Young Lords, or on a different level, NOW, may form propaganda units of their own and that while Newsreel's seminal importance to any such development would have to be noted, a fairly abrupt break in the continuity of membership and orientation may occur. (Already the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit has formed Black Star Productions as an educational-propaganda unit. It distributes *Finally Got the News* and publishes a newspaper.)

Newsreel's membership has been and continues to be predominantly white. Class background has become more working class and petty bourgeois but only New York Newsreel with its larger overall membership, has been able to organize a Third World work-team or caucus. Hence, Newsreel has
been caught in a difficult position since the most blatant exploitation and the most intense struggle has occurred among minority populations. In fact, the greatest obstacle that blacks have found to principled unity has been racism, and yet Newsreel has still not tackled this question head on--outside of San Francisco's declaration of intent to combat racism, chauvinism and petty bourgeois ideology among the white working-class. Newsreel has hit on many vital questions that foster working-class fragmentation, but it has only gotten its feet wet when it comes to dealing with these most fundamental issues. And rather than use Newsreel films that hit around the periphery of central questions some of the advanced organizing groups, like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, may prefer to attack them squarely from their own point of view.

Even if Newsreel does begin to give more sober consideration to the questions of racism within the white working-class (and white radicals, as Ted Allen pointed out)¹⁰, its present orientation will face yet another difficulty. The great bulk of Newsreel films, including the very best ones, in fact, especially Black Panther and The Woman's Film, give almost no recognition to Third World groups. The kind of uncritical focus placed on racism against blacks fails to identify the commonality of racism against all minorities. For example, the Panthers' 10 Point Program that is enumerated at the end of the film calls for the release of black prisoners, trial of blacks by blacks, and the
exemption of blacks from military service. The demands were meant to illustrate the racist-caused inequities between blacks and whites, but they have a racist aura of their own to the ears of Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other minorities. The minor treatment of Third World people in *The Woman's Film* exhibits the same, massive flaw so that it cannot be claimed that the problem is an historical one, limited to the Panther's political analysis in 1968. It is a problem within Newsreel itself and is another reason why Movement propaganda work may require more abrupt reorientation than the present organization can withstand.

* * *

A final, political concern that Newsreel has only begun to consider is how radicals are created. The Movement's confrontation and polarization tactics of a few years ago clearly did little to swell the ranks of the committed. Even in the more quiescent aftermath, the Movement has felt an ambiguous relationship to its own recruitment. As one Long March member noted, "Despite the Left all these radicals keep coming up. We're not producing them. The system produces them, and we don't know what to do with them when we get them." 11

Newsreel has shown at least an intuitive awareness of this problem and *Oil Strike*, *Los Siete* and *The Woman's Film* all explore the germinal stages of the radicalization process. Nonetheless, there are limitations to each of the films that indicate Newsreel has not really thought the
matter through or made an explicit, theoretically based commitment to study and communicate this process on film. It is a line of exploration that may be critically important if the facade of false consciousness is to be cracked and the Movement's relatively miniscule ranks enlarged to embrace the majority of workers. And few media are better equipped to record a process directly correlated to objective conditions than the documentary film. Portraying that process, particularly among and for white workers, may well be Newsreel's most important role in the foreseeable future.

* * *

The rudimentary beginnings of a study of how radicals are created sometimes receives an aesthetic deflection no less crippling than a political one. Newsreel's general disregard of aesthetics has led them to create crude, intuitively shaped alternatives to more disciplined and appropriate structures. Most notably, riot footage and other manifestations of violent conflict have been expected to establish a dramatic structure that is more usually constructed around the recurring elements of the narrative—a character or process, for example. Newsreel's violence involved the viewer without taking the pains to create an identification with one side or the other by aesthetic means. Whether we were shocked or pleased, angered or satisfied at the results of violence had less to do with the film than with our presuppositions.

Newsreel began by assuming a sympathetic viewer
rather than creating one. It meant that the violence which it sometimes recognized as a minor, if not deleterious, part of Movement activity took on a dramatic role far out of proportion to its political role. The viewer's reaction becomes deflected away from the processes that prompt violence to the phenomenon itself, another example of an empiricist distortion.

Several Newsreels move away from this problem by focusing more precisely on the individual. If the film can create a sympathetic bond between a protagonist and the viewer, it can effectively convey a sense of process within a context of dramatic involvement. Black Panther, Interview with Bobby Seale, Oil Strike, Los Siete, Make-Out and The Woman's Film tend in this direction, and all but Make-Out rely chiefly upon the interview format. In the Panther films the protagonists are more or less charismatic leaders, in the others they are more like the average person on the street. But in either case they have been specifically chosen for what they have to say and how they say it.

Generally, these films have been among Newsreel's most successful. Instead of showing the sweep of an event (including an inevitable confrontation) these films are narrowed down to the experiences of a few, representative people. The films do not rely upon typage as the early Russian features and the Rothe-Grierson documentaries frequently did--some like the women in The Woman's Film even work against the grain of the typage concept effectively--
and their protagonists do not simply represent certain characteristics and attitudes; they actually embody them.

The interview structure thus allows for the vital dramatic element of human identification. The revelation of character and the depiction of process can be welded into a simple format when we explore how a person arrives at a certain position. This has been less explicitly the focus of these films than we might desire, however, and the process by which the protagonists come to their conclusions sometimes seems more like a series of mathematical axioms than a continuous ribbon of human experience. In part, political misconceptions may inform this lack as they did the over-stress on violence. The individual personality has often been associated with bourgeois egoism and it may be tempting to overcompensate by examining a person's political viewpoint while more or less neglecting his other, equally human dimensions. This is certainly true of the Panther films and of The Woman's Film. Were it not for the force and openness with which they articulate their political insights they could have easily appeared stale and one-dimensional.

The interview format also tends to diminish the role of a very valuable aesthetic tool, counterpoint. Cinéma-vérité almost invariably abandons the counterpoint that Eisenstein and others made into the foundation of the sound film, and Newsreel's interview films approach cinéma-vérité in this respect. Other forms such as de Antonio's documentaries and Newsreel's turn-on films exploit sound-image
juxtaposition to a considerable degree to build an ironic or satiric mood while a film like *Make-Out* mixes irony with insight in a more balanced fashion. This entire dimension, however, is essentially lost in the interview films and they sometimes seem a bit colorless as a result.

The absence of counterpoint is not an absolute requirement of the interview format and much of the monotony in the Newsreel versions is due to an unrelieved focus on the individual himself. While this also draws them closer to the cinéma-vérité camp, it is without a similar effect of detecting drama and character in the midst of activity which the camera minimally disturbs. The people are speaking directly to the filmmaker, for the camera, and there is far less feeling of being privy to a private life than of being addressed by a public self. Hence, the prolonged focus on the individual offers little actual reward in terms of insights gleaned and little dramatic anticipation that private reserves will be disclosed or severely tested, unlike cinéma-vérité.

A logical alternative would be to use cut-aways that situated the person in a more cinéma-vérité-like format (the shot, for example, of Vonda leaving home to go bowling in *The Woman’s Film*). This would leave Newsreel with adequate opportunity to impose correctional sounds to images still falsified by the bourgeois world as well as reintroduce an element of counterpoint and intensifying the revelatory potential of the visuals themselves. Newsreel, however, has
generally kept cut-aways to a minimum in their interview films, without developing alternative means of intensifying the inherent but relatively low-level dramatic tensions. This minimal drama is frequently the object in Warhol movies which are strikingly similar in basic concept to television talk shows whose greatest ambition is to provide filler for empty lives. Neither example would appear to be one that Newsreel would consciously want to follow.

These tendencies on Newsreel's part indicate a drift into what has been a mainstream of film theory and it will be very interesting to see how comfortable Newsreel will be there. The majority of film theories have turned to democracy for their metaphorical underpinning. Bazin, the neo-realists, Rothen-Grierson, Flaherty and the devotees of cinéma-vérité are all concerned with allowing the viewer freedom to choose within the frame, a freedom to see life as it really is, without authoritarian interference from the director. While none of these individuals or groups would deny that the camera invariably affects what it perceives, the tendency has been toward limiting the resulting effects to the lowest possible level, interposing as little manipulation as possible between viewer and recorded reality.

In accordance with this tendency, Newsreel has adopted the attitude that the people should speak for themselves. One San Francisco Newsreel member stated, "If we're going anywhere with technique, it's that we want people to speak for themselves." One can see very compelling...
reasons for this trend in the early didactic, moralistic Newsreel films. The actual experience of learning from these films, in fact, has no doubt been a stronger factor than any desire to conform to or learn from a particular tradition of film theory. The shift, nonetheless, derives from similar kinds of rationale, especially the desire to offer a more democratic structure for film subjects and viewers alike than the autocratic assumptions of the Hollywood spectacle-film. Newsreel may find, however, that their blanket enthusiasm for having people speak may need considerable modification before it can be utilized to full advantage.

* * *

Another consideration besides counterpoint and the interview format which may have to be explored in greater depth is that which members of the Frankfort school like Mannheim and Marcuse call the "reality-transcending" dimension. Marcuse in One-Dimensional Man and Mannheim in Utopia and Society point out that without a consciousness of this dimension men limit their aspirations and self-definition to the status quo. It was the general absence of this dimension from American life, and the working-class particularly that led Marcuse to conclude that Marxist revolution was no longer a possibility; the urge to transcend capitalist modes of production and social consciousness no longer persisted. Mannheim associated this transcendent dimension with the utopian vision and concluded that without a
"reality-transcending element we will accept all with
'matter of factness' . . . [The lack of utopian vision] leaves many without ideals, and paradoxically, in a rationally evolved society, a mere creature of impulse."^{14}

Newsreel films have generally adhered very closely to the here and now and have given little consideration to the idea of revolution as a facet of consciousness as well as of immediate and specific political struggle. The films assume that the viewer has already developed the facility to conceive of an altered social fabric as something other than chaos and destruction. The films do not seem to acknowledge the fact that many people today have experienced an atrophying of this facility. It is precisely this form of awareness for example that The Woman's Film abruptly unleashes when we hear the women conclude that there will have to be a violent confrontation before their most basic needs are fulfilled. How they created a consciousness of this reality-transcending element within a milieu characterized by its absence is the least explored facet of their political nature. Their stories of oppression and struggle could be matched by even more compelling tales of hardship (such as the Queen for a Day show used to deal in) where the connection was never made. Newsreel has tended to accept the women's level of consciousness as normative (it is, after all, that of their own peer group), an exemplary form of awareness for others, but not a truly unusual one worthy of deep examination in its own right.
Dziga-Vertov's conception of a "new man" who would be born by the camera eye has scarcely been elaborated since, and Newsreel is no exception to this general neglect. Propaganda that is at odds with the prevailing situation is in special need of this supplementary dimension to both rational and emotional appeals. It faces the task of carving out still obscure categories of perception and setting them in sharp relief to those that dominate social, political and economic relationships. There are signs that Newsreel has become aware of the need to sculpt more than the rough form of political confrontations and party programs, that the state of mind that embraces change and welcomes socialism is no less noble a figure for the chisel and hammer of their craft. When Newsreel reaches a point where we can speak systematically about their aesthetics and politics, it will be of great interest to examine if, and how, they successfully evoke this reality-transcending dimension within the concrete structures of their films--and in the concrete, material lives of people, not in idealist categories of metaphysical symbolism. There can be no other alternative, for without concrete embodiment this dimension will become speculative and abstract, like heaven and hell, rather than material and possible, like the socialist societies that already exist.
APPENDIX A

SAN FRANCISCO NEWSREEL MAJORITY POSITION PAPER

(Abridged)

HATE THE ENEMY, LOVE THE PEOPLE; DESTROY SELF-INTEREST,
FROM THE DEVOTION TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST, STRENGTHEN THE
DETERMINATION TO DEDICATE ONESELF TO THE REVOLUTIONARY
STRUGGLE

POLITICS

The primary contradiction in the world today is be­
tween U.S. Imperialism, which is the highest stage of capi­
talism, and the oppressed peoples of the third world. The
most active aspects of this contradiction is the Indochina
peoples war for liberation. The primary contradiction in
the U.S. today is also between the oppressed third world
peoples and the U.S. Imperialists. The most active aspect
of this contradiction in the U.S. is the struggle of the
Black people for their liberation from the mother country.

We see the position of Black people in this country
as a colony within the mother country. We recognize and un­
equivocally support the right of Black people to self­
determination. We recognize the revolutionary nationalism
of the BPP and reject the cultural nationalism as reaction­
ary and the Black people are merely super-exploited workers.
Revolutionary nationalism recognizes the class struggle and
the necessity to link up with class allies to topple the
common enemy, the U.S. ruling class.

We recognize that the Panthers are a leading force
in the National liberation struggle in the Black community
and are a revolutionary inspiration and example for white
radicals, as illustrated by their advocacy of Marxist­
Leninist theory, their socialist programs (i.e. Breakfast for
children) and their willingness to defend these programs
thru revolutionary armed struggle. We support the right of
all people to armed self-defense. The acts of repression
against the Panthers shows that the ruling-class recognize
how truly dangerous a threat to imperialist rule the Panthers
are.

We agree with the BPP that the primary task for
revolutionaries within the mother country is to defeat U.S.
imperialism. We must, however disagree with the prevailing
view of the party as expressed in their newspaper, as to how white revolutionaries can best contribute to defeating imperialism. Increasingly it appears that the Panthers are demanding that we become what would amount to a Fifth column in the U.S. (See D.C.'s articles on "Revolution: Necessity Vs. Desire" and his articles on self-defense groups). We reject this idea and insist that the way to defeat imperialism in the mother country is thru class struggle that will result in the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The BPP in D.C.'s article does not recognize class oppression in the white community. We disagree; within the mother country there are class divisions, poor and working class white people are oppressed as a class, not only as individuals. We see that it is in the material interest of this segment of white America to join with Black people and fight the imperialists and build socialism.

We agree with D.C. that most "new left radicals" come from the bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes and become revolutionaries due to their individual oppression and moral outrage. Most white radicals have shown their racism in the TDA demonstrations, in their inept attacks against the system, and in their rejection of the BPP community control petition. They have shown their class stand by refusing to go into the poor and working class communities of America to gain support for the Black liberation struggle. There are however, a number of white radicals who are becoming part of the poor and working class America, we support their activity and are working to have Newsreel join them.

Black people have set an example for white radicals, they have started mass education, organization, and arming of the black community. We feel that it is the main task of white radicals to serve the needs of poor and working-class whites by doing the same thing. Educating to break down racism, male chauvinism and petty bourgeois ideology among white people. Organizing a class conscious white proletariat that can join in a united front to attack U.S. imperialism.

Black and third world people in the U.S. will unite with this class conscious element of the white community and all other progressive forces. As chairman Mao teaches us:

"... the world revolution can only succeed if the proletariat of the capitalist countries supports the struggle for liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and if the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies supports that of the proletariat of the capitalist countries... We must unite with the proletariat of all the capitalist countries, with the proletariat of Japan, Britain, the U.S., Germany, Italy, and all other capitalist countries, before it is possible to overthrow imperialism, to liberate our nation and people, and to liberate the other nations and peoples of the world. This is our internationalism, the international-
ism with which we oppose both narrow nationalism and narrow patriotism."

Chairman Mao—In Memory of Norman Bethune

The fundamental antagonistic contradiction in capitalist societies is between labor and capital. We see that the fundamental contradiction between the American proletariat and bourgeois has been relatively inactive since the end of WWII due to Imperialist expansion. The triumph of U.S. imperialism as a result of WWII has laid the material basis for this inactivity. However we see the current crisis in imperialism brought about by the victories of the third world is creating the objective conditions for the fundamental contradictions to come to the forefront.

We see the heightening of contradictions in the mother country in such aspects as the rising inflation, increased unemployment, increased casualties from the war, and the increased misery of life in America in general.

We see that the final defeat of Imperialism can only come thru the class struggle against the ruling class lead by the proletariat under the direction of their party.

At this time the task of white revolutionaries in building this class struggle is to join with the working class, learn from them, serve them, and aid them in building a party. This task has 3 parts: organizing, agitating and propaganda work. By organizing we mean to recruit into an organization which has a program. By agitating we mean to create movement to action around essentially one issue which has already created unrest. By propaganda we mean: The creation and dissemination of information through concrete materials or forms, emanating from a specific political point of view. We see 3 kinds of propaganda: a) films, pamphlets, music, theater, etc. b) action propaganda, e.g., street theater, hunger strikes, self-immolation. c) armed propaganda: violent acts whose primary purpose is their propaganda value.

All over the world revolutionary people recognize the necessity and importance of film propaganda as part of their struggle. The working people in the country have the same need. And there is no one making films for them. Since we have those film-making skills and some experience it is our duty to make the best proletarian film propaganda we can. When the working class has its own party this function can be taken over by it.

There are 3 kinds of film we would make:
1. national liberation struggles designed to win support in all classes of the mother country (such as May Day and Fateh film).
2. films for other classes designed to win support for the proletariat (a film for students about the UNITED FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM).
J. However, most of our films will be aimed at the white segment of the working class because we are best equipped (being white) to serve them. This is not to say that we think that whites will lead the proletarian struggle. However, we feel that since they are more backward than black and brown proletarians and since no one is making films for the white working class, we should! Our films will combat racism of the white working class, male chauvinism and the petty bourgeoisie ideology which we see as the three main obstacles that divide the working class.

The masses must participate in our work. Whenever possible we will ask working people to help write the scripts and shoot and edit the films. We will also screen our present films for working and oppressed people for criticism and advice and encourage them to shoot and show us their own films.

"To the masses" means for us the development of an American Mass Style incorporating the "fresh, lively American style and spirit which the common people of America love." "To separate internationalist content from national form is the practice of those who do not understand the first thing about internationalism." (From a report of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.)

We must also strive to increase our distribution among the masses (see structural proposal) and encourage organizers and agitators to use our films in their work among the masses.

Given this task of making film propaganda from the masses and for the masses and the limits of our material resources (see Planned Economy) it is clear to us that we can not be organizers, agitators and film propagandists at the same time. Therefore, we feel Newsreel should limit itself to being a film-making and distributing propaganda circle. All of our relationships to other progressive and revolutionary groups will revolve around our task of producing and distributing film propaganda. We will distribute our films to everyone except agents of the ruling class.

Our film production will either be initiated by us based on our own analysis of what will best serve the needs of the American people. Our developing theory and practice among the masses and discussion and criticism sessions with organizers will aid in developing this analysis. Production may be initiated at the specific request of an organization for a particular piece of film propaganda. When such a request is made it will be given priority based on an evaluation of the requesting organization's theory and practice consistent with our existing priorities and material resources. As Chairman Mao teaches us:

"If we have shortcomings we are not afraid to have them pointed out and criticized because we serve the people. Anyone no
matter who, may point out our shortcomings. If he is right, we will correct them. If what he proposes will benefit the people, we will act upon it."

For this summer we see completion of the Labor History and Women's films as priorities because they are the foundation for a body of films which we are developing for the working masses.

We also see that it is a priority to expand our own distribution greatly into working class communities, state and junior colleges, high schools, and unions. Based on these priorities and the principles laid down in this paper we propose the following structure.

STRUCTURAL PROPOSAL

Stemming from the political strategy that we put forth in our position paper we propose the following reorganization of S.F. Newsreel. Included in the proposal is a summer plan based on political priorities and a planned economy. We propose a division of labor into three areas.

I. Work furloughs: We propose that a group of people in Newsreel get jobs. There are several reasons for this plan. First, we feel that in order to make films which serve the masses in America, we must go and work among the people and learn from them. We believe that we must change the class composition of the group from an essentially lumpen and petit-bourgeois base to a working class base. Our ideal is to get proletarian jobs in mass production wherever possible, or at least where there are many people working with us. People to take jobs will be the people with the least job experience, first, and the people with the least proletarian job experience second. Eventually everyone should take work furloughs. Our goal is to learn from the people and make friends not to organize. We would not be backwards or hide our politics. We would learn what the people need and how to make political arguments for the revolution.

II. Film Production: Each member involved in film production will be assigned to a film project. In addition to production, members will be responsible for maintaining the darkroom, still production, film and sound library, animation stand, film equipment and projectors. Film projects will be responsible for raising funds. Film production and distribution are Newsreel greatest contribution to the development of a revolutionary struggle in America at this time. We adopt the attitude of "give the masses quality." We must develop a mass revolutionary style. We will encourage the participation of others in the making of our films and will always take our films to the people for criticism. We will correct our past errors and adopt a serious attitude.
in maintaining our production plant, in caring for equipment and collecting, and preserving film, sound and graphic materials to be used in the production of future films.

III. Distribution: We propose that in order to expand our distribution in working class communities, junior colleges, high schools, unions, universities that we divide the work of distribution and make a concentrated effort, particularly over the summer to reach more people and build a broad base of support. We will maintain and develop a mailing list for catalogues and announcements, push rentals at unions, schools and community centers, arrange mass screenings, do publicity in trade journals, make leaflets, look for additions to our library of films by new radical filmmakers, sell prints to movement groups for their own use.

We propose that a permanent central committee be elected consisting of three members chosen on the basis of experience, a good grasp of the principles of marxism-leninism-mao tse tung thought, and good leadership qualities . . . The three members of the central committee will be responsible each one to one of the three areas of work outlined above . . . they will also be responsible to plan political education and technical education for the membership. Regular political education classes will be held for the membership and criticism-self criticism will be incorporated in these classes. The members in each area will have regular meetings to plan and discuss their work. The work groups or the Central Committee may call for a mass meeting for criticism and self criticism of the leadership, and members of the central committee may be recalled on the basis of severe criticism.

PLANNED ECONOMY

Newsreel has essentially two economic problems. The first is how to survive the coming four months of summer (June, July, August, September) and the second, how to finance expanded production and distribution over the next year.

In the past, Newsreel has depended on a largely spontaneous distribution system, sporadic and ill co-ordinated fund-raising and a generous reserve held by one member who has bailed us out of several tough spots. We feel that Newsreel can no longer afford to operate on this system (or non-system). In the two years that S.F. Newsreel has been in existence, the political situation in the country has changed considerably. Increased repression against the BPP, anti-war activists (like the Chicago 7) and the financing of moratoriums, GI Support etc., have made great demands on the "Movement's" backers. In short, much greater sums are going to more immediate and critical areas. Moreover, with increased political activity and politically motivated
violence, many of our old supporters will shy away (witness Fuller and Bernstein in the case of the BPP) as the society polarizes and political aims become clear. Our own internal development has and will continue to further this process. Two years ago our politics were not very distinct from an over-all cultural life-style movement which was seen by the liberal elements of the bourgeoisie as an exciting non-antagonistic development deserving of support. Today, however, our Marxist ideology and the increasingly proletarian line of our films will only serve to heighten the contradictions between ourselves and the bourgeoisie. Those people who were willing to finance a film of SF State or People's Park will not necessarily back a film on Labor History whose purpose is to expose antagonist class contradictions, or a film on Women's Liberation which bases women's oppression in class contradictions.

In short, class contradictions are intensifying and the bourgeoisie will begin vacillating. And so will our fund-raising.

Politically it is necessary to expand our distribution both into the working class in the factory and community and into the smaller state colleges and universities throughout our region. This means increased production (particularly since many of our present films are inadequate in class line and hence, increased financing.

The long range solution to these problems is Commercial Mass Distribution under our control. We must shift the major source of our finances from the Bourgeois to the working class masses and the petty bourgeoisie, and establish it on a more predictable, regular basis. This can be done not so much through any brilliant new scheme, but by following through on ideas we have already had; i.e., maintaining an active mailing list, frequent and massive publicity, brochures, packets etc., travel and in person contact with professors, shop stewards, small theatre owners and perhaps even NET tv producers.

Building such a distribution system must begin now and must have a top priority after basic survival. Our first big push can come in the fall of next year, but it will take several months of preparation including the raising of adequate funds in advance to finance catalogues, mailings etc.
APPENDIX B

From: Organized Migrants in Community Action
To: San Francisco Newsreel

Dear Newsreel,

I wish I could communicate the feeling that is aroused in the hearts of the migrants when they see a film that touches of their own struggle. This could be like no showing you've ever made to reflective college students; people here rarely get to see film of any sort and then to be confronted by one that helps each of us to define our own movement problems, helps us to define our goals . . . the feeling is really beyond description. In the white community film and literature are often criticized as being unproductive, intellectual tools but here these same films, even as liberal as this Grape Strike film, are activating, moving forces.

Solidarity in Struggle,

Organized Migrants in Community Action, Inc.,
Florida.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I


4 Dziga Vertov, "We," *Evergreen*, p. 51.

5 Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks Revolution," *Film Culture Reader*, p. 359.


18Ibid.


25Sergei Eisenstein, quoted in Leyda, Kino, p. 220.


28Ibid.


30Hurwitz, "Survey," p. 27.


33Hurwitz, "Revolutionary Film--Next Step," p. 15.


36Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO

4 John Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, ed. and compiled by Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1966), p. 16.
5 Ibid., p. 29.
6 Ibid., p. 147.
7 Ibid., p. 289.
8 Ibid., p. 191.
9 Ibid., p. 233.
10 Ibid., p. 278.
12 Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, p. 191.
13 Rotha, Documentary Film, p. 117.
14 Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, p. 289.
15 Rotha, Documentary Film, p. 96.
16 Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, p. 207.
17 Ibid., p. 246.
18 Rotha, Documentary Film, p. 12.

20. Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, p. 206.


22. Ibid., p. 50.


24. Ibid., p. 35.


26. Ibid.

27. Rothen, Documentary Film, p. 353.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 354.


32. Ibid., pp 72–84, passim.


37. Ibid., p. 83.

38. Ibid., p. 20.
CHAPTER THREE

Irwin Silber's *The Cultural Revolution* provides a succinct, Marxist analysis of why the counter-culture has been essentially peripheral to the Left's most pressing priorities.

1 Irwin Silber's *The Cultural Revolution* provides a succinct, Marxist analysis of why the counter-culture has been essentially peripheral to the Left's most pressing priorities.


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


9 Ibid.


11 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member, April, 1971.
Letter from Co-ordinating Committee of Newsreel, March 1, 1968.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member, April, 1971.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member, April, 1971.

Letter from Co-ordinating Committee of Newsreel, March 1, 1968.


Ibid., 46.

Ibid.


"Newsreel," Film Quarterly, p. 48.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel member.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

"Newsreel," Film Quarterly, pp. 45 and 48.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel member.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel member, March.

Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel member.


Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel member.

Ibid.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

Ibid.

55 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.
56 Ibid.
57 Dellinger was one of the five signatories to the letter of March 1, 1968 (footnote 12).
58 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.
59 Mao Tse-Tung, Literature and Art, p. 36.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 "Newsreel," Film Quarterly, p. 47.
3 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Los Angeles, California, interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member, February, 1971.
9 Los Angeles, California, interview with two members of the Long March, May, 1971.
10 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.
11 All of the members and former members of New York Newsreel who were interviewed agreed upon this point.
12 Interview with a former member of the New York Newsreel nucleus.
13 Ibid.
14 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.
15 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

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17 Silber, The Cultural Revolution, pp. 33-37, passim.

18 Ibid., p. 34.

19 Mao Tse-Tung, Literature and Art, p. 29.

20 "Newsreel," Film Quarterly, p. 45.

21 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.


24 Ibid.

25 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

26 All quotes are taken from the Leviathan article (see footnote 22).

27 Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, pp. 89 and 91.

28 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

29 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

30 Interview with three New York Newsreel members.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 The film is entitled Ira, I'll Get You in Trouble by Stephen Sbarge.


37 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.
Interview with a former New York Newsreel member.


Yves de Laurot, cited by Gary Crowdus, "Press," Film Society Review, VI, No. 6 (1971), p. 14. The quote is excerpted from an article in Cineaste where de Laurot uses Ice as an example of what a revolutionary film should not be, presumably in distinction to his own, unfinished picture, Listen America.


Interview with Robert Kramer.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Interview with Robert Kramer.

Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, p. 191.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

Ibid.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.


Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE


Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

Interview with three members of New York Newsreel.

Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel nucleus member.

Los Angeles, California. Interview with a former member of Los Angeles Newsreel, June, 1971.

Schaar, "Reflections on Authority," p. 76.


Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

307
Interview with three New York Newsreel members.

Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

Ibid.

Interview with three New York Newsreel members.

Information compiled from various Newsreel interviews.

Interview with three New York Newsreel members.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 17.

Ibid., p. 20.

Ibid., p. 28.

Ibid., p. 36.

Interview with three members of New York Newsreel

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

39 Interview with three members of New York Newsreel. All subsequent information about Newsreel's structure is based on interview material.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 San Francisco, California, interview with San Francisco Newsreel, April, 1971.


52 Ibid., p. 30.


54 "Newsreel," *Film Quarterly*, p. 46.

55 Interview with a former member of New York Newsreel.


57 Interview with New York Newsreel.

CHAPTER SIX

1 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 "Newsreel," Film Quarterly, pp. 44-45.
9 Ibid., p. 46.
10 Leyda, Kino, pp. 132, 286-287.
11 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.
12 "Newsreel," Film Quarterly, pp. 46-47.
13 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. 4.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 5.
24 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.

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30 Mao Tse-Tung, Literature and Art, p. 148.

31 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

32 Ibid.


34 Ibid.

35 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

36 Leyda, Kino, p. 247.

37 Mao Tse-Tung, Literature and Art, p. 106.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.


3 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.


10 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

14 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

15 Ibid.

16 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

17 Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Readings, p. 405.

18 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview with two members of the Long March.

23 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

24 Doob, Propaganda, p. 254.

25 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Interview with Judy Smith.

34 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.


CHAPTER EIGHT

1 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


7 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel member.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Interview with a former New York Newsreel nucleus member.

20 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.


Interview with a former Los Angeles Newsreel Central Committee member.

Ibid.

Ibid.

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Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with a former member of Los Angeles Newsreel.

Los Angeles, California, interview with a former member of Los Angeles Newsreel, July, 1971.

All proposals are taken from "New Proposal," an internal document circulated by members of the CCL within Los Angeles Newsreel.

Interview with a former member of Los Angeles Newsreel.

A term applied by members who belonged to CCL. Based on the internal document "New Proposal."

Interview with a former member of Los Angeles Newsreel.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Los Angeles, California, interview with a member of the Long March Central Committee, June, 1971.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with two members of The Long March.

Ibid.

Ibid.
Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

Interview with a member of The Long March Central Committee.

CHAPTER NINE

1 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.

2 Ibid.

3 Silber, The Cultural Revolution, p. 33.

4 Interview with a member of The Long March Central Committee.


9 Jean-Luc Godard, "What Is To Be Done," n.p.

10 Allen, "Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?"

11 Interview with a member of The Long March Central Committee.

12 Interview with San Francisco Newsreel.


14 Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p. 236.
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Interview with Judy Smith (April, 1971).

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San Francisco, California. Interview with San Francisco Newsreel (April, 1971).

University of Vermont. Interview with Robert Kramer (May, 1971).
ADDENDUM

To Follow Page 192

San Francisco Newsreel has changed considerably since its earliest days. It has evolved a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist perspective; it has created several working-class films; it has formed a structure that synthesizes democratic-centralism with economic survival. All this from anarchic, adventuristic beginnings. San Francisco Newsreel has begun to allot larger film budgets and to approach each film in a calmer, more deliberative manner. They have built the foundation upon which they or other groups can go on to define and refine a Marxist style of propaganda that will be "vigorous, lively, fresh and forceful." Perhaps certain refinements will have to await the formation of a mass, Marxist party which Newsreel like much of the Left, forsees. Meanwhile, Newsreel is not simply waiting for a deus ex machina, but constantly struggling to improve its political and cinematic prowess. If a more advanced propaganda unit ever evolves, it will be from the groundwork that Newsreel has already laid.