

17 CELLULOID CLASSROOMS AND EVERYDAY PROJECTIONISTS: POST-WORLD WAR II CONSOLIDATION OF COMMUNITY FILM ACTIVISM

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In *Making Films That Teach* (1954), a solitary employee in the dark offices of Encyclopaedia Britannica Films (EBF) struggles after hours to write a script on the contributions of motion pictures to education. He is not completely alone. A helpful ghost named Mr. McGuffey Reader materializes from a framed photograph hanging on the wall. Together, the literarily inclined figure from the past and the more technologically advanced character from the present discuss the multiple advantages of film, taking time to compare filmic attributes with the traditional textbook. Illustrating various aspects of film production, including editing, sound, and color, our guides reassure the audience that film programs are produced with the cooperation of, and are reviewed by, qualified educational consultants and that the work of EBF is to help teachers make the best film selections for themselves. Scenes demonstrating the variety and adaptability of motion pictures include recreations of historical events; easy-to-remember nutritional information; presentations of industrial and scientific processes; images of family life worldwide; close-ups of the natural world; and views of the internal workings of the human body, including the larynx, eardrum, and joints. The film suggests that the textbook is improved upon by the visual malleability of a cinematic supplement, with dramatic examples of animation, microphotography, and time-lapse sequences, revealing what would otherwise not be visible.

Encyclopaedia Britannica Films produced *Making Films That Teach* to commemorate its twenty-fifth year of producing motion pictures for schools and teaching contexts. It explicitly narrates not only the wonders of filmic

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construction and plasticity but also the regularized and noncontroversial presence of movies in classrooms. Mr. McGuffey Reader, far from a stodgy champion of the printed page, is comfortable with this technological addition to instructional situations. *Making Films That Teach* reasons that film pedagogy does not usurp the authority of teachers but rather supplements and enhances their existing role and materials. After all, quality resources from EBF still rely upon conventionally recognized experts in various subject areas.

Making Films That Teach is one example of a subgenre of information film designed to promote the use of motion pictures for instructional purposes. Others include *Teaching with Sound Films* (EBF, 1936), *Using the Classroom Film* (EBF, 1945), *Film Tactics* (U.S. Navy/Castle Films, 1945), *Projecting Motion Pictures* (UCLA, 1951), and *Film Research and Learning* (W. A. Wittich, 1958). Even into the 1960s, such films were still being produced and released, including *Choosing a Classroom Film* (McGraw-Hill Text Films/Centron, 1963), *How to Use Classroom Films* (McGraw-Hill Text Films/Centron, 1963), *New Dimensions through Teaching Films* (Coronet, 1963), and *Motion Film in the Classroom* (EML, 1968). In addition to providing technical advice, these films focus on the advantages of motion pictures as illustrators, bringing the distant or microscopic into the classroom. They typically offer examples of subjects, using excerpts from the company's catalog to demonstrate uses to which the teaching film might be put, highlighting the photographic manipulation of scenes and presenting general stages of film production.

Most strikingly, film-use films include material on proper selection, the screening skills of educators, and their incorporation into lessons and public forums. These films, then, reveal something of the supposed location and deployment of motion pictures in educational and informational settings, at least as imagined and promoted by the production companies themselves. Such films are often not just about film use but about the organizational and corporate entities themselves. *Making Films That Teach*, for instance, in addition to its treatment of instructional film, is both a marketing and commemorative device for Encyclopaedia Britannica Films.

This essay documents the institutional and discursive structures for informational film in the United States and Canada during the 1940s and 50s, with emphasis on the film-use instructional film. How did these education shows imagine and present a comfortable place for motion pictures alongside books and chalkboards, in gymnasiums and community halls? I discuss material features that shaped how the factual film moved about in the world, the agencies that advanced this circulation, and the situations for cinematic engagement that developed. Significantly, it is clear that the role of film in pedagogical and community contexts was not automatically appreciated by all. Agencies interested in the advancement of film in instructional and training venues—most notably the film council system—launched an enterprise to assess and recommend “proper

models of film adoption, with postscreening discussions becoming the pedagogical standard, thus educating educators and community leaders about a new media environment.

The forties and fifties were not the first decades to witness investment in the public service dimensions of motion pictures. Entrepreneurs and teachers had exploited, or at least talked about exploiting, film for instructional purposes since the first decades of motion pictures, intensifying their activities in the 1920s.¹ The interwar period was primarily a moment of experimentation, one that began to settle by the end of the 1930s into generally recognized, at least among modern educators, priorities and procedures. The use of film for mass mobilization in World War II further solidified the favorable view toward functional applications of motion pictures. John Grierson noted the success of mobilization activities as a vital resource for civic development and progressive educational programs by writing in 1943, "There is more seating capacity outside theaters than there is inside them."² The wartime experience left many Canadian and American educationalists and community leaders interested in continuing similar efforts in a civilian capacity after the cessation of hostilities, hoping to capitalize upon the contemporary enthusiasm for the community and pedagogical advantages of film as wartime federal support receded. Consequently, a rapid reimplementation of the use of classroom and community films followed World War II. The postwar period is distinct for the normalization of the place and operations of informational film on a mass basis. A number of organizations emerged to promote and guide that wave of activity, circulating information on access to films, evaluation of instructional potential, and methods of incorporation into various classroom and community locations.

Attention to agencies directing that film education activity reveals the interconnectedness of sites and institutions incorporating motion pictures into their operations after World War II. The deployment of motion pictures muddled the boundaries of the classroom, redefining what counted as an educational context, and extended the reach of community authority into schools. This is a crucial aspect in the history of instructional film: one cannot understand the rise of the classroom film without understanding the related rise of film use in community, institutional, and industrial contexts. Not only was film taken up simultaneously in these extratheatrical locations, but often the same films and film-usage materials, such as catalogs, discussion guides, programs and screening ideas, notes and

¹ For example, Edgar Dale, Fannie W. Dunn, Charles F. Hoban Jr., and Etta Schneider, *Motion Pictures in Education: A Summary of the Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1938); and Charles F. Hoban Jr., *Focus on Learning: Motion Pictures in the School* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1942).

² John Grierson, "Propaganda and Education," in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (1943; reprint, New York: Praeger, 1971), 291.

essays) traveled between them. Moreover, the organizations and industrial concerns advancing instructional film did so for both formal and less conventional educational situations. For example, the 1950 catalog for the New York University Film Library made clear its services were for "schools and organizations."³

One outgrowth was the film council movement, a network of community-based organizations promoting proper use of informational and instructional film by all potential users. This movement built upon other community councils and local chapters of voluntary societies, including women's, adult education, religious, and labor groups. Local chapters might be linked to form national organizations, like the YMCA, 4-H, and Rotary Clubs. The special role of voluntary organizations in American civil society has been regularly noted by commentators and historians, beginning with de Tocqueville. Lizabeth Cohen points to the key function voluntary societies had on the initiation of contemporary consumer advocacy.⁴ These civic groups had a structuring influence on the public sphere. They delineated constituent-defined access to informational and deliberative agencies and drew formal institutional paths between local and national contexts.

The film council movement, then, had a double role with respect to these societies. First, it provided a technologically defined service to these groups, furthering group usage of motion pictures; and second, it was itself a constituency of technologically invested educators and activists, championing the place of film in the future of democracy.⁵ These media education activists held the belief that film was a valuable instrument for learning about this "rapidly changing world," as Film Council of America director Glen Burch put it, and that people "must learn to choose for themselves, from among all the films available, those best suited to their individual needs and interests."⁶

In a major and immediate order of business, both the Canadian and U.S. councils responded to perceived community problems in accessing, evaluating, and deploying informational films. In the United States, the Film Council of America (FCA) was founded in 1946.⁷ According to its constitution, it was a

³ *New York University Film Library, A Catalogue of Selected 16mm. Educational Motion Pictures* (New York: NYU, 1950), 4.

⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 33.

⁵ The postwar council movement is not to be confused with prewar councils, such as those emerging from the National Board of Review, which primarily focused on feature films and theatrical exhibition, rather than informational and educational films in extratheatrical situations.

⁶ Glen Burch, "Film Councils at Work," in *Ideas on Film*, ed. Cecile Starr (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1951), 62.

⁷ For a fuller account of the FCA, see Charles R. Acland, "Classrooms, Clubs, and Community Circuits: Reconstructing Cultural Authority and The Film Council Movement, 1946-1957," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 149-81.

nonprofit educational association whose mission was "to increase the information and work toward the general welfare of all people by fostering, improving and promoting the production, the distribution, and the effective use of audiovisual materials."⁸ It was to pursue these ideals by coordinating and supporting the activities of community-based councils, its own local chapters, and national audiovisual organizations.⁹ To this end, the FCA was an active producer of catalogs, discussion guides, material on how to run a council, and informational film news. By June 1951, the FCA had more than 150 local chapters, and had developed information centers in more than 1,200 towns. These materials were widely circulated, and the priorities for instructional film usage were acted upon by the gamut of formal and informal educational organizations.

The National Film Society of Canada (NFS), founded in 1935, acted in a manner similar to the FCA, and its affiliation as a member organization of the FCA assured an easy flow between the two countries for programs and publications on informational film utilization. The coordination of the distribution of information about educational film utilization, and the council system on the whole, was a few years more advanced in Canada than in the United States. Consequently, American film educationalists kept close watch on Canadian developments.¹⁰ Though education was always part of its mandate, in its early years the NFS was modeled on the British Film Institute, and it operated very much as a conventional film society, helping to organize screenings of exemplary and rare works of world cinema. But the NFS became more engaged in informational film during and after World War II. At the time, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) had been operating its own distribution circuit. Seen as a success, this circuit "took on substance, becoming a part of the nation's life, communities themselves responded with energy," establishing their own film councils.¹¹ In actuality, postwar cutbacks to the NFB led to a reduction of this focus, and staff progressively declined.¹² As a result, NFB representatives provided the information and

⁸ "FCA Constitution," Mar. 4, 1947, Film Council of America [hereafter FCA], Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, Ms. 351, box 1, folder 1, 1.

⁹ Letter, Evans Clark to Carnegie Corporation, Mar. 1950, Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Carnegie Corporation Grants, box 144.12, folder "Film Council of America, 1947-1957" 2.

¹⁰ As a point of comparison, the FCA had 130 affiliated councils in July 1949, while the NFS boasted more than 250 councils in Canada. "Summary Report on the Second Annual Meeting of the Film Council of America," *Film Counselor* 3 (July-Aug. 1949): n.p. Though FCA and Ford Foundation executives repeatedly referred to the more highly developed Canadian community film scene, these tallies reflect the more centralized organizational structure of the U.S. agency and not the size of educational film audiences.

¹¹ Memorandum, NFB Sept. 1953, *Film and You* file, National Film Board Archives [hereafter *FAY*], Montreal, 15.

¹² Staff declined from a peak of 787 in 1945 to 540 in 1949. *Ibid.*, 20.

arguments needed to encourage communities to take this activity up for themselves. The NFB representative had “been called many things, not all of them complimentary and ranging from ‘film peddler’ to ‘adult educator’” but was in fact a “demonstrator, organizer and promoter of films and filmstrips for their informational values and as tools of adult education.”¹³ These individuals facilitated the formation and operation of local councils, and though NFB-operated rural circuits fell from 85 to 67 in 1946–1947, 90 new circuits had been created by departments of education and agriculture, school boards, and Wheat Pools among other organizations.¹⁴ Thus, even as state support for informational film usage dwindled with the end of World War II, the general investment increased, and along with it, increasingly specified modes of film utilization by educators and community leaders. The NFS executive noted, “The growth of interest in the educational film throughout Canada during the past year has been remarkable.” They felt that had the NFS “not prepared itself to give extended service to these many new converts to audio-visual education, the growth of film use in Canada would have been retarded or the Society might have lost its enviable place of pioneer leadership.”¹⁵

Like the FCA, the NFS worked with other educational organizations, pooling resources and coordinating the nationalist energy that was apparent among the cultural authorities of the day. Members compiled evaluations of films in catalogs, produced status reports on usage, published a newsletter on quality international films, wrote practical guides like *How to Organize a Film Library*, helped produce radio talks to be used in conjunction with screenings, and collaborated with the NFB on films demonstrating cross-media information events.¹⁶ Typical for the period’s blurred boundary between commercial and educational interests, the NFS circulated films from private as well as public sources, and eventually used sponsorship films to begin screenings.¹⁷ Many of these local councils in turn pooled resources to form provincial structures like the Ontario Association of Film Councils and the Manitoba Film Association. The NFB measured council activity as reaching half a million people a month by

¹³ NFB Representatives’ Manual, ca. 1952, FAY, 1.

¹⁴ Memorandum, NFB Sept. 1953, 20.

¹⁵ NFS, “Report of the Executive Secretary for the Fiscal Year, 1946–47,” FAY, 1.

¹⁶ NFS, “Film Library and Depot Membership Services,” Mar. 1948, FAY, 2; Donald Buchanan, *Educational and Cultural Films in Canada* (Ottawa: National Film Society, 1936); Donald Buchanan and D. S. McMullan, “Report to the Executive of the National Film Society of Canada” (1938), Rockefeller Archives Center, Rockefeller Foundation Collection, record group 1.1, series 427R, box 27, file 270; O. C. Wilson, *How to Organize a Film Library* (Ottawa: NFS, ca. 1945). Their catalogs include *Canadian Films Reviewed, 1939–1941*, and *Educational Sixteen Millimetre Films Distributed by the NFS* for both 1947 and 1948.

¹⁷ NFS Bulletin, 1946, “Distribution Plan for Sponsored Films,” FAY.

1950 with their documentary and educational programs.¹⁸ This would have been about half the NFB's total monthly audience at this time, according to its own measurements. In short, volunteer work of the NFS and the film councils established a formidable system of film and information circulation.

The preceding description of activity gives a sense of the magnitude of the film councils, a seriously underappreciated distribution and exhibition apparatus. And, most essential to the topic at hand, they were key to the organization of ideas about how motion pictures were to be incorporated into educational and informational contexts. Their presence following World War II marked the widespread energy devoted to normalizing the place of factual film in ordinary public, pedagogical, and cultural life. And with the emphasis on user guides, assessment committees, and catalogs to assist in particular forms of usage, it is clear that the movement was not just about access to films but also about the production and circulation of material about film. The advancement of this brand of motion picture education was varied. For example, W. S. Jobbins designed a film utilization workshop in 1950, covering such topics as using a film for discussion and staging a screening. Jobbins described that 90 percent of people using film, whether community council members or teachers, had never had any training. The workshop included two films on utilization (*Film Tactics* and *Projecting Motion Pictures*) and two example forum topics (*Seed Growing in Grand Forks* [NFB, 1947] and *Worth the Risk* [Central Office of Information, United Kingdom, 1948]). Common for film educators of the period, Jobbins's workshop emphasized discussion questions and preparation of technological aspects of screening situations.¹⁹

The advancement of "proper" informational film usage appeared in radio addresses, often supplementing written argument and cataloging to assist informational film users in discernment. Canadian educationalists, building on Farm and Citizen Radio Forums, promoted joint programs of group-listening to radio talks, watching films on a topic, followed by related discussion. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) broadcast a radio series called "Speaking of Films." One program dramatized the work of film councils, with characters including a bored boy looking for entertainment other than the movie house, pool hall, and skating rink; a schoolteacher looking for "closer cooperation between teachers and parents"; a doctor saying, "It's been pretty tough getting folks interested in health campaigns and clinics"; and a clubwoman wanting to "stimulate discussions at our church meetings."²⁰ The announcer then recommends, and defines, a film council, whose end result, in this broadcast, is the

¹⁸ Memorandum, NFB Sept. 1953, 21.

¹⁹ W. S. Jobbins, "Capsule Workshop: An Outline for a Two and One-Half Hour Course in Film Utilization," Dec. 1950, *Let's Talk about Films* File, National Film Board Archives [hereafter LTAF], Montreal.

²⁰ "Speaking of Films," Radio script, FAY, 2.

confrontation with issues of racial intolerance and juvenile delinquency. The ultimate objective of a film council's work was the creation of "the rarest of all types of citizens . . . world citizens, discovering that the world does not end at their city limits, nor their country's borders. That what happens in a village in Hungary or Greece or Palestine sooner or later affect every one of them. These films are dispelling the bonds of ignorance and prejudice."²¹ This radio documentary captures a dominant set of ideas and ideals for motion pictures in postwar life, one that is evident among educational, community, and film progressives throughout the period, namely that motion pictures indisputably played a productive role in a media-dominated era. If handled properly, they could help the full flowering of a liberal public sphere, technologically structured, but in which debate and discussion still reigned and world citizenship might still emerge.

Other material advising educationalists on the liberal public potential of wisely deployed film included trailers demonstrating motion pictures as part of a multimedia community event. For example, the three-minute *Film and Radio—A Word About Citizen's Forums* (NFB, 1943) presents three civically engaged individuals—Neil Morrison from the CBC, Edith Spencer from the NFB, and Ralph Wright, who was studying rural health—sitting around a radio after listening to a talk on reconstruction that had aired on the CBC series *All Things Come* and having watched Paul Rotha's *World of Plenty* (1943) (see fig. 17.1). They



Figure 17.1. A film discussion demonstrated in *Film and Radio—A Word about Citizen's Forums*. (Courtesy of the NFB.)

²¹ Ibid., 3–4.

say a few words about the film, but on the whole, the trailer depicts the demeanor of knowledgeable individuals engaged in cross-media consumption and evaluation. It highlights discussion about issues of concern, following media consumption. Spectators see one image of the appropriate mode of active engagement with mass media, with the sleek portable 16mm projector hovering in the background as a visible reminder of the technological means of expert exchange.

Nowhere are these ideas about motion pictures' democratic impulse better represented than in the films made about the functional and educational uses of film. Several of the most widely circulated ones came from the NFB. A notable example, *Film and You* (NFB, 1948), demonstrates the work of councils, showing how one might be formed and depicting the progressive possibilities of nontheatrical screenings. The producer, Donald Fraser, had been an executive secretary of the NFS and had worked with the wartime film circuits. Early in production, Fraser was convinced of the multiple objectives of this film: as a prestige project for the NFB; a document of Canadian educational film usage; and a way to link production staff, field staff, and general audiences.²² Fraser conducted an extensive survey of the state of the film council movement in Canada and the United States during the course of production, ensuring that the content would be accurate and up-to-date. The survey equally had the effect of assessing the market for the finished product.

During production, Margaret Carter, head of the U.S. office of the NFB, circulated a script to individuals in U.S. extension departments, the FCA, and educational film companies.²³ The most common recommendation she received was to minimize the Canadian information and also to include more dramatic subject matter to suggest urgency, such as images of famine and atomic blasts (a recommendation, incidentally, the filmmakers did not follow). One comment from Scott Fletcher, president of Encyclopaedia Britannica Films and an FCA board member, disapproved of the current community-oriented nature of the script—which indeed would become the focus of the film—proposing that “film excerpts deal with the significant problems of nutrition, hygiene and medicine, child welfare, public health, social planning, conservation, international responsibilities rather than those outlined in the present script which deal with community planning, industrial safety, weed control, farm home improvement and the like.”²⁴ Stephen M. Corey, professor of educational psychology at the University of Chicago, and president of the FCA Board of Trustees, concurred with this view, feeling that even more film excerpts might be included.²⁵ Publisher of *Business Screen* O. H. Coellin

²² Memorandum, Don Fraser to Ross McLean, May 12, 1947, RE: Film Council Film Project—Prod. 15—023, FAY.

²³ Memorandum, J. Margaret Carter (Chicago) to Donald Fraser (cc. Jack Ralph), Oct. 16, 1947, FAY, 1.

²⁴ Memorandum, J. Margaret Carter (Chicago) to Ralph Foster (cc. Jack Ralph and Jean Palardy), Oct. 24, 1947, FAY.

²⁵ Memorandum, Carter to Fraser, Oct. 16, 1947, 1.

suggested that the filmmakers be careful to not display makes of projectors in their films in order to avoid charges of “commercial favoritism.”²⁶

These notes notwithstanding, the response Carter received was supportive and gave her the impression that this film would be a much sought-after work. C. R. Reagan, first president of the FCA, went so far as to declare that “as usual Canada leads out in significant factual films.”²⁷ Carter encouraged making the production of *Film and You* a priority, speeding up the process and assuring it would be of superior quality. As Carter wrote, “I have given the film so much advanced publicity here among leaders of the FCA movement that it would be extremely bad form to come forward with an inferior film. A really good film offers National Film Board a tremendous opportunity for prestige and good will.”²⁸ In the end, the FCA did abundant publicity for *Film and You*, published a discussion guide, and produced its own introductory trailer providing specifically U.S. information.²⁹ The NFB, on their part, made the film available on a cost-recovery basis, hopeful it would both sell other NFB films and expand the market for nontheatrical productions with each council created.³⁰

Film and You begins with a screening in a community hall setting, showing excerpts of actual NFB films, including *Kitchen Come True* (1948), *Get Rid of Rats* (1948), and *Canada Dances* (1947), and presenting individual, intergenerational, and stereotypically gendered audience reactions. A father looks mindfully at a child following a scene from *Lessons in Living* (1944) in which a boy pours boiling water on himself. Watching a film of energetically dancing women, a male spectator displays a lascivious grin, the woman next to him is scowling and purse-lipped, and an adolescent’s face alternates between interest and disbelief. Images of rats make some women yelp and a scene about new kitchens makes Grandpa nod off, though he bolts up, clapping, when a movie about square dancing commences. Following this screening scene, people wonder how they can be certain such films will always be available to them. The narrator, to whom the characters respond directly, introduces the idea of a film library and council. To illustrate the idea, animated sequences, including abstract electronic sound effects, represent the forming of community groups, group representation on a regional council, and the sharing of materials. The film goes on to depict a council’s basic functions—fund raising, projector care, cataloging, and preview committees (see figs. 17.2 and 17.3). The final third dramatizes additional screenings igniting lively community debate, leading to solutions to local problems. A rural community sees *Just Weeds* (1945) and decides to pool resources to invest in a

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ C. R. Reagan to Margaret Carter, Oct. 3, 1947, FAY.

²⁸ Memorandum, J. Margaret Carter (Chicago) to Jack Ralph, Nov. 5, 1947, FAY.

²⁹ “‘The Film and You’—A 16mm Film about Films—and You,” Feb. 1949, FAY, 2.

³⁰ Memorandum, Carter to Fraser, Oct. 16, 1947, 1.



Figure 17.2. Film resources at a community library in *Film and You*. (Courtesy of the NFB.)



Figure 17.3. A projection tutorial in *Film and You*. (Courtesy of the NFB.)

chemical sprayer. A film on workplace safety screens in an industrial setting, prompting those watching to form a committee to investigate their own factory. And a movie on community beautification sparks what appears to be a massive groundswell of painting and litter collection. Thus, a film about film councils presents motion pictures igniting social action and is itself designed to produce interest in forming councils. *Film and You* illustrates the combined interest in civic duty, choices for modernization, and the careful incorporation of film to these ends.

For a test panel assessing its potential applications just prior to release, *Film and You* was seen as timely for the promotion of community projects. The panel suggested questions for postscreening discussion including “How can a community use film to best advantage?” and “Is a Film Council needed?”³¹ The NFB discussion guide for *Film and You* provided information on documentaries, councils, and libraries, highlighting the work of the NFS and the Film Board itself. The stated intention was to develop interest in “films which rouse our will to be doing.”³² The discussion guide divided recommended questions into those for rural audiences, those for urban audiences with a film council, and those for urban audiences without a council. Rural audiences faced questions probing key community concerns, how motion pictures might help, how films might be accessed, and if a regional committee might be more useful than a local council. The guide recommended that urban audiences with a council contrast the representation of the screening scene in *Film and You* with their own experience, and to think about how films might be better deployed to match community interests. Urban communities without councils were asked to consider how a council might serve the community and what the first issues to tackle might be. It appears that the contribution of film was a given, and that it was only through a community’s lack of energy that it would miss out on the benefits.

A U.S. pamphlet promoted the film. The redundantly titled “‘The Film and You’—A 16mm Film about Films—and You,” from February 1949, was a reprint of an article from *See and Hear: An International Journal of Audio-Visual Education*. Providing a synopsis and information on how to acquire prints, the pamphlet offered a sketch of U.S. film council work in general. The discussion questions focused upon getting audiences to think about community problems first, then to think about how motion pictures might be a useful resource and catalyst to the related solutions:

1. Is there any issue before the community now where films could be used profitably?
2. Do you feel that you are able to get the films you need—when you need them?

³¹ “Film and You”—Evaluation Sheet, 1950, FAY.

³² “Let’s Discuss It!: A Film Discussion Guide, *Film and You*,” NFB 1948, FAY, 2.

3. What assets has the community which would serve as the beginning for a local council?
4. Would a regional or district plan be better than a local setup?
5. Would other films of this type stimulate more interest generally?
6. What do you feel is most lacking in your use of films?
7. Canada's problem of local film handling is different from our own in many respects. How many film libraries exist in your own area? Do you keep in regular touch with them?³³

The *Australian Monthly's* enthusiastic review wondered, "Why haven't we got councils like the Canadian ones?"³⁴ A review in "Film Council Corner" of the U.S. magazine *Film News* was less complimentary; the author was skeptical about the amount of community activity film might be able to activate. Arguing that "a thorough and balanced assimilation of films in the community" should have been depicted, the assessment continued, "One sequence in particular conveys the impression, at least to this reviewer, that a community was well-nigh revolutionized after a film screening. Maybe it happened somewhere *once*, but that it is typical seems pretty doubtful." In what appears to be a reference to the communication research of Paul Lazarsfeld and his cohort, this same reviewer criticized the film for an "over-evaluation" of the effects of mass media, pointing out that "latest research gives greater value to the role of face-to-face relations in influencing the individual directly, the community activity through him, than it gives to the press, radio and films."³⁵ Given that the film *does* set as a priority the face-to-face discussion and evaluation of films, I understand this comment as a sign of just how widely accepted this "new" understanding of media use must have been, such that *Film and You* could be criticized for not prioritizing it enough. *Ideas on Film*, the 1951 source guide for nontheatrical film comprised mostly of selections from the *Saturday Review of Literature*, reproaches *Film and You* for not being as exciting as it might be, but concludes that "it gives the best all-around coverage on the nontheatrical field yet available on film."³⁶ Gloria Waldron made favorable mention of its use by the FCA in her 1949 *The Information Film*.³⁷

Spurred on by the success of *Film and You*, the NFB produced a companion film titled *The Gentle Art of Film Projection* (1950). It had some of the same crew as the earlier film, including director Peters, composer Eldon Rathbone, and cinematographer Lorne C. Batchelor; though this one was produced

³³ "The Film and You"—A 16mm Film about Films—and You," 2.

³⁴ Review, *Australian Monthly* (Dec. 1950), FAY.

³⁵ Review of *Film and You*, *Film News* (Feb. 1949), FAY.

³⁶ Cecile Starr, ed., *Ideas on Film* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1951), 153.

³⁷ Gloria Waldron, *The Information Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

by a future head of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, Michael Spencer. Designed to improve showmanship in nontheatrical settings, with an accompanying lithograph pamphlet, it contains material on how to set up and run projectors.³⁸ The necessity of such good projection practices is reinforced by the hapless George Beasley, the quintessential bad projectionist. He is a clumsy, Walter Mitty-like character, who alternately dreams he is a dandy schoolboy in ruffles, tights, and oiled hair; an orchestra conductor; and a love-struck romantic, mooning over Alice the film librarian. He sets the volume too high or too low, he runs the film upside down, and he doesn't notice when celluloid misses the take-up reel, burying him (see fig. 17.4). It ends with him crashing down a flight of stairs, off-screen, while overloaded with film reels and a projector. The narrator/film expert turns to the camera and pointedly says, "George Beasley will never be a showman. But you could."

The response to *The Gentle Art of Film Projection* was not as favorable as it had been for *Film and You*, and some powerful figures wanted the film scrapped. The High Commissioner for Canada in Australia wrote to complain of the "burlesque treatment" of the topic.³⁹ The NFB staff documented problems with the



Figure 17.4. George Beasley learning the finer aspects of film screenings in *The Gentle Art of Projection*. (Courtesy of the NFB.)

³⁸ Memorandum from Michael Spencer, May 11, 1951, *Gentle Art of Film Projection* File, National Film Board Archives [hereafter GAFF], Montreal.

³⁹ Letter from the Office of the High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra, Nov. 28, 1951, GAFF.

film's light touch, pointing to *Film Tactics* as an appropriately serious film, which is a striking assessment given that the latter film now appears surreal, and perhaps even absurdist.⁴⁰ Negative comments felt *The Gentle Art* was "directed to people with a low I.Q.," "it is unbelievable that taxpayer's money is spent on such rubbish," and that the straight man was seen as too much like a Gestapo officer.⁴¹ A full survey showed that it did in fact please film council members, projectionists, and rural audiences, and was seen unfavorably primarily by urban audiences. Still, complaints led to a temporary suspension of distribution in 1951.⁴²

One of the problems with the film, aside from tone, was that it didn't deal with discussion. Spencer proposed to make another film, more explicitly a practical guide to instructional film for community use, rather than revise *The Gentle Art of Film Projection*.⁴³ Distribution and field officers also expressed a desire for a short on film discussion.⁴⁴ Their findings contributed to the NFB's *Let's Talk about Films* (1953). This film illustrates techniques to generate questions and debate following a film screening, showing the importance of a skilled group leader. Again using a diegetic film instruction context, this time an unsuccessful forum following a film on rehabilitation of ex-convicts called *After Prison What?* (NFB, 1951), *Let's Talk about Films* argues for an active and authoritative leader. Film discussion leaders were not to be blustery authorities, but to become members of the group, watching films with audiences and posing questions. Forum leaders were directed to express their personal opinion on film topics, thus encouraging audiences to do the same. Rather than dominating a discussion, leaders prompt audience members "to share their feelings," seeing this as the best way to get people to make up their minds about something and then, once convinced, to be prepared to act.⁴⁵ The goal of *Let's Talk about Films* was to convey "the feeling of a warm group atmosphere" as an essential component to effective discussion and utilization.⁴⁶

Looking Beyond . . . Story of a Film Council (NFB, 1957) was an ode to the success of the councils. It presents the contributions to "the welfare and enlightenment" of citizens made by the over four hundred councils through which "people gather together, discussing, arguing, learning—with the aid of film," as

⁴⁰ Memorandum from Vaughan Deacon, "Observations of NFB Toronto Staff on Gentle Art of Film Projection," June 11, 1951, GAFF.

⁴¹ "The Gentle Art of Film Projection: A Report on Audience Reaction as Reported by NFB Representatives," Nov. 1951, GAFF, 4.

⁴² Memorandum from T. V. Adams, "RE: *The Gentle Art of Film Projection*," May 3, 1951, GAFF.

⁴³ Memorandum from Michael Spencer, July 20, 1951, GAFF.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Glen Byford, "Film Utilization," Jan. 20, ca. 1953, LTAF.

⁴⁵ Vaughn Deacon, "Getting the Most out of Your Film Showing," Dec. 29, 1952, LTAF.

⁴⁶ Memorandum from E. W. Bovard Jr., University of Toronto, June 23, 1953, LTAF, 1.

the NFB information notice puts it.⁴⁷ Where nine years earlier *Film and You* chronicled the process by which communities form film councils, *Looking Beyond* begins with a montage of councils already in operation. In the first scene, a council has just watched a film and they begin to discuss the politics of aid to developing nations. Next, a gathering of older women argue about childcare. This leads to a "New Canadians" club wondering about what is left behind by the progressive education of their new country. As presented here, groups are typified by gender, interest, ethnicity, and language, with the rather obvious imperative of Canadian citizenship enforced. The New Canadians declare, "We agreed to speak English," which is followed by a French-speaking council from Montreal. This opening montage includes a 16mm projector or screen, or both, standing watch over each of these screening scenes. There is no highlighting of the film titles, with the exception of *L'homme aux oiseaux* (English version: *The Bird Fancier*) (NFB, 1952) watched by the francophone group. The overarching element is discussion and debate. Moreover, discussion is calm, civic, and ordered, with measured turn-taking and meaningful contributions respected by other members.

Looking Beyond then flashes back, presenting a reminiscence of a particular council's formation, beginning with the needless death of a child from diphtheria, and a doctor's campaign to promote an immunization plan. A representative from a neighboring film council arrives to describe how a community can be mobilized behind a general health concern through film programs. The movie ends by presenting a forum celebrating the fifth anniversary of the council's establishment. Echoing the reference to the politics of international development in the opening scene, the final forum topic depicted is an appeal to global significance of their activities, including excerpts from *The War on Want* (NFB, 1954), a film about Canadian contributions through UNESCO to the development in Southeast Asia. Thus, *Looking Beyond* moves from localized communities of difference, enacting a common mode of national citizenship, to the cosmopolitan ideal of world citizenship at the conclusion.

The depiction of activity in this cycle of film-use films makes it evident that the path of progress toward a stable informational and instructional media scene involved certain ideas about motion pictures, education, and citizenship. Examining these largely forgotten works now provides access to some of the presumptions of the day as popular ideas about educational media were in process of being set in place. Represented is a link between local participation in community activity and international civic responsibility, with film as the crucial vehicle for this connection. Further, these film-use films indicate a desire for the promotion

⁴⁷ NFB Information Bulletin for *Looking Beyond . . . Story of a Film Council* (1957), *Looking Beyond . . . Story of a Film Council* File, National Film Board Archives, Montreal.

of *guided group discussion* as the ideal form of film utilization. The film-within-a-film structure of the film-use films shows the sort of topics available, which were of interest for community and classroom contexts, rural and urban audiences, and serious and light programming. Along with these ideas ran particular modes of serious consideration of community and curricular topics via motion pictures as well as related uses of classroom and community space for gatherings, screenings, and discussions. Put differently, cultural leaders deployed the mobile media of film to gain access to and influence in locations for the molding of civic participation. In addition to the discourse of democratic life and volunteerism advocated here, there is also a reconfiguration of the relationship between government and industry in the arena of education and media, with private citizens taking a leadership role in the integration of media with existing institutions. On the matter of the media industries, take note that this is also partly a tale of the expansion of the extratheatrical market as businesses readied themselves to pry open classrooms and other quasi-educational sites as targets for their new media wares.

Film educationalists and their organizations worked to coordinate how decisions were made about film, offering a framework for a public mediated by screens, which were in turn mediated by community leaders, teachers, and cultural authorities. The forum/discussion idea blended less traditionally authoritative educational tactics with ideas about participation in democratic life. This enactment of citizenship appeared in other films, including Encyclopaedia Britannica's *How to Organize a Discussion Group* (1954), *How to Conduct a Discussion Group* (1954), and *Room for Discussion* (1953). Together these represent an effort to situate a technological apparatus in a vaguely Deweyian educational idea. The guided group discussion model offered a reasonable supplement to an existing understanding of progressive education, and in so doing, it established comfortable ground for screen education and a film-inflected public to grow. The place of group discussion in mass media echoes the founding paradigm of the field of communication studies, the contemporaneously developing "limited effects" or "two-step flow" model. In the existing historical material on the discipline, this paradigm is presented as the product of research, albeit sponsored research, from sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld's studies of media influence or psychologist Kurt Lewin's research on group dynamics.⁴⁸ In light of the priorities evident in the film-use film, in the activities of film educationalists, in similar

⁴⁸ See, for example, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944); Elihu Katz and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New York: Free Press, 1955); and Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics [1935-1946]* (New York: Harper, 1948).

initiatives with other media, and in the philanthropic foundations that supported these projects, I am convinced that the two-step flow model was equally the product of policy. In other words, the limited effects hypothesis of the impact of mass media emerged from an organized and concerted effort to establish a postwar liberal consensus built upon relations between ideas about mobile technology and group discussion.⁴⁹

The film council movement, and its advancement of screen-mediated citizenship, was a major force directing the incorporation of film into diverse educational locations. *The Unique Contribution* (EBF, 1959), a film about Encyclopaedia Britannica Films' successful role in modernizing classrooms, ends with an encapsulation of the dominant sentiment about technological futures, though with a post-Sputnik anxiety in the subtext. Narrator Maurice B. Mitchell, then president of EBF, declares that films used by "forward looking teachers" are part of the nation that has "never before turned its back on a challenge to use the modern devices, the most advanced techniques, to solve its problems. Certainly in education we have a critical problem, and certainly in education we will make our greatest contribution to provide to those who deserve the most, our teachers, the tools that help them do the job that is so important to us." As the sites and occasions of education expanded, and as officially sanctioned curricula confronted novel community forms, authorities acting in the name of public interest sought to occupy that terrain, filling it with what they deemed to be appropriate tactics, subjects, and materials. Thus, a brand of vernacular film knowledge about the instructional and information genre was emerging, one that expressed a hierarchy of authority about a modern mass-mediated public sphere.

Filmography

Film and Radio—A Word about Citizen's Forums (1943) 3 min.
PRODUCTION: NFB. ACCESS: NFB.

Film and You (1948) 21 min.
PRODUCTION: NFB. PRODUCER: Donald Fraser. DIRECTORS: Jean Palardy, Donald Peters. CAMERA: Lorne C. Batchelor. MUSIC: Eldon Rathburn. A French-language version, *Conseil du Film*, was also produced. ACCESS: NFB.

⁴⁹ Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: The New Press, 2010) develops this argument with respect to middlebrow, educational television.

***Film Tactics* (1945) 22 min. and 15 min. sd. b&w. 35mm and 16mm**

PRODUCTION: U.S. Dept. of the Navy. PRODUCER: Harry Joe Brown. NOTE: In 1947, the U.S. Office of Education released this for public educational use; distributed by Castle Films. Released in 1974 by National Audiovisual Center (Washington, DC). ACCESS: University Libraries of Maryland, North Texas, Pittsburgh, South Carolina, and Idaho State; State Library of New South Wales, Australia.

***The Gentle Art of Film Projection* (1950) 21 min.**

PRODUCTION: NFB. PRODUCER: Michael Spencer. DIRECTOR/WRITER: Donald Peters. CAMERA: Lorne C. Batchelor. SOUND: Roger Beaudry. EDITOR: Pierre Bruneau, Victor Jobin. ANIMATION: Wolf Koenig. MUSIC: Eldon Rathburn. CAST: John Pratt. A French-language version, *Les joies innocentes de la projection*, was also produced. ACCESS: NFB.

***Let's Talk about Films* (1953) 18 min.**

PRODUCTION: NFB. PRODUCER/DIRECTOR/WRITER: Julian Biggs. CAMERA: John Foster. SOUND: Joseph Champagne. EDITOR: Fergus McDonell. A French-language version, *Ciné-forum*, was also produced. ACCESS: NFB.

***Looking Beyond . . . Story of a Film Council* (1957) 18 min.**

PRODUCTION: NFB. PRODUCER: Tom Daly. DIRECTOR/WRITER: Stanley Jackson. CAMERA: Robert Humble. SOUND: Clarke Daprato. EDITOR: William Greaves. ACCESS: NFB.

***Making Films That Teach* (1954) 18 min.**

PRODUCTION: EBF. PRODUCER: Hal Kopel. ACCESS: Prelinger Archives; www.archive.org/details/MakingFi1954.

***Projecting Motion Pictures* (1951) 10 min., sd., b&w, 16mm**

PRODUCTION: UCLA (Motion Picture Division, Dept. of Theatre Arts). DIRECTOR/WRITER: William E. Jordan. PHOTOGRAPHER: Gabriel Hachigian. EDITOR: Tamara Webster. ACCESS: UCLA Film and Television Archive; Pacific Film Archive.

***The Unique Contribution* (1959) 28 min.**

PRODUCTION: EBF. ACCESS: Prelinger Archives/LOC; www.archive.org/details/UniqueCo1959.
www.archive.org/details/UniqueCo1959_2.

Related Films

- After Prison What?* (1951). NFB. 11 min.
- Canada Dances* (1947). NFB. 9 min.
- Choosing a Classroom Film* (1963). McGraw-Hill Text Films/Centron. 18 min. www.archive.org/details/Choosing1963.
- Film Research and Learning* (1956). W. A. Wittich. 12 min. www.archive.org/details/FilmRese1956.
- Get Rid of Rats* (1948). NFB. 10 min.
- L'homme aux oiseaux* (English version: *The Bird Fancier*) (1952). NFB. 29 min.
- How to Conduct a Discussion Group* (1954). EBF.
- How to Organize a Discussion Group* (1954). EBF.
- How to Use Classroom Films* (1963). McGraw-Hill Text Films/Centron. 14 min. www.archive.org/details/HowtoUse1963.
- Just Weeds* (1945). NFB. 21 min.
- Kitchen Come True* (1948). NFB. 18 min.
- Lessons in Living* (1944). NFB. 23 min.
- Motion Film in the Classroom* (1968). EML Corp. (Educational Media Laboratories, Austin, TX).
- New Dimensions through Teaching Films* (1963). Coronet. 27 min.
- Room for Discussion* (1953). EBF.
- Seed Growing in Grand Forks* (1947). NFB.
- Teaching with Sound Films* (1936). EBF.
- Using the Classroom Film* (1945). EBF.
- The War on Want* (1954). NFB. 15 min.
- World of Plenty* (1943). Paul Rotha. 42 min. www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/560335/index.html.
- Worth the Risk* (1948). Central Office of Information, UK.