AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

AN EXEGESIS SUBMITTED IN PART FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

Attachments

The Project After Indonesia Calling (2012), a single channel DVD film of 39 minutes, with which this exegesis is concerned, is attached. Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia (John Hughes, 90 minutes, 2009) and Indonesia Calling (Joris Ivens, 22 minutes, 1946) are also attached as additional DVD supplements.
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In pursuing this work I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to colleagues Pat Laughren, Trish FitzSimons and Dugald Williamson among others who have examined overlapping concerns in recent times. Pat Laughren provides an insightful distillation of issues in documentary policy up until around 2006; his Ph.D. by publication ‘Picturing Politics’ (2006) is exemplary in its reading of certain specific works (four of his own films 1990 - 2005) and their articulated relationship with industry policy settings and change, and with broadcasting
priorities and protocols. Among the scholars of Australian film history, and early post-war documentary in particular, this work is indebted to Graeme Cutts, Deane Williams, Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan and the groundbreaking works in policy of Ina Bertrand and her colleagues [Bertrand and Diane Collins], and Graham Shirley whose advice has always been pertinent and generous.

I am indebted to many collaborators acknowledged in the credits of the films that I have drawn on for the Project. In particular I am indebted to film editor Uri Mizrahi, with whom I have collaborated since 1989, and to writer Paul Davies who worked on Traps (1986), All That Is Solid (1988) and One Way Street (1992). For her help in compiling the film Project After Indonesia Calling, I thank film editor Kate Muir, and Emma Bortington for her sound mix on the Project. Throughout all these processes and over many years, I am deeply appreciative of the pertinent critical oversight and support of my partner, Carole Sklan.
Statement of Authorship

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously in whole or in part to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by any third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

John Hughes, November 2012
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After Indonesia Calling is concerned with two documentary films: the Joris Ivens film ‘Indonesia Calling’ (1946) and a film I have made addressing aspects of Ivens’ film: Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia (2009). The Project is a film of about 38 minutes, essaying these works (2009 and 1946) in a speculative mode, exploring an engagement with Ivens and his Indonesia Calling and placing the 2009 film in the context of some other works from my earlier filmmaking practice. Ivens’ Indonesia Calling is recalled in a gesture of remembrance, when today the ‘independent’, the ‘creative’ documentary, and the ‘essay’ documentary, even the ‘social’ documentary appear to many filmmakers somewhat threatened, or at least undergoing significant transformation.

The exegesis, in three parts, elaborates the discourse initiated by the Project, giving consideration to facets of the contexts in which these works were made in more detail, in ways that a moving image work is less suited to perform. Attention is given to Australian government policy contexts of both the 1946 film and the 2009 film, examining aspects of the politics of regulation that both enables and constrains documentary production in Australia. In the case of the early post-war period, a central focus is the emergence of the Australian National Film Board and its film production division. The context given prominence is a politics of the early Cold War. New research in security archives, sketched out in the 2009 film, is extended, indicating ambivalences (or contradictions)
concerning documentary, its practitioners and its advocates, within the early post-war Australian state apparatus. This work supplements existing scholarship on the emergence of the Australian National Film Board as an exercise in post-war reconstruction and also supplements existing research on security-informed interference on the cultural front in Australia in literature and the arts.

Regarding 2009, another constellation of Commonwealth policy and support for Australian documentary is explored, teasing out something of the complex relations today between government policy, independent documentary and television. It is argued that the changing priorities of television, and the changing relations between filmmakers and broadcasting have converged with the interests of a certain sector of factual television production and ideologically aligned policy architects to bring these changes about. This recent substantial structural change, broadly contemporaneous with the 2009 film and the Project, focuses on process and differing values in play as change is implemented. Despite far-reaching differences in circumstance of 1945 on the one hand and 2008 on the other, important parallels of contestation and outcome are apparent.

Part Three of the exegesis offers a speculative essay on Ivens' film, referencing ‘the essay film’, newsreels, the word and the image; it is argued that despite the film’s pedagogic and instrumental intentions the very heterogeneity of the work reveals, as it were between the ‘cracks’ of its uneven surface, an essayist moment.
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Introduction

When, in February 2006, my friend Simon called back across Flinders Street, “Someone should make a film about *Indonesia Calling!* You should do it!” I recognised immediately he was onto something. We had just left the ACMI cinemas in Flinders Street, Melbourne following a screening of my earlier film *The Archive Project*, which had premiered at the AIDC (Australian International Documentary Conference). The more I thought about it, the more I could see the connections Ivens’ 1946 film *Indonesia Calling* had with the present day.

The filmmaking community was as usual bemoaning the parlous state of independent documentary; Australian-Indonesian relations were in the news with international relations experts calling for a renewed engagement with Asia. The story around the making of *Indonesia Calling* was a parallel one, in many ways the logical follow up to *The Archive Project*’s story of the Realist film movement, mainly set in Melbourne during the same period. It could complement other film work with which I had been engaged, work that had sought to recover oppositional ‘activist’ documentary in Australia during the Cold War.¹

Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* was made ‘independently’, with editorial and creative decisions independent of the disciplines and authority

of government and (commercial) industry film production. It was an advocacy film, articulating explicitly its editorial perspective. It was also an ‘activist' film, serving a function within the political struggle it depicted. I realised that many of the ‘emerging’ documentary enthusiasts at the AIDC would likely have never heard of *Indonesia Calling*, or Joris Ivens for that matter. Perhaps a new film could bring this material to a new constituency, and encourage filmmakers to think and work ‘outside the box’. Maybe after this I could put my long-standing interest in Cold War film culture aside.

The issue Ivens' film addresses—the support by sections of the Australian community for the Republic of Indonesia as it emerged at the end of the Pacific War—seemed a story well worth recalling for other reasons as well, including troubled relations between Indonesia and Australia current at that time.\(^2\) The example the film provided of organised workers taking action in collaboration with committed artists to advance human rights in an international context was a compelling aspect of this history. The events depicted in Ivens' film—Australian, Indonesian, Chinese and Indian workers combining their efforts to blockade Dutch shipping in Australia to defend the Indonesian's anti-Colonial revolution—was a fine starting point.

As I began to develop research on Ivens' *Indonesia Calling*, the history of the Indonesian independence movement in Australia, its relations with Australian trade unions, Ivens’ engagement with the formation of the Australian National Film Board, the possibilities of  

\(^2\) Mutual distrust and hostility between many Australians and Indonesians was reported in the press and from public opinion polls in both countries (Mackie 2007).
enhancing the process by crafting the work as a postgraduate academic project became apparent. It quickly became a more elaborate, longer-term project than first anticipated. This Project and these pages are the result of that work.

The broad editorial imperative flowing through the Project and exegesis is an interest in the past and the future of ‘independent’ or ‘creative’ documentary in Australia. In the context of this work terms like ‘independent’, ‘creative’, ‘essay’, and indeed the word ‘documentary’ itself are less than definitive. The boundaries between ‘documentary’ and ‘infotainment’, for example, are currently in dispute; there is a lot of business on this particular boundary. Fortunately, for my purposes in this work, these terms are more descriptors than ‘locked off’ categories; they are best understood as attributes that flow through individual works accessible to commentary and criticism; they apply to individual works as a matter of degree. Even the most genre-driven, specialist factual television science or history show, for example, will often have an essayist dimension. My work here conjures a spectrum with independent creative documentary at one pole and the television industry’s factual categories (specialist factual, factual entertainment, infotainment) at the other.

The film about *Indonesia Calling* that Simon suggested became *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia*, 2009. It was released internationally in late 2009 at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA). It premiered in Australia at the Melbourne Film Festival and was broadcast on ABC TV 1 in January 2009.

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3 The issue concerns how broadly tax rebates should be available to subsidise the production of factual television; see Part Two.
2010 and February 2011. It is provided here as a supplement to the project *After Indonesia Calling*. The project *After Indonesia Calling* (2012) has provided the opportunity for a creative reflection on this recent work and an opportunity to spin a yarn more playfully and personally, and to speak more directly of overarching issues of documentary film practice, in a mode unconstrained by considerations of the needs of broader audiences, broadcasters or financiers.

In keeping with an aesthetic tendency in this Project that favours the essay film, the exegesis itself and its relationship with the Project is somewhat unorthodox. Themes are introduced in one context and elaborated in another. Parallels and echoes of past and present are evoked through the juxtaposition of stories and ideas. While the Project is playful in its evocation of themes, the exegesis in its first and second parts is more empirical and detailed in its exposition. In its third part the exegesis opens into a more speculative mode, reflecting on Ivens’ film in more formalist terms and considering it in relation to the idea of the film essay. In its more speculative exposition, this third ‘movement’ of the exegesis is more closely parallel with the Project on the level of form, and corresponds more explicitly in its reference.

**The Project**

*After Indonesia Calling* (2012) takes the form of an essay film of around 39 minutes, drawing on *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (2009) and pursuing a conceptual trajectory (a continuity of ideas) with other films I have made exploring related concerns. *After Indonesia Calling* incorporates reflection on relations between film and history that the reception of Ivens’ 1946 film evokes today.
It incorporates elements from a number of my earlier films re-configured around the themes developed here. The provenance of material cited in this bricolage practice can be seen as a layer of intertextuality, referencing an essayist practice in my work thematically resonant with these new works (2009, 2012).

The Project references *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia*, through quotations of sequences, an exposition of narrative and textual strategies, and through elaborations of ideas that are embedded, but not necessarily explicit, in the 2009 film. For example, the ‘biopic’ as a form almost necessarily constructs a problematic historiography of decisive deeds of great men (or women) producing an individualistic, ‘celebrity’ historiography. The 2009 film sails very close to the wind on this front, although arguably the tendency to heroism is undercut to some degree by the attention given to those around Ivens in his 1945-6 endeavours, and to the weight given throughout the film to the broader political context. *After Indonesia Calling* explicitly unpacks some of this by reference to an earlier ‘biopic’ of mine, *One Way Street: Fragments for Walter Benjamin* (1992), a film that dealt differently with the same problem (see Cumming [unpublished] 2004: 186-198).

*One Way Street* uses a comic sequence from René Clair's *Entr’acte* (1924), in which a hearse shakes loose from its horse-drawn carriage and races through streets and carnivals of Paris with the funeral cortege in their finery rushing along behind. This Dadaist classic seemed to me a suitable metaphor for the fetishism surrounding the figure of Benjamin, and in particular surrounding
his death—such a powerfully romantic moment in his canonisation—with which the film was inevitably complicit.4

This ironic montage lifts _Entr’acte_ from its moment in time and sets it against preparations in 1990 to mark the 50th anniversary of Benjamin's death at a gravesite memorial ceremony in the town of Portboa on the French-Spanish border, the site of Benjamin's apocryphal 'suicide'. In _After Indonesia Calling_, this structure (_Entr’acte/Portboa_) is reconfigured, cut up and restaged in a new constellation referencing a similar problem vis-à-vis the figure of Ivens and the ‘making of _Indonesia Calling_ (1946). The Project explores this and reflects on how the parallel ‘funeral’ trope in the 2009 film works quite differently, while sharing some narrative functions in common with _One Way Street_. Film and history, historical mourning and remembrance are drawn back into the work in a different register as the project turns its attention to people who actually appear in Ivens’ film and to the manner of their depiction.

In the 2009 film, television coverage of Ivens' funeral allows the deployment of ‘celebrity’ as a shorthand device to establish the prominence of the famous Dutch filmmaker for an audience that cannot be assumed to know his name. The scene also establishes certain details of his ongoing notoriety, such as for example, the honouring of his grave by both the Chinese government and Chinese dissidents within weeks of Tiananmen Square.5


5 The attack on demonstrators by Chinese security forces in Tiananmen Square took place on June 4, 1989; Ivens’ funeral in Paris at Montparnasse Cemetery took place on July 6, 1989.
This apparently morbid fascination with the grave also becomes a reference, an evocation, of an analogy essential to interpretative method in adaptation (Corrigan 2011: 191), commentary and criticism: the ‘mortification of the text’ (Benjamin 1995: 297-298; Wolin 1982: 63-5). The metaphor of the grave is figured as an opening to ‘salvage historiography’—drawing upon things that have passed away and threaten to disappear irretrievably—to speak to us in a manner legible for our time. The Project, the provenance of its component parts, and the works to which it refers and on which it draws are in one way or another dedicated to remembrance. Where there is nostalgia in this turning to the past, there is also a kind of rebirth, a ‘recycling’ if you like, a ‘remake’ that invests nostalgia with a revitalising energy.

While new scenes have been shot for After Indonesia Calling, it is substantially a compilation film ‘repurposing’ scenes, shots, sequences, audio ‘grabs’ and music from Film-Work (1981), All That Is Solid (1988), One Way Street (1992), What I Have Written (1995), River of Dreams (2000), The Archive Project (2006) and Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia (2009). Other archival materials, both sound and image, are also drawn into this bricolage. While methodologically something of a compilation film, it also has attributes of the essay film insofar as it makes new works of existing materials through re-cutting and re-contextualising of sequences, shots, sounds and scenes.\(^6\) For instance, in After

\(^6\) There is a resonance between these formal attributes of the Project and Beattie’s account of ‘found footage’ collagist practices “which release unrealised meanings and productive ambiguities inherent in source footage [...] result[ing] in a critical historiography operative though documentary display” (Beattie 2008: 7).
Indonesia Calling, a Benjamin quote performed by Nicos Lathouris for One Way Street ("Even the dead will not be safe...") is reconfigured by superimposing, and animating, an individual frame from an earlier film (Film-Work [1981]). The scene becomes a new work; each of its components, ‘found images’, transposed from their earlier contexts. In this case a static, graphic text originally functioning as an epigram at the head of Film-Work combines with a performance from 1992 to say something in 2012 about the 2009 film: the new configuration is an imagistic counter-text. Other examples include the use of scenes from All That Is Solid (1988) and other works to quite different purposes than their original use intended.

Another example, a live action slide show from River of Dreams (2000)—a film I made on native title and environmentalism in the Kimberley, is cannibalised here for its skeleton, into which a new set of freeze frames from Indonesia Calling (1946) is then surgically inserted. This scene in After Indonesia Calling is introduced with a shot from my narrative feature What I Have Written (1996), depicting a 35mm transparency falling into place in a slide carousel.

After Indonesia Calling deploys a first-person narration in the foreground of its enunciation. The ‘voice’ of the project is idiosyncratic, but the narrator is identifiably the same identity as the narrator of the 2009 film and of The Archive Project (2006), also cited. These are different kinds of films; in each case the

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7 The component (the written text) was made for the Project by generating a high-resolution scan of a 16mm frame of the epigram at the head of Film-Work and animating a move across the text and the texture of this freeze frame.
positioning of the first-person narrator is slightly different. This latter film was the first occasion in my work that deployed this device. In the case of *The Archive Project*, it made sense to construct the first-person narrator as a filmmaker, a manipulator of other people's images, in search of a kind of partial genealogy of film-on-the-left in Australia. The first-person narrator in *The Archive Project* is what I have called a 'recessed' narrator: a narrator who speaks from the margins. In *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia*, again there is a first-person narrator assumed to be the filmmaker, but in this case, unlike in *The Archive Project*, the narrator figure is not identified, and is also recessed. With *After Indonesia Calling*, the first-person narrator occupies centre stage much more; this is because the work needs to function more idiosyncratically and speak personally, suggesting an almost autobiographical dimension. Engaging with this Project in this way provided an opportunity to work through some reluctance to assume such a position in the work, both as a filmmaker and a writer.

A screening of *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* at IDFA in November 2009 is cited in the Project as it is part of the story of that film, and because it provides a bridge to the international nature of underlying issues canvassed throughout this work: relations between markets and creative practice. In the Netherlands in 2009, the iconic Dutch documentarian Ivens was quietly displaced from ‘naming rights’ for IDFA’s most prestigious award. What had been, since IDFA’s founding in 1988, the ‘Joris Ivens Award for Best Documentary’ became in 2009 ‘the IDFA AVRO Award’ (AVRO is the Netherlands’ leading public broadcaster). This

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coincidence of the 2009 premiere recollecting Iven’s Australian film on the one hand and a new ‘forgetting’ on the other, since IDFA as it were ‘de-friended’ Ivens in his own country, provided the Project a strikingly resonant, irresistible ironic symmetry.

Another matter raised in the Project concerns aspects of the context conditioning the cultural environments in which both Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* and the 2009 film were made. In the case of Ivens’ film, the Cold War security environment is the main focus. In the latter period, during which this Project and the 2009 film were in production, changes to Commonwealth policy supporting film and television production were planned and instituted.9

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9 *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (2009)—the ‘Project I had intended to make’, to paraphrase Deane Williams (Williams 2000: preface)—was completed in June 2009, under contract to MIFF (Melbourne International Film Festival) on condition that the film premier at MIFF that year, which it did. The Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC) was the principal investor through its ‘Special Documentary Fund’ (SDF), with Film Victoria and ABC TV Arts also contributing to the film’s budget. After an extraordinarily drawn-out process, on which fortunately we do not need to elaborate here, a ‘Producers Offset’ was returned to the Project. After the film had secured its SDF funding, ABC TV Arts and Entertainment (as distinct from ABC Documentary) commissioned a half-hour version, but agreed, on the film’s completion, to broadcast it at feature length. [A similar strategy enabled *The Archive Project* (2006) to be made.] It is relevant in this work to be aware of these financing partners as the discussion of turbulent contemporary documentary policy and practice in Part Two of the exegesis argues a relationship between creative practice, policy and the financing mechanism.
Thus a variety of strands woven together hold these different historical horizons of documentary filmmaking in Australia in tension, while one looks back at the other. Similarly, the exegesis and the Project look back at one another, and each articulates the same constellation of reference points in its own language. The medium of the moving image can evoke aspects of these ideas, but ‘chapter and verse’ are better suited to the written exegesis.

The exegesis

The exegesis is in three parts. In the first part the Ivens' film is explored in terms of the circumstances that occasioned Ivens and his colleagues making the work that became *Indonesia Calling* (1946). A literature review mainly confined to scholarship pertinent to questions raised here and material specifically concerning *Indonesia Calling* and Ivens in Australia introduces an account of Ivens' time in Australia. (Neither the films nor the exegesis comprising this work seek to deliver a ‘life and work of Joris Ivens’.) The political context that gave rise to Ivens' film—an anti-Colonial liberation movement emerging in the region—and the political context around the film's release—the gathering disciplines of the Cold War—are explored with reference to Australian responses to them. New archival research is presented here, supplementing previous scholarship.

Ivens' *Indonesia Calling* has an uncanny relationship with the emergence of the Australian National Film Board (ANFB). I say ‘uncanny’ because the relationship between his film and the ANFB remains one of absence and mystery. *Indonesia Calling* was not,
and could not, have been made with overt support from the ANFB. However, there remain traces of interconnection between the ANFB and its production division with *Indonesia Calling*. Research informing these ‘traces’ is based on security files; archival materials I have sought and discovered in the course of work on this Project, the 2009 film and earlier film, television and online works dealing with this period of Australian film history (Hughes 2006; Hughes 2007a). The role of security agencies in guiding the hand of Commonwealth support for Australian writers and intellectuals in the Cold War period has been documented (Ashbolt 1984; McKernan 1984; Capp 1993; McKnight 1994: 123-133), but less attention has been paid to security interest in Australian film. The 2009 film and this Project and exegesis contribute new research on this question, supplementing the original scholarship of *The Archive Project* (2006) with new documentation. This contributes to further filling out the missing (film) dimension to scholarship on the more covert dimension of Australia’s cultural Cold War.

Part Two explores in a different register and in more detail the Australian government’s engagement with documentary during the period when Ivens was in Australia. Returning to primary sources on the establishment and early years of the ANFB as a bureaucratic project, this section brings to light new detail and interpretation supplementing previous work on the ANFB’s origins (Bertrand 2000; Bertrand and Collins 1981; Moran 1991; Williams 1999). The relationship in the mid-1940s between Alfred Conlon’s ‘Prime Minister's Committee for Morale’ and H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs’ Department of Post-War Reconstruction is offered as a formative moment in the bureaucratic emergence of early post-war documentary through the advocacy of John Heyer and Professor Alan Stout.
Part Two is also concerned with aspects of contemporary Commonwealth government film industry policy during the period coinciding with the preparation of this project and exegesis. While some accounts of these changes have been published, most notably Laughren (2008: 116-128) and FitzSimons et al. (2011: 232-242); to my knowledge the process of change, and its implications for practice, have not previously been elaborated. This work does not make a claim to comprehensiveness; it is more a reflection on the process informed by an abiding interest in the kinds of filmmaking represented by the various works deployed in this Project.

While in 1945 a hopeful national agenda for post-war development and modest social change was to be informed and supported by government documentary production and community-based distribution, the potential of the ANFB was spoiled by its containment within a conservative government department hostile to the emerging documentary practice of its time, and spoiled again by the secret security apparatus of the state informed by Cold War conflict. Sixty years later we have seen a determined and largely successful attempt to corporatise and transform an ‘independent' documentary sector characterised as a ‘cottage industry’ in the interests of ‘viable businesses'. It is argued that priorities and values driving Australian government policy have increasingly constrained opportunities for the production and distribution of the ‘creative documentary' and the essay film, while favouring the factual television series. The gradually emerging hegemony of television is seen as one factor among many in the reconfiguration of Australian documentary today in parallel with international trends.
Part Three in a sense returns to ‘the repressed’ of Parts One and Two, considering Ivens' *Indonesia Calling* as a work of art. The ‘elephant in the room’, as it were, turns out to be a Golden Calf. Deploying a more speculative and playful mode of address, this part examines ideas around the essay film and explores their relationship with *Indonesia Calling*. It is argued that a certain aesthetic disunity and heterogeneity of forms disrupt the surface of Ivens' film, resulting in formal properties that perform the kinds of a-conceptual elements that Adorno in particular associates with the essay in its literary form (Adorno 1991).

This is not to say that *Indonesia Calling* (1946) is an ‘essay film’, although it could be argued that way. Rather, I wish to say—through a close reading of certain sequences—an essayist dimension is discernible, not only in the slightly fragmented and discursive rhetorical form at the level of narrative, but also at the level of the image, where the delinquent production methodology necessitated by the historical crisis attending the film's production has inscribed itself, creating a kind of dialectical image recognisable today when new activist moving image makers seek to deploy different kinds of semiological delinquency in the service of a critical cultural politics.

Two European television news stories about Ivens—his moment of 'redemption' on the one hand and his burial on the other—are deployed in a riff on the discourse of word and image; the unreliability of historical 'progress' and the tendency for 'all that is solid' to 'melt into air'. These television news items are sources deployed in the opening and closing sequences of the 2009 film and in the project *After Indonesia Calling*. They are integral to both, and occupy an interesting status, insofar as (particularly in the 2009 film) they are at once integrated into and also located 'outside' the
totality of the work. In both films the newsreels are ‘quoted’ with minimal editing and positioned to perform a degree of autonomy. They evoke a more distanced reception therefore than some other newsreel and documentary materials cited as ‘found footage’ in the 2009 film.

The harvesting of television news, with its often idiomatic ‘factual’ storytelling, as the source material that structures this section has an ironic resonance with the thrust of the closing section of Part Two, where it is suggested that the ‘fall’ of a certain kind of documentary practice is occasioned by the hegemony of television. It also refers to an account of the newsreel as a form and textual strategy in Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling*, presented later in this part. Thirdly, it echoes earlier discussion concerning the ‘newsreel faction’ as a constraining influence within the office politics of the ANFB (Moran 1991: 34; Williams 2008: 102-103). In *Indonesia Calling*, this newsreel idea—redolent in the early post-war period with a practice (that today we might call ‘factual’) the new documentary sought to escape—is deployed rhetorically by Ivens with playful editorial dexterity.

An image drawn from a French television newsreel (1985) and quoted in *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (2009) sets the stage for this reading. The newsreel documents the occasion of Ivens’ ‘rehabilitation’ by the Dutch Minister for Cultural Affairs, André Brinkman, with the presentation in Paris of the Netherlands most prestigious film award, the Golden Calf. It is at this point that the exegesis converges most directly with the moving image project *After Indonesia Calling*. (This is apparent in the speculative idiom of the address, the material with which it deals, and its formal
components, pictures and words; the text in Part Three is almost a variant of captions, a kind of ‘voice-over' to the images included.)

The newsreel provides an emblematic vehicle to explore allegory, the word and the image. Rather than foregrounding Ivens’ realism and positing relations between Ivens’ oeuvre and traditions of Dutch realist painting, for example, the art referenced is Poussin and the analysis grabs a television news story and excavates its iconic reference for the allegorical moment available within it, to produce an approach to the 1946 film as historical artifact with its ‘hope in the past' struggling against the ‘cunning of history’, which is seen to betray both the utopian moment available in the film, and the filmmaker as an exemplary figure of the committed documentary.

An analysis that fractures, or breaks down, the film into distinct representational modes (the newsreel, the staged observation, the stylised tableau) locates an ‘essayist’ dimension, ‘moment’ or voice in *Indonesia Calling*. A close reading of certain scenes from Ivens’ film offers a virtuous coherence in the film’s uneven surface; a hidden logic in its formal heterogeneity that articulates a utopian moment and a transition from nostalgia and myth to history and activism. Ivens’ Australian ‘film pamphlet’, produced at a moment of crisis for a colonised people’s liberation struggle, remains an exemplary instance of the activist film, and Ivens’ himself the ‘author as producer’ (Benjamin 1978). But to begin at the beginning.
AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

Part One: “An advanced Communist”

In his 2008 book on Australian post-war documentary, Deane Williams evokes the figure of Ivens as he questions a conventional wisdom affirming John Grierson as the ‘father figure’ of documentary in Australia.

Another history (such as the one I had intended to write) could have provided an account of the influence of specific people on documentary filmmaking in Australia in the post-war period... this kind of history could address the visit of Joris Ivens and the making of Indonesia Calling (1946), a film that now seems to warrant urgent attention... Unlike Grierson, who is often considered the father figure of the National Film Board, Ivens is seldom considered in relation to it... (Williams 2008: 16-17).

Williams says his book gives voice “to a more complex and general notion of an international left film culture ... a perhaps less ‘celebrity’-focused notion...” (Williams 2008: 17). In saying this he rightly warns against historiography dedicated to the influence of heroic individuals that foregrounds individuals against a recessed background, rather than recognising how decisive creative thinkers, artists and activists are embedded in complex discourses of historical change. This question of locating individual actors within the complexity of their historical settings is pertinent to this project. It is something of a balancing act negotiating between the appeal of character-driven narrative and a more abstract formulation of historical context. In the case of an account of Ivens in Australia, the first challenge is to give sufficient depth to a variety of
categories of historical context pertinent to decisive actions taken by key figures in the events described.

_Cultural treasures [...] owe their existence not only to the great minds and talents that have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries_ (Benjamin 1973: 258).

Benjamin is reflecting here on a much grander canvas; he is thinking of vast historic epochs and the cultural treasures of civilisations; however the point applies nonetheless in microcosm on the modest scale with which this Project and exegesis is concerned. Parts One and Two of the exegesis seek to present something of these broader contexts.

In speculating over the detail of the production process of _Indonesia Calling_ during 1945-46, we are somewhat reliant on rumours and hearsay. The ‘anonymous toil’ here concerns the identities and fate of Indonesians, in particular, those whose participation is so central to Ivens’ film, and yet to us their individual lives remain shrouded in mystery. The Project and exegesis seek to redress this in their admittedly formalist reflection on certain scenes from the film (see Part Three).

Another pertinent insight from Williams' work is reflected in his thesis title (and book subtitle) ‘An Arc of Mirrors’. Williams sees Australian documentary culture, and film culture more generally, as necessarily international, “a web-like series of immediate and distanced filmmakers, governmental, oppositional and sometimes both” (Williams 2008: 17). This is an important departure from previous scholarship that has tended to approach Australian documentary from a slightly hermetic, nationalist perspective; a discourse governed perhaps by colonial ambivalence.

_White Australian culture has always been at the mercy of the conceptual stasis of the discourse of ‘settlement’. This concept_
has remained a predominant force locating Australian culture at the receiving end of the colonial experience, delimiting the agency and inventiveness of an infant white culture that participates in a global network producing films that imitate, adapt and remake other films in a never-ending journey (Williams 2000: 238).

Again, *After Indonesia Calling* moves in parallel with Williams’ insight. *Indonesia Calling* is very much a work that evokes an Australian identity in dialogue with the ‘outside world’—in particular the Asia Pacific region—through the film’s subject matter—both the ‘international’ personnel who came together in its making and the genre traditions that inform the film’s formal properties.\(^\text{10}\)

In a passage in his thesis\(^\text{11}\) Williams uses an essay of Ross Gibson to tease out the idea that an oceanic dimension of an imagined Australian nation might deliver a more dynamic discourse than that flowing from more common ‘settler’ Australia narratives. Gibson writes,

> *Once a Pacific setting of Australian history is brought to the fore, fluidity and mutability rather than stoic, reactive intransigence can be proposed as a communal tendency* (Gibson 1996, cited in Williams 2000: 238).

In keeping with a historiography of fluidity, Williams makes fine use of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘nomadology’ to analyse a recurring narrative strategy—the journey—that he observes in the early post-

\(^{10}\) Discussion of the hybrid formal properties of Ivens’ film is given consideration in the Project and in Part Three of the exegesis.

war Australian documentary. The films he considers are very often stories of travel and ‘travelling stories’ that ‘name’ and ‘settle’, delivering white Australian meaning to landscapes, times and places. Williams observes a tendency towards a conceptual and cultural ‘occupation’ of the landscape, and with it the dispossession of meanings identified with ‘country’ by Indigenous peoples and culture. There is also an ‘unsettling’ moment of difference. While the documentary forms of these works are familiar from other documentary traditions, they are also new; attributes of the journeys depicted are different from the journeys depicted in British, American, Soviet or other influential ‘national’ documentary cinemas. Williams says rather than seeing these early post-war documentaries as derivative of various ‘mother’ tongues (the English, the American, the Soviet, etc.):

*It is possible to understand these films having further resonance in their fracturing of the colonial culture’s relationship to the hegemonic discourse* (Williams 2000: 233).

In concluding his book (as distinct from the thesis), Williams takes the journey one step further, encouraging an expansive project for an Australian film culture:

*In emphasising the ‘international’ aspects of these films (circulation, reception, imitation) it may be possible to invoke a more dynamic and cross-bred form of cinema that enables*  

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In Deleuze and Guattari’s terms there is both a territorialisation (an invasion or occupation of identity by significance) and deterritorialisation (the ‘becoming’ of the *nomad*). The structure of his argument proposes a kind of liberating agency arising from a dialectic between formal qualities of a body of work reflecting traditions from elsewhere and subject to an immanent critique in the form of an undisciplined difference, a critical moment of delinquent content.
cultures to ‘travel’... to deterritorialise and reterritorialise international viewers (Williams 2008: 151).

The subtlety of Williams' disavowed nationalism resides in its denial. This is an Oedipal gesture: Williams has his protagonists as it were talking back to Grierson (‘the father of documentary’), displacing his authority in favour of a more dispersed network of power and influence. The figures of the ‘mother tongues’, multiple and voluptuous, adorned with cultural treasures (“... colonial experience” Williams 2000: 238), are both admired and desired for the beauty of their forms, and also feared for their capacity to deride and belittle. The ‘infant white culture’ is inventing its post-colonial will to power against the merciless self-deceptions of a colonialist, dare I say, ‘false consciousness’. The ‘inventive infant’ redeems its servitude, returning its own image, hybridised, boundless, delinquent, to the arc of mirrors.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Williams considers attention to Indonesia Calling a matter of urgency; here is a film that addresses these matters of colonialism, white Australia and identity directly. Moreover it does so with a narrative, methodology and purpose positing collaboration among an international progressive movement.

The film has been acknowledged by Australian film history, and with one excellent anthology chapter (Cutts 1984) and more recent work from labour historians Cottle and Keys (2006) and Goodall (2008). These and other Australian scholarship on Indonesia Calling are discussed below.
On Ivens’ oeuvre in general

International scholarship on Ivens, which is vast, has mostly given other films in Ivens’ oeuvre prominence. Ivens’ life’s work spanned almost the complete history of 20th century cinema. He made more than 80 films, on almost every continent, often on location at history’s turning points. Literature on Ivens’ oeuvre can be found in German, Dutch, French, Spanish and English, and spanning the decades of his extensive filmography (1927-1988). A collection of essays published in 1999 cited ten dissertations, only two of them in English (Bakker (ed.) 1999: 310-312). Ivens himself wrote a number of short articles on documentary and gave numerous papers and speeches. His memoir, *The Camera and I* (1969), ghost-written by Jay Leyda according to Thomas Waugh (Waugh 1999: 176), has been through numerous translations and printings.

While Ivens’ films and scholarly writing about the films range far and wide, there are abiding themes. One such abiding theme concerns Ivens’ relations with the Netherlands, his homeland. This theme is explored in both *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* and in *After Indonesia Calling* (and Part Three here). There are elements of romanticism and myth that colour both sides of an argument that has spanned over sixty years, ever since Ivens threw over his job with the Netherlands East Indies government in Australia and chose instead to make *Indonesia Calling* as an independent film supporting Indonesian independence.

As well as romanticism and myth, there are also real issues of ethics, political commitment and persecution, psychological ambivalence and redemption that come into play around Ivens’ biography and the choices he made. Bert Hogenkamp says that Ivens let it be known that he was considered a traitor and treated
as a ‘pariah’ when he returned to the Netherlands in 1947, and yet “during the short stay in the Netherlands he was offered several assignments (even by the government)” (Hogenkamp 1999: 187). Schoots reports that while Ivens said that the degree of harassment to which he was subjected by the Dutch authorities following *Indonesia Calling* forced him to work in Eastern Europe, actually his treatment was little different from that suffered by others on the left during the Cold War period. Despite the constant threats that his short-term (three-month) passport may not be renewed, he was able to travel to and from Eastern Europe uninhibited (Schoots 2000: 213-4). Hogenkamp also reports in some detail on the efforts of Dutch authorities to hinder Ivens’ work, and to prevent screenings of *Indonesia Calling* into the 1960s (Hogenkamp 1999: 188).

Controversy around Ivens’ works and reputation continued throughout his lifetime and beyond. When he was finally formally recuperated by the Dutch state at a ceremony in Paris in 1985, with the Dutch Minister for Culture Elco Brinkman presenting Ivens with the Dutch Film Festival’s prestigious Golden Calf, Brinkman’s speech included an acknowledgement that the Dutch state had indeed sought to inhibit his work with “diverse obstacles” and also conceded, “history agrees more with you than with your opponents” (Hogenkamp 1999: 191).\(^{13}\)

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\(^{13}\) Brinkman’s speech, agreed to in advance by Ivens, was quite explicit: *Your support of Indonesia’s right to self-determination and your film *Indonesia Calling* brought you into conflict with the Dutch government [...] I can say now that history has come down more on your side than on the side of your adversaries.* Other aspects of this deal included 100,000 Dutch guilders towards the Ivens Archive at the Netherlands Film Museum (later the dedicated European Foundation Joris Ivens in Nijmegen) and
In the Dutch university newspaper *Intermediair*, Hans Moll and Michel Korzec published a scathing attack on this gesture. They considered this ‘canonisation’ of Ivens shameful, and characterised him as an artist who had uncritically supported the regimes of two mass murderers, Stalin and Mao. On these same grounds a campaign was launched in the press in 1998, nine years after Ivens’ death. This campaign sought to reverse the naming of a Plaza in the town of his birth Nijmegen, ‘Ivensplats’, where a monument was dedicated to Ivens on the centenary of his birth (1898). The campaign failed, but these events show that controversy concerning Ivens’ reputation and loyalty to the Netherlands continued long after his death (Hogenkamp 1999: 191).

I have mentioned the 2009 displacement of Ivens' name from what is probably Europe's most prestigious documentary award at IDFA in favour of AVRO TV. This signifies a waning of endorsement for Ivens as an exemplary figure in Dutch film culture, while it is also emblematic of documentary tradition in transition.

Another abiding issue concerns the question of relative value in his oeuvre at different times regarding a commitment to aesthetic forms on the one hand and political advocacy on the other. Crudely put, this discourse can posit judgments about Ivens’ stature as an artist, conscripting the ‘film art’ of his early avant-garde works against the political commitment of his subsequent major works, which are often characterised as ‘propaganda’.14 Hogenkamp

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14 An Australian instance of this can be found in Robert Connell’s ‘The Myth of Joris Ivens’ *The Film Guide* (Summer 1955) pp. 15-16, 30.
parodies this ‘revisionist’ assessment of Ivens’ oeuvre as it arose in the Netherlands in the 1990s:

*At the beginning of his career Ivens made a few masterpieces (The Bridge, Rain, Zuiderssee), but after that he sold his soul to the devil (Communism); he never created anything worthwhile again* (Hogenkamp 1999: 194).

Hogenkamp’s response to this position is to dismiss it as blindness towards the imaginative and conceptual versatility of the bulk of Ivens’ works in favour of a rejection of their editorial perspectives. The dismissal of Ivens as simply a ‘propagandist’ also fails to take account of those works dedicated to more lyrical concerns, for example, *La Seine a Recontré Paris* (1957), *...A Valparaiso* (1963) and *Pour le Mistral* (1965).

Thomas Waugh recently drew attention to another instance of historical revisionism in the omission of Ivens’ entire output of 1947–1957 from the long awaited 2009 DVD box set of Ivens’ films curated by the official Ivens archive, EFJI. ¹⁵ Waugh argued this represented a failure to face up to the ‘old left’ self-deceptions around Stalinism; he said simply forgetting the films of this period inhibits a comprehensive assessment of film on the left (Waugh forthcoming). ¹⁶

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¹⁵ Waugh drew attention to omissions, specifically, Ivens’ *Song of the Rivers* (1954), in a presentation he gave to the Visible Evidence conference (New York, August 2011).

¹⁶ The box set also underrepresents Ivens’ work in China, in particular the remarkable 12-part, 12-hour *How Yukong Moved the Mountains* (1976); only one part is included. Also sadly excluded is *Italy is Not a Poor Country* (110 minutes, 1960).
The European Foundation Joris Ivens (EFJI), established in 1999 by the Dutch government to house Ivens’ archive and promote his name, has been keen to maintain the image of Ivens as a great artist in the Dutch and Flemish tradition, while at the same time celebrating his art’s ‘social obligations’ (Stufkens 2002: 40). The great lineage of Flemish and Dutch painting is mobilised in this positioning of Ivens as artist first, activist second. In an essay published in 2002, the Director of EFJI André Stufkens wrote, “His visual memory contained an immense database of Dutch visual art tradition.” Stufkens cites Waugh writing on Ivens’ *Breakers* (1929): “There is scarcely a painter from the tradition of Dutch folk realism that is not somehow evoked in the film” (Waugh 1981: 57-8, cited in Stufkens 2002: 39).

Finding parallels in lighting and composition between frames of Ivens’ earliest avant-garde films through to his final ‘essay’ film, *A Tale of the Wind* (1988), with Dutch and Flemish artists as diverse in their practice as Van Gogh, Breughel and Vermeer, Stufkens argues their continuity with Ivens’ visual sensibility. Locating Ivens’ works within the “metaphysical realism in Dutch art, that peculiar combination of sharp observation, attention to detail and cosmic feeling”, Stufkens also notes, “his films were not only to move viewers but also to activate and politicise.” Stufkens wishes to emphasise in the work a ‘spiritual’ dimension—a transcendent function, a kind of cinematic sublime. Stufkens wants us to look at Ivens’ works as a poetics of the everyday:

*The bolts of a drawbridge, a rain drop on a roof tile, a pair of old socks on a washing line, [are given] equal attention as he edited the skies of Ohio, Vietnam and Southern France into a balanced unity* (Stufkens 2002: 39).

Stufkens says during the course of his life’s work Ivens completed
a circle related to his early principles as an avant-gardist, as he had read in Van Gogh’s letters, "to produce the spiritual in favour of the material" (Stufkens 2002: 41).

This take on the significance of Ivens' works has a domesticating tendency, downplaying the frequently militant and oppositional imperative, while simultaneously returning the figure of Ivens as a kind of 20th century master to a pantheon of Dutch cultural heroes.

Tom Gunning also acknowledges Ivens' 'visual database'. Gunning, like Stufkens, identifies Ivens with a Dutch realist tradition in visual art dedicated to the “optical examination of everyday life...” Drawing on art historian Svetlana Alpers, Gunning distinguishes the Dutch tradition as one focused on:

*Processes of vision, exemplified by the optical discoveries of Leeuwenhoek’s microscope, rather than the mathematical and dramatic plotting of space found in the Italian masters* (Gunning 2002: 19).

However, Gunning's argument gives emphasis to the material—indeed bodily—experiential moment of Ivens' early experimental works, rather than their 'spiritual essence' or modernist, formalist aesthetic. He sees this in both Ivens' technique and in his aesthetic sensibility. Making reference to The Bridge (1928) he writes,

*The film’s most unusual aspect, its attempt to incorporate the bodily motion of a person walking into the visual experience of the point of view shot, signal one of the most important aspects of Ivens' cinema, his anchoring of visual experience in the physical body... [In Rain (1929)] the human body and its blend of grace and awkwardness becomes the basis for a cinematic rhythm built from the gestures and patterns of bodily motion [rather than determined by formal rhythms of editing]* (Gunning 2002: 21).
From these considerations Gunning argues for a special sensitivity in Ivens’ cinematography to the portrayal of the worker, producing in the sponsored film *Phillips Radio* (1931) a work that “could easily satisfy a corporate sponsor or seem to leftist viewers to attack labour conditions.” Gunning says he admires Ivens’ films, as despite their

*dubious attempt to shore up state policy [they are nonetheless] [...] operating within Ivens’ desire to change the world for the better [...] he continued to wrestle with the truth the film image seemed to carry and the meanings it could be made to bear* (Gunning 2002: 27).

In his autobiography, *The Camera and I* (1969), Ivens had this to say on the making of one of his most celebrated early activist films *Borinage* (1934):

> We felt it would be insulting to people in such extreme hardship to use any style of photography that would prevent the direct honest communication of their pain to the spectator

> [...] We sometimes had to destroy a certain unwelcome superficial beauty that would occur when we did not want it. When the clean-cut shadow of the barracks window fell on the dirty rags and dishes of a table the pleasant effect of the shadow actually destroyed the effect of the dirtiness that we wanted, so we broke the edges of the shadow. Our aim was to prevent agreeable photographic effects distracting the audience from the unpleasant truths we were showing (Ivens 1969: 87-8).

In this passage, Ivens is writing about his work of the 1930s for a readership of the 1960s imbued with that decade’s political radicalism and the context of emerging new modes of documentary
realism (*cinoli vinoli* in France and Direct Cinema in the US). The approach Ivens recalls here is no less a poetic concept and a creative treatment idea for its refusal of ‘superficial beauty’. While blunting the edge of ‘beauty’ Ivens is sharpening his modernist aesthetic and his committed practice. In recounting this incident Ivens presents an image emblematic of his work, affirming at once both the integrity of the ‘committed’ artist and solidarity with the downtrodden in a synergy that Stufkens affirms in both Van Gogh and Ivens.

Waugh’s championing of a tradition of ‘committed documentary’ and Ivens’ seminal role within it is quintessential to English language scholarship on the subject (see Waugh 1984a; Waugh 1984b; Waugh 1999). During his contribution to an international conference in Nijmegen in 1998 staged by the embryonic EFJI as part of the marking of the centenary of Ivens’ birth, Waugh pointed out that *Indonesia Calling* was at that time “one of several of Ivens’ masterworks to be virtually inaccessible”:

> I call on the Ivens estate [...] to reconsider the cautious inertia that has held back the circulation of Ivens’ work since his death. I call on the guardians of the hoard to immediately release cheap if not free copies of twenty of Ivens’ most immediate political works to the community networks who are his proper constituency and heirs [...] At one hundred, the youthful Ivens belongs not to the archivist and lawyers but to

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17 In defining the “committed documentary” Waugh says, “By ‘committed’ I am referring to activist cultural interventions on the Left, situated along the continuum that that ideological label evokes.” Waugh sees Dziga Vertov and Ivens as ‘founding parents’ of the committed documentary (Waugh 1999: 172-3).
Waugh, and everyone else, had to wait ten more years for the box set, which was certainly not free, and as I have mentioned above, less than comprehensive.

*Indonesia Calling* is usually not considered a major work in Ivens’ canon; it is considered more a ‘pamphlet’ than a work inviting aesthetic attention (Hogenkamp 1999: 187). In *The Camera and I* Ivens himself hardly mentions *Indonesia Calling*. Waugh assesses the film perhaps a little dismissively when he says it “seems like a long demonstration trope from beginning to end”, although this is said in the context of an appreciative account of the ubiquity of the demonstration as a performative gesture in a tradition of radical documentary (Waugh 1999: 176). Both these characterisations—‘one long demonstration’ and the ‘pamphlet’—are entirely defensible, while at the same time both Hogenkamp and Waugh would agree that the film is also much more than these remarks suggest. It is a film where the urgency of a political imperative—and in this case a specifically post-colonial ambition—eclipses an aesthetic unity that might evoke a more immediate formalist appreciation. Indeed, the film’s ‘disunity’, its hybridity, its heterogeneity of form is one of the attributes of the work that renders it recognisable today.

In teasing out attributes of form that characterise Ivens’ realism of the 1930s, Bill Nichols identifies in these earlier works the

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18 The “greenhairs and the whole ratbag army of malcontents” is a reference to a critique of Waugh’s book celebrating the committed or militant documentary published in 1984 (*Show Us Life…*) and attacked in these sorts of terms by *The New Criterion* (Waugh 1999: 181).
fundamental activist dimension driving *Indonesia Calling* in the mid-1940s:

*No longer the elusive artist who speaks through (modernist) form, the filmmaker now speaks with a cinematic body of sounds and images, attesting to situated experience and conditional knowledge of the historical world. He forgoes the beauty of formal pattern [...] to acknowledge [...] a determining subjectivity responsible for history making itself [...]. The documentarian, committed to ‘being there’, has arrived* (Nichols 1999: 155).

The “poetic”, formal and rhetorical dimensions of documentary representation remain in the composition, structure and flow of the film over the course of its modest 22 minutes. However within a tradition of advocacy and activism—a tradition that comes into focus again today with the emergence of new forms of agitprop moving image drawing on new technologies for production, distribution and exhibition—a film like *Indonesia Calling* is suddenly recognisable in its immediacy, militancy, urgency and usefulness. The old documentary ‘sell-line’, “films with a purpose”, a slogan devalued and dormant now for some time, regains its pertinence in the present moment.

**On *Indonesia Calling* in particular**

Australian film history has generally acknowledged *Indonesia Calling*’s importance, although commentary on the film has been uneven. On occasion it is confused with the later work of the Waterside Workers’ Federation Film Unit (1953-58), or with the work of the Commonwealth government’s production unit (see for

Most commonly Australian scholars acknowledge Indonesia Calling as a significant moment in a history of Australian ‘political documentary’. For example, citing the Realist Film Association and the Waterside Workers’ Federation Film Unit as instances of a tradition of radical documentary work, Megan McMurchy wrote,

*A major influence on this development ['radical' film practice] had been the presence in Australia towards the end of the war of distinguished Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens. With the clandestine participation of several Film Division employees, Ivens made Indonesia Calling [...] (McMurchy 1994: 189).

The film is singled out by Tom O’Regan in his survey book Australian National Cinema (1996) as being representative, along with the works of David Bradbury, of an Australian ‘political documentary’ which, among other documentary works, “lays most claim to being Australia’s major, even singular, contribution to world cinema” (O’Regan 1996: 170). In his Projecting Australia: Government Film Since 1945 (1991), Albert Moran uses the example of Indonesia Calling to illustrate what the Australian National Film Board’s production unit was not doing: “the unit itself did not engage in this type of film” (Moran 1991: 39-40). Moran points out that the film drew suspicious attention to the production unit of the Australian National Film Board (Moran 1991:34).

The most thorough account of Indonesia Calling’s production is almost certainly Eric van ‘t Groenewout’s M.A. thesis (Leiden University, Netherlands, 1979). Stufkens deploys this and other documents from the van ‘t Groenewout collection, along with more recent scholarship, to provide a thorough chronicle for his chapter

The first detailed investigation of the film in English, by the Australian film historian Graeme Cutts, remains an essential account of the circumstances of the film's production (Cutts 1985: pp. 350-364). It was a little over 20 years after Cutts' article was published that Drew Cottle and Angela Keys presented their paper at the XIIIth Biennial Conference of the Film and History Association in Melbourne (Cottle and Keys 2006). Cottle and Keys developed an account of relations between the film and the Chinese community in Sydney, in particular the Chinese Seamen's Union, Fred Wong and Australia's White Australia Policy, the subjects of their earlier labour history research (Cottle 2000; Cottle 2003; Cottle and Keys 2007).

Heather Goodall published a lengthy and insightful study (for which she deservedly received an award from the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History) on relations between Australian trade unions and the Indian Seamen's Union of Australia. Her study developed a close reading of *Indonesia Calling* to examine the porous nature of Australia's borders in our social history, and to challenge the tendency of Australian historiography to imagine its past within the confines of Australia's geographic boundaries. Her central concern was the portrayal of Indian workers involved in the blockade the film depicts. Goodall argued that the contribution of the Indian Seamen's Union to the success of the blockade was understated in Ivens' film in favour of privilege given to Australian waterfront unions (Goodall 2008: 43-68).
The EFJI *Newsmagazines* have published a number of essays on the film including Robert Hamilton and Laura Kotevska's essay arguing that the film anticipates an Australian multiculturalism at a time when the notorious White Australia Policy was still practised (Hamilton and Kotevska 2005: 8-11). Gerda Jansen-Hendriks has also written on a number of films depicting events surrounding the birth of Indonesia and the Dutch retreat from its former colony. Her focus is on the editorial and pictorial representation of the *Bersiap* period; i.e. the period between Sukarno and Hatta's declaration of independence in August 1945 and 1949 when the Dutch relinquished the territory and Indonesian independence was won in the eyes of the world. The term *Bersiap* is the Indonesian declaration “I'm ready!”, used by militant Indonesian youth groups declaring their readiness to govern themselves without a need for Dutch colonial administration. Jansen-Hendriks makes the important point that the chaos and violence that accompanied the independence struggle, particularly in its early period of transition from Japanese occupation, has been insufficiently represented in many accounts favouring the depiction of a heroic independence movement (Jansen-Hendriks 2003: 20-22).

Jansen-Hendriks' article is derived from a presentation she gave to a conference (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, June 2003) examining the *Bersiap*, and her desire to understand relationships between different groups in contention in the first year of the revolution. Non-fiction films, mainly newsreels, were made by the Indonesian Republic itself, as well as the British and Dutch. Jansen-Hendriks notes that while these films do not detail actual political events as they are happening, they do articulate the worldview and aspirations of those whose positions they represent.
Jansen-Hendriks writes that while *Indonesia Calling* does not include any scenes set or shot in Indonesia, it nonetheless certainly articulates an unambiguous point of view. She does not explore the implications of this point of view in detail; however she does consider—in its relationship with *Indonesia Calling*—the 1946 film *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (*Through Darkness to Light*), made by colleagues of Ivens from the early period of the Dutch Film League avant-garde, Jan Moi and Mannus Franken. They took up the government commission that Ivens refused. They were colleagues and knew one another's work. Indeed Franken had worked with Ivens on *Rain* (1928). Referring to *Door Duisternis tot Licht* Jansen-Hendriks notes,

*It is remarkable that a documentary about post-war Indonesia does not once name the newly proclaimed Republic, nor show Sukarno* (Jansen-Hendriks 2003: 21).

Rather the film treats the Republic as merely one political faction among many, which was the Dutch ‘spin’ on the Republican revolution at that time. The editorial of the film addresses its Indonesian and Dutch audiences with an image of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia (both terms are used) as victims of the Japanese, and as partners in building a future for the country. She notes that *Indonesia Calling* has something that is lacking from the films and newsreels on the Indonesia she studies, “solidarity between people of all creeds and colour” (Jansen-Hendriks 2003: 21).

My documentary film work on *Indonesia Calling*—while delivering new research relevant to its Australian context—seeks to recall the work for contemporary audiences and redeploy it in a project of legitimisation on two fronts: that of the challenge to the independent creative documentary generated by the particular circumstances of documentary production today, and secondly to add historical
complexity to a pervasive oversimplification of Australian-Indonesian relations, in which this early bond of cooperation can easily be forgotten. In both instances it is a kind of 'salvage' historiography (see also Hughes 2007b; Hughes 2010).

Ivens in Australia

Ivens came to Australia in early 1945 as the Netherlands East Indies Film Commissioner. The Netherlands East Indies (NEI) government-in-exile was resident in Australia due to the occupation of the Dutch colonies by the Japanese. When the Dutch fled Japanese occupation in March and April 1942, the NEI government-in-exile was established firstly in Melbourne and then later moved to Brisbane.

The film production company Southern Seas Productions, owned and operated by broadcasting entrepreneur and film producer Frederick Daniell, had been working with the NEI from early 1941. With the establishment of the NEI Government Information Service (NIGIS) in Melbourne, Daniell was appointed Officer-in-Charge of the NIGIS Film and Photo Unit (FPU).  

In October 1944 NEI officials in New York announced Ivens’ appointment as Film Commissioner. His task was to make a series of films, including a feature documentary portraying what the NEI government anticipated would be their reoccupation of the colonies—what we now know as Indonesia—following the defeat of

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19 By the time of Ivens’ appointment the Unit had 128 staff—25 of these Indonesians—mainly in Melbourne (a branch office of three in Sydney), and a further 24 journalists and ‘stringers’ attached as war correspondents.
the Japanese. He was also charged with making a series of educational films for Indonesians, and it was anticipated he would establish a nation-building educational film agency in post-war Indonesia, training Indonesian filmmakers. There was some ambiguity around the anticipated relationship between Ivens' project and the already established NIGIS FPU.

A press release announcing Ivens' appointment reiterated progressive post-colonial ambitions that had been articulated by Dutch authorities (in exile in London and the US) and within the displaced colonial administration (in exile in Australia). An end to three hundred years of Dutch colonial rule and a new spirit of post-war, post-colonial order in keeping with the Atlantic Charter was acknowledged in Dutch post-war policy (van Mook 1950: 17-18; George 1980: 15-16).

Ivens insisted that his Film Commissioner contract with the NEI

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20 An agreement signed by Britain and the US in August 1941 and subsequently endorsed by the Soviet Union setting out principles for post-war planning on a global scale and including democratic aspirations for former colonies of European powers.

21 The Dutch Queen Wilhelmina made these undertakings in a speech before the United States Congress in August 1942. The Lt Governor General of NEI, H. J. van Mook, a supporter of Ivens, was of a reformist mind. He wrote in 1950, "During the war years it had become abundantly clear that colonialism in Asia had reached a stage where it must prepare for its own liquidation" (van Mook 1950: 18). Van Mook was considered "too lenient" and dismissed/resigned as Governor General over "differences" with the Netherlands government in November 1948. He was, as Lockwood says, "one of the very few to detect the unknitting of the Dutch administrative fabric before he turned his back on flaming Bandung in 1942" (Lockwood 1975: 222, 67-68).
reflect these undertakings in its text, and a press release shortly after his arrival in Melbourne publicly affirmed these reformist ideals:

*Ivens’ feature documentary film will [record the campaign] which will liberate the Netherlands Indies, combined with the political, social and economical reconstruction of the reborn Netherlands Indies [and] the development of the future Indonesia in which both Dutch and Indonesians can and must cooperate on a footing of complete equality, mutual respect and admiration [... ] This feature documentary leads to a large re-education project for the liberated peoples of the Netherlands Indies* (NIGIS press release, April 1945).

There were varying responses when Ivens’ appointment was first announced in the US in late 1944.

Behind the scenes anxieties were expressed from the moment the appointment hit the news in Australia.22 ‘Doc’ Sternberg, cinematographer and director with the NIGIS FPU and close colleague of Daniell, sent a memo to his boss immediately, strongly suggesting the FPU issue its own release correcting what he saw as insulting oversights. Pointing out that while he (Sternberg) “more than anyone else” admired Ivens’ work and believed “no better man can be found to assist us in Dutch propaganda than this famous Dutchman”, Sternberg feared the reputation of Daniell’s FPU was threatened by the terms in which Ivens’ appointment was announced.

*The statement simply infers a clean sweep of this organisation, neglecting entirely the great and arduous*

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22 *The Argus* (October 19, 1944: 16); *The Canberra Times* (October 20, 1944: 1); *The Sydney Morning Herald* (October 20, 1944: 2)
pioneer work this Unit has done under Commander Quispel’s, Mr v. d. Loeff’s, and your personal guidance (‘Doc’ Sternberg to P. Daniell October 20, 1944, Daniell Papers, NFSA).

The term ‘Film Commissioner’ it was thought carried the implication that Ivens would be in charge of the FPU. An ‘Official History of the FPU’ written in 1946 and held among Daniell’s papers reflects ‘tensions’ between Ivens and his collaborators and the existing FPU from the beginning. It speculates that this designation,

probably derived from a misquoted interview he gave to the press in New York, where he explained he had been “commissioned” to make films for the Netherlands Indies Government (Official History: 55-6).

Others welcomed the experience Ivens might offer to an emerging Australian documentary film culture, regardless of the needs of Dutch war propaganda. Catherine Duncan, a celebrity playwright and radio actor, later to write the commentary for Indonesia Calling, was excited by the announcement of Ivens’ appointment. She was determined to get into documentary filmmaking—the “it” avant-garde cultural form of the moment. When she heard that Ivens was coming to Australia, she persuaded ‘Freddie’ Daniell to hire her as a scriptwriter on the newsreels the NIGIS FPU were making for the Dutch.

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23 Ivens’ letterhead used this title and he remarked in correspondence with Professor A. K. Stout that this was his correct designation.
24 Duncan had been an activist since the late 1930s; she organised the controversial actions around the banned Clifford Odets’ anti-fascist play, Till the Day I Die, with Melbourne’s Workers’ Theatre Group (later The New Theatre). One of Daniell’s deepest subsequent regrets was the way that—to his way of seeing things—Ivens had “carried on an intrigue” with Duncan after Daniell had invested so much time and energy in “educating
At the time of the announcement of Ivens’ appointment in October 1944, the Australian government was well advanced in planning an Australian national film board on the model of the National Film Board of Canada as one of a number of institutions directed towards post-war reconstruction. The policy process was fraught with competing attitudes to documentary. Later, Ivens inevitably became enmeshed with this new initiative.

Many months elapsed between the announcement of Ivens’ appointment and his arrival in Melbourne. Among factors delaying his departure was the question of a re-entry visa to the US. Ivens had been working with Frank Capra on the series *Know Your Enemy* with the Special Services Division of the US War Department (*Know Your Enemy: Japan*, 1943\(^{25}\)), in Canada for the National Film Board (*Action Stations!*\(^{26}\)), and was well known for his films *Song of Heroes* (Russia 1933), *The Spanish Earth* (Spain 1937), *The 400 Million* (China 1939) and *Our Russian Front* (US 1941).

Ivens was prominent as a public figure\(^{27}\): in 1942 he participated in

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\(^{25}\) *Know Your Enemy: Japan* was the subject of disagreement resulting in Ivens and his editor Helen van Dongen being sacked from the Capra group. Ivens disassociated himself from the final version, which was not shown publicly until 1977 (Schoots 2000: 175-6).

\(^{26}\) Originally 50 minutes, the NFBC recut the film to 22 minutes and released it as one episode of a series *Canada Carries On* under the title *Corvette Port Arthur* (Schoots 2000: 171-172).

\(^{27}\) In July 1937 with Ernest Hemingway, Ivens screened *The Spanish Earth*...
a discussion of art and war in the Soviet Union at the Congress of Soviet-American Friendship in the US and appeared at Carnegie Hall in New York at a meeting of the Artists' Front to Win the War with Orson Welles and Charles Chaplin (Jansen 2002: 86). The FBI opened their file on Ivens in July 1940 when he began work with the US government on *Power and the Land* (1940). He had unsuccessfully sought work with the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS was forerunner to the CIA). By the time he had accepted the offer from the Dutch government to become the NEI Film Commissioner, the FBI had decided he was a “dangerous communist... strongly suspected of being a Soviet espionage agent” (FBI file, cited in Schoots 2000: 18-9). The FBI advised the State Department that Ivens should be refused a re-entry visa; he was advised of the visa's refusal in mid-February and left the US for Australia on March 8, 1945.

“An advanced Communist”

Ivens had been in Australia less than three weeks when the Director General of Australia’s wartime Security Service, Brigadier W. B. Simpson, sought Ivens’ file from the FBI (NAA: 6126/18: 81). Netherlands Intelligence, via Lieutenant Kenneth C. Plumb, who was the liaison between the Commonwealth Security Service and the Netherlands Indies Intelligence Service (NEFIS), initiated this inquiry. Plumb contacted Simpson again when they had not heard to President Roosevelt at the White House (Jansen 2002: 81).

28 Plumb was to have a close involvement with Indonesians in Australia. He accompanied the first repatriation ship, the Esperance Bay, in October 1945 and, according to Naval Intelligence, was “well acquainted with the Indonesian problem and the Dutch attitude to it” (cited in Bennett 2003: 85). He was also known to Daniell, Daniell’s Security Service and business
back by April 11, but Simpson appears to have been unwilling to push the issue. A week later (April 17) he was able to advise Plumb that he had been told that Ivens was considered “an advanced Communist”. In the meantime NEFIS had made its own inquiry directly through American military intelligence (G-2 USAFFE), which provided the advice that Ivens was considered by the FBI “one of the most dangerous communists in the United States.”

In his memo to Brigadier Simpson, Plumb says NEFIS “would be very pleased if accreditation of Ivens as a war correspondent were refused by you" on these grounds (Plumb to Simpson, April 25, 1945, NAA: 6126/18: 78). He cautions Simpson that this may cause political problems, as Ivens might take the matter further “through Soviet diplomat or other channels.” Plumb alerted Simpson to the fact that Dr Charles van der Plas, the NEI Minister assisting NEI Governor van Mook, had said Ivens had been given US permission to proceed to Manila, and that when he arrived there he would be accredited as a war correspondent.

Minister van der Plas had tried to short circuit the NEFIS by contacting US General Headquarters directly, as it was considered urgent that Ivens meet with US Generals Diller and Fellers in Manila to plan the proposed shoot as the Allies moved west. It appears from the files that an acting public relations officer with the US Command (a Colonel Lafollette) had all too quickly agreed to van der Plas’ proposal. Ivens traveled to Brisbane on the first leg of his journey to the Philippines, only to discover as he was preparing to leave (on April 30) that he would be denied accreditation.

associate Major Reg Denison, and to the mysterious counter espionage officer Robert Wake (aka ‘Hereward’) (Wake, 2004: 185, 258).
At this point Peter Russo\(^{29}\) tried to intervene with Australian security on Ivens' behalf. Russo wrote to his friend and contact in the Security Service in Melbourne, Des Alexander,\(^{30}\)

\begin{quote}
If I'm off-colour in mentioning the subject, please forget it, and so shall I [...] I'm sure you've heard of Joris Ivens. He rates among the best half dozen documentary filmmakers in the world today [...] Joris, unfortunately is believed to have a slightly red bias in his productions. It appears his dangerous thoughts have caught up with him. [...] Joris doesn't know what it's all about, and I've told him to discuss it all frankly with you (NAA: 6126/18).
\end{quote}

Alexander met with Ivens in mid-May. The security files include Russo's hand-written introduction. Ivens told Alexander that his accreditation as war correspondent with the Australian Army had

\(^{29}\) Dr. Peter Russo is an intriguing man. Early in the war he was on "blacklist A" and slated for internment in the event of a Japanese invasion. He had spent years in Japan before the war, teaching at Tokyo University. He spoke several languages (French, Italian, Spanish, German and Japanese), and traveled between Melbourne and Tokyo in 1940 and 1941 bearing wishes of goodwill from Prince Konoye. He also corresponded with leaders of the Australia First Movement, the troublesome dissidents detained for a period (March 1942 - August 1945) under suspicion of treason. (Torney-Parlicki 2005: 81-159). Many senior security officials were very suspicious of Russo and he was under intense surveillance (NAA: A6119 1257). However, he seems to have had very cordial relations with Alexander.

\(^{30}\) Des Alexander was to become Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, based in Canberra shortly after the war, and continued after ASIO was established in 1949. Russo continued to be a valued informant to ASIO while working with The Argus and the ABC out of South East Asia in the 1950s and 60s.
been held up as the Australians waited on advice from the Dutch and the Dutch waited on advice from the Americans. He said he had learnt from van der Plas that accreditation had been refused by the Americans. He went on to explain that he did not understand this, as he had worked under war conditions in Spain and China. He had made a film for the National Film Board of Canada and the Royal Canadian Navy with “full approval of the Royal Canadian Naval Intelligence.” Furthermore he had worked with the US Special Services Division on Know Your Enemy: Japan (1942-45). Alexander simply lodged a file note saying he had advised Ivens “to see the Dutch Minister with a view to having the position clarified” (file-note dated May 21, 1945, NAA: 6126/18).

But why Russo? Why was he intervening on Ivens' behalf? Russo knew Ivens through Duncan (Keane 2011: 59-61). While Ivens was in Brisbane, hoping to leave for Manila, a ‘human interest’ celebrity profile appeared in the ABC Weekly celebrating Duncan’s work as a playwright:31

Catherine Duncan is definitely a career woman. In appearance she is everyone’s idea of how a career woman should look— attractive, beautifully poised and charming. With [these attributes] is combined an even more important career. Mrs Kim Keane,32 in private life, Catherine Duncan is the mother

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31 The article was publicity for Duncan’s anti-fascist play, Sons of the Morning, produced by Melbourne’s New Theatre in April 1945. Her play had won first prize in the Playwright’s Advisory Board’s play competition that year, with 100 pounds prize money attached (Bennett 1945; Williams 2004). [Later in 1945 Sydney’s New Theatre mounted a production of this play directed by Jock Levy (later of the WWF Film Unit)].

32 Kim Keane, Catherine Duncan’s second husband, was a journalist with the Melbourne Herald from the early 1930s. He was involved with Duncan in the Workers Theatre Group, where they wrote 13 Dead, a play about
of two young children—Michael who will be seven in July and Marghareta, just two and a half (June Mackay Bennett, ABC Weekly, April 28, 1945: 9).

When Eric van ‘t Groenewout interviewed Duncan for his thesis on Indonesia Calling in the late 1980s, she told him with conviction, “I don’t think there was a file on Joris, and if there was, I think it was done away with, just as mine was, I know that!” (Groenewout 1988).

When Hans Schoots interviewed Duncan for his Ivens’ biography she told him,

*He (Ivens) had a political dossier in Australia [...] I know that because I put him in touch with a friend of mine who had a friend in that particular section and I know that dossier was destroyed* (Catherine Duncan, in Duncan, Schoots 1990).

Duncan believed ‘her friend of a friend’ had arranged for her security file and Ivens’ file to be destroyed, to facilitate her travel when she left the country in 1947. We now know that at least one file was maintained, as was Ivens’ file, and at the time of her departure from Australia, services abroad were advised of her ‘adverse’ status (NAA: A6126/18). It is fair to say that her ‘friend’ was probably Russo, and her friend’s friend, Alexander.

About three weeks before the inaugural ANFB meeting in June, where Ivens would address the Board and later the same day deliver a public address on ‘documentary film in national

the 1937 Wonthaggi mine disaster. Keane introduced Duncan to Russo, his journalist friend from The Herald. Duncan and Russo began an affair that ended when Russo suddenly announced his engagement to someone else. Keane and Duncan were divorced in 1946 (Keane 2011: 59-61).
development’, a two-page spread in the *Women’s Weekly* appeared on the glamorous Netherlands East Indies Film Commissioner. Peg McCartney had interviewed Ivens in Sydney in mid-May.\(^\text{33}\)

*Medium height, dark, attractive, Joris Ivens has enormous vitality, and looks incredibly young to be one of the pioneers of documentary films.*

Ivens told McCartney:

*I am striving to make this film of the liberation a completely factual one […] I will make the film on the spot, using actual people and backgrounds. There will be as little faking as possible […]* (McCartney 1945: 23).

He went on to say that he was anticipating the arrival of his wife Helen van Dongen, who would work with him on the project, and also Marion Michelle, with whom he had worked on *Women of the Sea* (a proposed film for the US Navy, never completed).\(^\text{34}\) Other members of Ivens’ unit, June and Donald Fraser, Canadians from the NFB Canada, had arrived by this time. The article announced that Ivens had “nearly finished” his script and would be departing for Indonesia “in about a month”. He said he had “the full cooperation of the Film and Photo Unit of the Netherlands Indies Government Information Service under the Australian producer Mr F. Daniell.”

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\(^\text{33}\) At this time he was also scheduled to meet with a number of other journalists, including the ABC’s Bruce Miller, who was to make a recording on disc (if this recording was made, it can no longer be located). During this visit to Sydney he also met with Ralph Foster and Jack Allen, the Department of Information producer and administrator of the National Films Council (*Interviews in Sydney—May 14 - 18, 1945’ Ivens papers, EFJI*).

At the same time he wrote to van Dongen, “never in my life and work was the start of a production so clouded in red tape, everything slowed up or blocked” (Stufkens 2009: 292).

A week after the Women’s Weekly article appeared, Brigadier Simpson cabled his American counterpart, J. Edgar Hoover, wanting to know when he could expect the follow-up detail on Ivens, promised by the FBI in April. Simpson was well behind the state of play. The wartime security intelligence apparatus in Australia was in disarray, particularly its counter-intelligence apparatus, for which Simpson was responsible. There was dissention within the ‘intelligence community’ and a lack of cooperation. “Chaotic” is the word chosen by the official historian (Templeton 1977).

The FBI had still not replied to Simpson in late June when Plumb wrote again, drawing attention to newspaper accounts of Ivens’ invitation to address the Australian National Film Board. When in July the Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) wrote to Simpson that he had heard Ivens was offered the job as Australian Film Commissioner (an offer he is said to have declined), and repeated that the DNI’s American sources had said Ivens is an “active and dangerous communist”, Simpson wrote back in a tone of haughty formality (July 13, 1945),

I desire to acknowledge receipt of your secret memorandum [...] and have to inform you that I have no knowledge of the information contained in paragraph 1 of your memorandum under reply.

2. As regards paragraph 2, I think it would be more correct to say that Ivens is very definitely regarded as a Soviet agent.

Wartime security in crisis
It is now known that the Commonwealth Security Service (CSS) had at least one secret Communist Party member working for the Soviet cause inside the Service. Alfred Hughes had joined Simpson's CSS at its inception, specialising in the Communist Party and Soviet espionage. He was in the Sydney office and in charge of counter-espionage (Ball and Horner 1988: 344-5). Details of the source of the leaks were not known at this time; however for good reasons none of the senior service intelligence agencies trusted Simpson's Service.

Both the Curtin and Chifley Labour governments were suspicious of security organisations, and key figures in the various services were suspicious of the government and of one another (Laughlin 1951: 104-5; Ball and Horner 1988: 29-47; Wake 2004: 157-159; Templeton 1977: 196-211). The CSS was established in 1942 because the government became convinced that the existing security and intelligence services had “failed to cope”. This CSS, established as a civilian organisation within the Attorney General's Department, also failed to cope, and failed to gain the trust of the British (MI5) or the Americans (G2), not to mention the Australian Army. The various Australian agencies remained at loggerheads. This is evident between the lines of the files concerning Ivens.

Simpson was not widely respected. The Director of Military Intelligence, Brigadier John Rogers, considered Simpson himself “extremely dangerous”, not because he was a communist or a spy, but because Rogers considered him hostile and incompetent. Military Intelligence had a very important secret: they were reading Japanese cable traffic (ULTRA) and this had told them there were leaks of Australian and other military intelligence via the Russian
Embassy in Canberra (Ball and Horner 1988: 46-7, 96-8). Soviet strategists were well aware that the Americans and the British had no intentions of withdrawing from the spheres of influence that they might secure at the war's end. They had concrete proof of this from British Cabinet planning documents leaked to Moscow out of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (courtesy of Ian Milner, Katherine Susannah Pritchard, Wally Clayton and others).

Thus American concern with counter-intelligence, and their attention to possible Soviet agents among left and communist activists within the Dutch, Chinese and Australian contingents at

35 Declassified papers known as the VENONA decrypts have revealed that the Communist Party of Australia’s secret member and spy, Wally Clayton, had a network of informants, including at least two staff in the Department of External Affairs, who provided the Soviet Union with secret foreign policy documents concerning among other things, British attitudes to the Indonesian Independence movement, and Britain’s plans for troop deployments in Java during 1946.

The information included telegrams exchanged between Prime Ministers Attlee and Chifley concerning Australian policy on the Indonesian Independence struggle which were sent to Moscow in November 1945 (Ball and Horner 1988: 344).

Behind the scenes the British intelligence service had revived its anti-Soviet activities in early 1944:

Kim Philby (MI6) had reported this to the Soviet NKGB in August 1944. The US Army Security Agency had begun work on Soviet codes in February 1943, and this had been reported to Moscow in November 1944. To Moscow Centre, the active British and US interest in Soviet codes and ciphers in 1944, when the end of the wars in both Europe and the Pacific were still a year away, demonstrated that a Cold War was already under way (Ball and Horner 1988: 351-2).
that moment were not necessarily fanciful or misplaced. Because of these leaks, Australian authorities had sought to limit their vulnerability by excluding the Chinese and the Dutch from high-level intelligence.

When Hiroshima was bombed on August 6 and Nagasaki three days later, Russian troops were assembling to enter the Asian arena as agreed at Yalta (Lens 1974: 343-344). But neither the Americans nor the British wanted this. Once the atom bomb had been tested successfully in Nevada, Churchill told his Cabinet, “It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan.” Wilfred Burchett wrote, “the atomic bombings were big demonstrations aimed at influencing Soviet behaviour” (Burchett 1983: 76-7; see also Lens 1974: 347). Following the atom bomb attacks the Japanese capitulated almost immediately; Emperor Hirahito surrendered on August 15.

On August 15 control of the NEI switched from MacArthur’s (US) command to Mountbatten’s (UK); the NEI region was therefore under British control. Australia’s war-time foreign policy aspirations included a substantial interest in the NEI, including a proposal for military bases and administrative influence over Borneo, Portuguese Timor, West Papua and other islands to Australia’s north. The NEI

36 The untold story of Alfred Conlon’s wartime Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs intersects here, as the Directorate’s advice to the Government, through General Blamey, influenced these ambiguous Australian foreign policy ambitions. Van der Plus described “an annexationist group linked with Blamey” (cited in Lockwood 1975: 249). These ‘secret’ ambitions were resented by the Dutch and quashed by the Americans. According to Lockwood, “General MacArthur promised to assist Dr van der Plas to counter Australian political meddling” (Lockwood 1975:
government-in-exile in Australia and the Dutch government resented this, as did the Americans, and were suspicious of Australian reluctance to cooperate in the transport of large numbers of Dutch troops intended to be deployed in retaking the NEI from the UK to Australia earlier in 1945 (George 1980: 14-33). Suddenly, with the Japanese surrender, everything changed.

**Indonesia declares independence**

Under pressure from their student movements (the *Pemuda*), Sukarno and Hatta declared Indonesia a republic on August 17. Within days the news was circulating among Indonesian communities in Australia. The Department of External Affairs heard the news in a shortwave radio broadcast on August 19 (George 1980: 35), but the Indonesian exiles heard it the day before. A radio broadcast in Arabic from West Sumatra monitored by NIGIS in Melbourne was passed on to Mohammad Bondon—a non-Communist Republican, who became a key figure in the Indonesia Independence Committee KIM (*Kimite Indonesia Merdeka*), later CENKIM (Central Committee for Indonesian Independence)

249; see also Hetherington 1973: 318, 320-322, 359-360). Margaret George wrote,

*The post-war demand for independence in the NEI, had, fortunately from Australia’s point of view, received only marginal support in West New Guinea. This enabled Australia to continue regarding West New Guinea as geographically and strategically separate from the rest of the Indonesia archipelago; [it was] part of the strategic ‘umbrella’ of islands that Australia regarded as vital to its security [...] part of its strategic sphere of influence, as distinct from its wider sphere of interest, which included the Indonesian islands* (George 1980: 68).
(Hardjono, Warner 1995: 34). Bondon had been a Tanah Merah\textsuperscript{37} exile, and worked with NIGIS in Melbourne, writing for their Indonesian-language newspaper.\textsuperscript{38} (Later, Bondon would become a founding member of the Australasia Film Syndicate, the committee formed to produce and distribute Indonesia Calling (Lockwood 1975: 287).

[In Sydney] news about the Republic was only spread from mouth to mouth... and the Dutch were completely silent. There was absolutely no news in the press at all about what had happened in Indonesia (Molly Bondon, in Hardjono, Warner 1995: 35).

Ivens’ dilemma

On August 21 Ivens met with van Mook, Commander Quispel (NIGIS) and Mr Schim van der Loeff (NEFIS) in Brisbane. As the NEI was now under the control of Mountbatten rather than MacArthur, and the Dutch had authority with the British in the reoccupation of the NEI, this meeting agreed Ivens’ unit could move to the NEI,}

\textsuperscript{37} Tanah Merah was a camp in West Papua where the NEI Government had concentrated exiled Indonesian independence activists and intellectuals, often with their families, since the 1920s. In May 1943 these political prisoners were transferred to Australia and interned until December 1943 (see Lingard 2008; Kartomi 2002).

\textsuperscript{38} Later, the CENKIM representatives on this Syndicate were K. Mailangkay and S. Walandouw. In this source the Syndicate’s President is said to be Mr H. Grant (Secretary Boilermakers Society, Trades Hall Sydney) (extract from a translated CENKIM pamphlet, April 29, 1946: NAA: 6126 18: 31), while Ivens says at one point its president was Jim Healy (WWF Secretary) (letter, Ivens to Brandon, 1946).
as part of the staff of the government, thus avoiding the complications of accreditation. The Unit, which is to move as a whole, to immediately start production upon arrival in the Indies (memo, Ivens to van der Plas, August 23, 1945).

This correspondence, confirming proposals for the Unit agreed in Brisbane, also confirms details agreed upon regarding access to film stock, both for the NIGIS FPU and the Ivens unit, giving priority to the latter, and confirming the original budget for the project of $180,000. Clearly, Ivens still hoped to realise his project.

Despite this, as troops and government officials hurriedly returned to the capital Batavia (now Jakarta), the ships did not include Ivens and his crew. He waited, stranded in Australia, as the first NEI government ship left without him, and then the second and the third. In the meantime he and Marion Michelle had moved to Sydney and were living on the 8th floor of Birtley Towers in Elizabeth Bay Road overlooking the harbour. Ivens described his disappointment as the NEI government and troops began to move back to their former colonies, but without Ivens and his crew. *Indonesia Calling* makes much of the productivity of resistance in its narration: “the ships that didn't sail so a nation might live!” (a central rhetorical device that structures the film’s editorial). Cutts in his account wryly counterpoints the “ships that did not sail” conceit of *Indonesia Calling* with the comment, “The story of the involvement of Joris Ivens concerns rather the ships that did sail, but without him” (Cutts 1985: 352).

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39 The crew specified for this proposed move into location shooting were: 1. Joris Ivens, 2. Lt R. Sodejono (Indonesian), 3. Mr J. A. Senduk (Indonesian), 4. Miss M. Michelle (American), 5. Mr D. Fraser (Canadian), 6. Mrs J. Fraser (Canadian), 7. Mrs J. Dunlop (Australian) (memo, Ivens to van Mook, August 23, 1945, EFJI archives).
Duncan moved to Sydney soon after Ivens and Michelle. She found a flat around the corner from Elizabeth Bay in Kings Cross and probably started work with the ANFB’s production division in August or September. Duncan had introduced Ivens to Indonesian independence activists that she had met at NIGIS in Melbourne. These people included Sardjono, a senior PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) leader. He was another ex-internee at Tanah Merah. In Melbourne he became chair of a short-lived independence movement organisation called SIBAR (‘the new united Indonesia’), established in 1944, in full knowledge and with the cooperation of the Dutch. Indeed van der Plas wrote to the Director General of Australian Security on behalf of SIBAR inquiring if it was necessary for such an organisation to seek the approval of the Australian government; he was advised there was no such requirement. SIBAR was an attempt to unify diverse groupings of Indonesian activism, such as Communist Party members, Republican Party members and Muslim religious parties; SIBAR established branches in Sydney, Mackay, Casino and elsewhere.

40 Financial records of the NIGIS FPU show that Duncan was paid through Daniell’s Southern Seas Productions (at 20 pounds a week) until August 4, 1945 (Frederick Daniell Papers, NFSA). In late August Duncan was in Hobart with a Canadian film editor and member of Ivens’ Unit, Joan Fraser. Duncan told the Mercury she had “temporarily given up” her work with Daniels’ outfit, and that she anticipated travelling overseas on a writing assignment (the Hobart Mercury, August 24: 7).

41 Sardjono had been elected to Parliament in the Netherlands in 1934 as a candidate for the Netherlands Communist Party, but he could not participate because the Dutch refused to release him from Tanah Merah where he had been detained in exile since 1928.

42 The Dutch supported the organisation, according to Australian security, because it was easier to monitor one organisation rather than several. The
Soedihijat and Soeleman were others among the membership of this group who were also employed with NIGIS in Melbourne and who, like Sardjono, were reportedly members of the underground PKI (NAA: A6122/40 136).

Following confirmation of the declaration of independence many Indonesian activists decided they would no longer collaborate with the Dutch and SIBAR was dissolved and replaced with CENKIM. The Indonesian committees were supplemented with support groups such as Australian-Indonesia associations and clubs in a number of locations including Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. These organisations with a strong ‘people-to-people’ community base often formed around relationships between young Australian women and Indonesian expatriate communities (Maramis 2006).

Once the independence movement was firmly established and with accounts of fighting in Java and elsewhere making news here and around the world, Sardjono issued a call for international solidarity in support of the Indonesian cause. His argument was set in terms that reminded the Dutch of their recent subjection to the “luftwaffe massacre in Rotterdam”, and reminded the English of “the horrors of London and Coventry”. Sardjono said the Indonesians of Sourabaya would be no less courageous in their resistance (Tribune, November 20, 1945).

Australian Security Service may have underestimated the sophistication of van der Plas, whose long-term political objectives included cooperation with a reformed Indonesia. The files note that “a slip on the part of Chevalier van der Plas” prevented the Security Service obtaining a translated report of speeches made at a meeting to establish a branch of SIBAR at Casino (Association of New Indonesia, SEBAR, NAA: A6122/40 136).
The statement was made at a time when British forces, including Indian and Gurkha troops, were obliged (under an agreement reached between the Dutch and the British on August 24, 1945) to ‘pacify’ the NEI, repatriate the Japanese forces, protect and release some 100,000 Dutch and European prisoners, and deliver the Colonies to the Dutch. During August, September and October this had proved far more difficult than anticipated.

Indonesian resistance in Australia

In early September 1945 a mutiny by Indonesian seamen, government office workers and dockworkers refusing to load Dutch ships was supported by Australian trade unionists who also ‘walked off’ Dutch shipping. The Dutch armada was declared ‘black’. Trade unions and community groups organised demonstrations, petitions and actions to stall the Dutch. Indian and Chinese seamen also refused to man the ships. The Dutch subsequently forced hastily flown-in Indian seamen to take their place. However, as soon as the Indians realised they were expected to be strikebreakers, they too ‘walked off’. On occasion they were forced to work at gunpoint. They shared with the Indonesians a common vision of a post-colonial Asian region and very often a cultural identity as Muslims (Goodall 2008). Around the world maritime unions followed the Australian trade unions’ example, refusing Dutch shipping and supply (Lingard 2008; Lockwood 1975).

While officially Australian troops were under orders of neutrality, in some parts of the Indonesian archipelago the military supported the Dutch against the Republicans. Australian soldiers elsewhere in the region distributed Republican propaganda and signed petitions.
declaring support for Indonesia; they said they would not fight for ‘Dutch imperialism’. In some places Australian troops supplied arms to the Republicans (Lockwood 1975: 238-9; O’Hare and Reid 1995: 14-20, 33).

The NEI administration, however, saw things very differently. They imagined they would be welcomed back to Batavia. They intended to return, to hang the ‘traitors’ Hatta and Sukarno and resume what they saw as “the peace, prosperity and happiness” of life before the war (Bennett 2003: 76).

Meanwhile, in the Australian Parliament debates raged about who were friends, who were enemies, and who were our neighbours. Labour Senator Grant entered the debate reminding those (like Opposition Leader Menzies) who called the Indonesian independence leaders ‘quislings of the Japanese’ that the British at that moment were deploying the Japanese to ‘maintain order’ across the Indonesian archipelago notionally under their control:

_The leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives has said that the government is offending our neighbours. Who are our neighbours? Are they the few Dutch imperialist exploiters who control rubber interests in Java and who have bled 75,000,000 natives for the last 350 years paying them an average wage of 2d a day? Seventy-five percent of the natives of Indonesia cannot read or write. The Dutch were unable to defend their own possessions. Now they want to return to exploit the natives again as they did in the past_ (October 2, 1945: CPD Volume 185, p. 6197, cited in Lingard 2008: 148).

As Indonesians walked off the job—NIGIS in Melbourne lost their Indonesian staff and Indonesian soldiers with the NEI forces mutinied—Dutch military police and Australian security forces began
to arrest and charge them. The Council for Civil Liberties telegrammed Calwell:

*Men are anxious to return to Indies in any but Dutch vessel... We are confident you would agree it is absurd to imprison as prohibited immigrants men who do not wish to immigrate* (cited in Lingard 2008: 157).

The government began negotiating with NEI officials and Indonesian leaders in Australia to repatriate the thousands of Indonesians around the country. The Dutch wanted the striking workers, mutinous soldiers and deserters deported under their control to West Papua, or Nauru, under Australian control. The Department of External Affairs wanted them out of the country as soon as possible too and managed to negotiate their passage on a British ship, the *Esperance Bay*. It arrived in Sydney carrying ex-prisoners of war from Changi on October 8, 1945 and was cleared by Mountbatten’s South-East Asian Command to return Indonesian expatriates home on October 10. Within days there were more than 1,400 Indonesians wanting to return home. The government had agreed to provide safe passage under the control of the British, against the wishes of the Dutch, with Lieutenant Plumb aboard as a witness and guarantee (Bennett 2003: 84-88).43

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43 It proved a complicated operation, with “dangerously fluid” military developments in Java causing a number of mid-voyage changes in planned destinations (Bennett 2003: 4). Bennett makes the point that had there not been such a successful public campaign by Indonesian activists, trade unions and the Communist Party, ”Indonesian seamen who refused to work Dutch ships might well have been declared inadmissible aliens and handed back to the Dutch... Australian policy towards the NEI might have been purely ‘hands off’” (Bennett 2003: 241).
Meanwhile, having shifted his film unit to Sydney, Ivens and Michelle were continuing to work on scripts for their proposed series of educational films for post-war NEI. By early October the black ban on Dutch shipping had taken effect, but NEI officials had already returned to Batavia, and clearly Ivens and his crew were not going anywhere. According to an anonymous manuscript in Ivens' security file (dated November 16), Harry Watt told Bertie Scott, an Ealing Studios employee on the production staff of *The Overlanders*, that he had written a script for a pro-Indonesian film for the Trades and Labour Council. This dossier says Watt had been in daily contact with Ivens in the first weeks of November (NAA: A6126/18).44

What was to become *Indonesia Calling* seems to have had its origins here, in the elective affinity of Indonesian independence activists, Communist-led Trade Unions and politically committed filmmakers from Australia, the Netherlands and the UK coming together in Sydney in the early months of post-war Australia. While the news of the Republic’s declaration spread from NIGIS in Melbourne, the first strike against Dutch shipping was in Brisbane, and the alliance of the Waterfront Unions, the Waterside Workers’ Federation, the Seamen’s Unions—Chinese, Indonesian and Australian—was negotiated in Sydney. Indonesian activists in collaboration with their Australian supporters had persuaded the Chifley government that Indonesians in Australia should be

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44 June Dunlop, Daniell’s secretary, deserted Daniell to become secretary to Ivens, moving to Sydney where she shared accommodation with Bertie Scott’s wife, film editor with Ivens’ NIGIS unit. She became June Cann when she married Alex Cann, a cameraman with the FPU.
assisted, as soon as possible, in their desire to return to Republican-held ports in Indonesia.

*Indonesia Calling*’s opening scene, which follows a graphic map showing Indonesia’s proximity to Australia, is set on the Sydney wharf. It is a mock newsreel—‘Indonesians Leave for Homeland’—and must have been shot between October 10 and 13, when the *Esperance Bay* left Sydney for Brisbane, and then went on to Batavia. Frank Bennett and Rupert Lockwood say the scenes that open the film, purportedly a newsreel of the *Esperance Bay* preparing for its departure, were recreated.  

Maybe some shots were recreations (the tray truck carrying waving Indonesians with luggage). Most of the sequence, however, is clearly reportage.

One of the abiding concerns of film historians has been the question of Ivens’ truthfulness in dealing with allegations that he illegally used the equipment of his Dutch employer to make a film attacking them, while still employed by the NEI. In 1975 Rupert Lockwood said Ivens had “breached his contract with NIGIS, illegally using its equipment” (Lockwood 1975: 287). Cottle and Keys (2006) follow Lockwood.

Schoots uses Michelle’s diaries to show that scenes were shot for the film while Ivens was in the employ of NIGIS. He says Ivens with John Heyer shot scenes as the *Esperance Bay* prepared to leave

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45 See Part Three.

46 A scene in which an Indonesian flag is presented to Jan Walandouw by Australian Seamen’s Union Secretary E. Elliot, like most scenes in the film, portrays an event that did in fact take place. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the presentation of a large Republican flag to Indonesians boarding the *Esperance Bay* by the Seamen’s Union (*SMH* October 15, 1945: 5, cited in Bennett 2003: 88).
Sydney on October 13. Noting that Ivens cabled Helen van Dongen in Los Angeles on October 12: “[…] Considering violent situation Indies my position now impossible stop drastic action on my part rapidly unavoidable.” Schoots speculates that shooting the Esperance Bay departure must have been this ‘drastic action’ (cited in Schoots 2000: 200). It is equally likely that Ivens is referring here to plans to resign his commission, an action he delayed until November 21, 1945.

Cutts argues that Ivens resigned before he started work on the film, and reports the date of Ivens' resignation as December 21, 1945 (Cutts 1985: 354-355). In this Cutts is allowing for a four-week period of ‘notice’ from the date of his resignation cable to van der Plas. His source for the claim that Ivens did not betray his employers is Ivens himself, who, at the time of the 1978 interview cited by Cutts, insisted that NIGIS equipment had not been used, and that he had “made a clean sheet” by resigning and returning equipment immediately. The anonymous dossier in Ivens' file, referred to earlier, stated that the equipment being used by Watt and Ivens was not from NIGIS but from the ANFB.

When Martha Ansara interviewed Ivens in 1979, he gave her an account of making the film in which he stages his resignation after noticing from his window that a strike was taking place; giving the impression very strongly that events depicted in the film took place following his resignation (Ansara 1979).

When news of a film shoot in progress on the Sydney wharves was published by the Melbourne Sun (November 5, 1945), Daniell and the head of NIGIS' Melbourne office, Lieut. G. van Rijn, engaged a character called Manderson (‘the man of the little radios’) “to undertake a complete investigation”. Manderson was said to be “well
and favourably known to Colonel Spoor", the head of NEFIS (Netherland Indies Intelligence Service).\textsuperscript{47} Manderson's report shows he had access to security files, as he cites Catherine Duncan's file and Axel Poignant's files, quoting from them. Interestingly he says that 'NSW security' does not identify Ivens or Watt as communists. He finds no evidence that the Indonesian Committee of the Trades and Labour Council were involved with making a film, but notes that the 'moderates' in the TLC executive were plotting, with the support of Security, to overturn gains made by waterfront unions on that Committee.

By the time Manderson's verbose report was delivered, the Sydney press had caught up with the story. The Sydney \textit{Sun} (November 22, 1945) reported that Commonwealth police were investigating a film that was being made, apparently for the Indonesian sub-committee of the NSW Trades and Labour Council.

A couple of days before this Sydney \textit{Sun} piece was published, Ivens sent out formal invitations to a press conference:

\begin{quote}
47 This 'Manderson' is very likely H. B. Manderson, who had worked with the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) managing commando raids into Japanese-occupied East Timor until he was removed due to incompetence in January 1944. The AIB involved Australians, Americans, Dutch, Canadians, Portuguese, Timorese, Chinese, Indonesians and others. NIFIS operated in Australia under its aegis and was based in Melbourne. A high proportion of the projects involving NIFIS and SIA were 'disasters',

\textit{Perhaps the worst—and least known—disaster was the terrible price paid by the people of Portuguese Timor for their help to Australians} (Powell 1996: xii).

The tragic incompetence, "lunacy" is the word Powell uses (Powell 1996: 159), resulted in the capture, shooting, torture and beheadings of dozens of Australians and "un-numbered" Timorese (Powell 1996: 376).
\end{quote}
Film Commissioner for the Netherlands Indies Government requests the company of [e.g., Professor A. K. Stout] in the Kent room at the Hotel Australia on Wednesday 21st November at 5.45 pm, at which time Mr Ivens will make an important statement.⁴⁸

Hundreds of journalists and guests turned up. Ivens announced he was resigning his position in protest at the NEI government’s actions. He would not “do any film work [...] against his principles and convictions” (Sydney Sun, November 22, 1945). “I cannot reconcile my conscience with the job that the Dutch government wants me to do” (The Daily Telegraph, November 22, 1945). NIGIS responded by calling Ivens a traitor who “has made himself an outcast in the eyes of every sincere Netherlander by doubting a promise the Queen has made” (Mr Schwarman, NIGIS, cited in SMH, November 22, 1945).

In a hand-written cable the same day to NEI Governor General van der Plas, now in Batavia, Ivens warmly expressed his regret as he gave notice. He thanked van der Plas and van Mook for their support:

I promised you at our last conversation in Melbourne that I would be open with you if I could no longer support the policy of the Dutch government; this is what I am doing today. It is tough that I will not be able to film one of the greatest events in world history, an arising Indonesia.

That Friday (November 23), the other members of the Ivens unit also announced their resignations (i.e. Michelle, Donald and June Fraser, John Senduk, Jane Dunlop and J. D. Tapp) (Melbourne Sun, 48 Stout’s invitation can be found in his Papers (Stout Papers, NFSA).
November 24, 1945). Cables supporting Ivens followed the report of his resignation in *The New York Times* and the Los Angeles *Daily News*: Ring Lardner Jnr., “everyone here supporting your stand in defense of Atlantic Charter”; Jean Renoir cabled his support from Los Angeles; the American Writers Guild, the Director General *Du Cinema François* likewise; the British Association of Cine Technicians added their voice in support, and so on (cited in *Indonesian Life* January-February 1947, NAA: 6126/18). Australian cultural organisations on the left also sent these kinds of endorsements. A surprising one arrived from Arthur Calwell, Minister for Information, who wrote to Ivens c/- the Australian National Film Board (ANFB),

> Views will differ concerning the political wisdom of the stand you have taken, but nobody will question your manliness in adhering to beliefs conscientiously held even at the expense of personal loss. I hope that the grand work you have done in the field of documentary films will continue. Your influence has been felt in Australia and elsewhere, and further opportunities to continue your labours in this direction are bound to occur (Calwell to Ivens, November 23, 1945, EFJI).

Although Ivens had publicly declared his allegiance, he was potentially subject to legal action as his period of notice had not expired; others could also be compromised. Work on what became *Indonesia Calling* continued in secrecy.

**Who worked on the film?**

Each time an account of *Indonesia Calling*'s production is published more names are mentioned.\(^{49}\) It is impossible to know precisely

\(^{49}\) The print of the film held by the National Film and Sound Archive in
over what time frame the film was shot, or how many people participated. Michelle’s diary noted October 30 as “the first day’s shooting” (Michelle Collection, EFJI), although she might have meant her first day of shooting. As we know from other accounts she has given that, as a stills photographer, it was new for her to be asked to be the cinematographer.

On November 4, scenes were shot at a demonstration against the troop ship the *Stirling Castle*, carrying 1,600 troops to Batavia, manned by an English crew. The ship was denied berth by Waterside Workers, but the troops were transferred to another ship, the *Moreton Bay*, and escaped the blockade.  

Authorship of the work was disbursed and collaborative. Duncan has said that it was (‘Big’) Jim Healy, Secretary of the Waterside Workers’ Federation, who gave them the ‘basic structure’ for the film (Duncan, interviewed by Groenewout, 1988). Michelle has said Duncan’s commentary was written after the picture was cut, while Duncan emphasises her earlier involvement. She says she started work on the film when she was invited to first see the rushes.

Australia has no creative credits, while later prints (from 1947) differ to the extent that they cite only the ‘key creatives’ in a single head credit card: Joris Ivens, Marion Michelle, Katherine (sic) Duncan and Peter Finch. The only other difference is the design of the title card, which uses a typeface evoking a more exotic ‘bamboo’ motif (see Part Three).

50 Daniell arranged for an NIGIS FPU cameraman (his son John) to shoot footage of the *Stirling Castle-Moreton Bay* shuffle, and secretly provide it to Cinesound newsreel for a widely exhibited, unattributed story advocating the Dutch position (confidential memo, G. van Rijn, NIGIS, November 24, 1945, Daniell Papers, NFSA).
(Duncan, interviewed by Groenewout, 1988). Duncan and Michelle agree in various interviews there was no shooting script as such; rather those involved closely with the project would design and convene scenes as they followed the dramatic events taking place. All the major scenes are heightened representations of actual events. Ivens says repeatedly in the interview with Ansara that there were no recreations, that everything was shot “as it happened”, but he must have meant to say that they shot portrayals of actual events that happened during the period the film was shot.

The Manderson Report names Ivens, Michelle, Heyer and Watt. He also confirms the involvement of Merv Murphy’s Supreme Sound. The Sydney Sun (November 22, 1945) says Arthur Higgins was shooting for John Heyer on the wharves, and also mentions ‘Merv’ Murphy. Cutts cites correspondence with Axel Poignant who says that he did “about a week’s work” shooting interiors at Supreme Sound (this will be the famous Indonesia Calling scenes with Indonesians receiving broadcasts from the new Republican radio). He also recalls shooting scenes on the wharf directed by Watt. Roslyn Poignant (née Izzat) has also confirmed Axel’s work on the film.\(^\text{51}\)

\textit{At the centre of the support group was Harry Watt, who enabled the film stock to be ‘supplied’ by Axel and probably also John Heyer. The friendship between Axel and John Heyer,}

\(^{51}\) Watt’s participation is also confirmed by a comment in a letter from Ivens to his US distributor Tom Brandon: “It will interest you to know that Harry Watt who was here directing a film for Ealing, ‘The Overlanders’, came out and did one sequence, but this is between us” (Ivens to Brandon, September 15, 1946: 5).
and Axel and Harry was lifelong. After all we all lived here in London. Harry died a year after Axel in 1987 and I was his executor (Poignant 2009).

Ironically, had there been a competent security service, and/or an appropriate investigation commissioned by NIGIS, we might be able today to answer the intriguing questions about who actually shot what and when. Cutts has reported Duncan saying that it “doesn’t really matter”, a comment she also made to others who quizzed her on the details (e.g., interview with Schoots). It is unlikely she did not know. Ivens maintained his silence years later: “They were friends of mine; I didn’t want to get them into trouble” (Ivens interview 1979, cited in Hughes 2009). Heyer issued a denial when the Sydney Sun (November 22, 1945) quoted him as saying he was making the film for the Trades and Labour Council.52

Eddie Allison has been a little more forthcoming. Allison was the secretary of the Australasia Syndicate established as a production vehicle for the project. There are no records of the syndicate having

52 I did not make the statement attributed to me in yesterday’s Sun. The statement was not correct. I have never at any time held a contract with the Indonesian sub-committee of the Trades and Labour Council to produce a film on the Indonesia situation. I am not producing films for any organisation except the National Film Board, which I joined several weeks ago (The Sun, Sydney, November 23, 1945).

This of course could be read as dissembling. He did not deny, for example, that he was directing a film on the wharf, etc. There may have been some ‘slippage’ between the ‘Trades and Labour Council’ (TLC) and Hugh Grant, TLC executive, President of the Indonesian sub-committee and President of the Australasia Syndicate, the production vehicle for what became Indonesia Calling.
been registered, but from various sources it appears the office holders were Hugh Grant, Secretary of the Boilermaker's Society, NSW Trades and Labour Council member and TLC Indonesia Committee President, and CENKIM leader Mohammad Bondon (later Mailangkay and Jan Walandouw) along with (‘Big’) Jim Healy of the WWF. Allison was Secretary and also responsible for the distribution of the film in Australasia.53

It was being shot underground, word went around. It was being made, you couldn’t deny it. ‘Big’ Jim Healy of the waterfront union was in it, also Elliot of the Seamen’s Union, and there was a group of people from the New Theatre; Ken McClaren, and then I, became more incorporated with it. When I came out of the Air Force in September ‘45, I became part of the unit as well; I was the business manager of the whole thing [...] Harry Watt shot one sequence. He heard about it; he was here with his film The Overlanders that had been made, that was due to be released. Also here was the Australian Film Commissioner, Ralph Foster from Canada. Also here at the time taking over from him was Stanley Hawes ... (Eddie Allison, interviewed by Graham Shirley, AFTRS, 1978).

Cutts also mentions Gwen Oatley, “Merv Murphy’s off-sider”, refusing a demand from the Commonwealth police to see the film in progress during its editing at Supreme Sound (Cutts 1985: 358). There is a wonderful filmed interview with Oatley in the NFSA in which she talks about how much she learnt from Ivens. She

53 “The Australasia Film Syndicate is the trustee for the film and will see that all profits will be allocated to the Indonesian independence groups” (letter, Ivens to Brandon, 1946).
describes observing him editing, and the revelation that sound editing could be so important to creating mood and pace (Gwen Oatley, interviewed by Graham Shirley, NFSA, 1979). Allison also spoke very warmly about Ivens’ generosity in encouraging Allison with his 1946 film *Coal Dust* for the Miners’ Federation.

“Making Coal Dust […] I found that I could make a film. For the first time I was brought into association with a great filmmaker. I saw him at work, basically on the editing and so on, and when you […] see a man that’s shot 2,800 feet and ends up with about 2,020 feet in the final thing, that’s filmmaking. It was great to be with him, and he was so helpful (Eddie Allison, interviewed by Graham Shirley, AFTRS, 1978).

When André Stufkens came to write his book to accompany the DVD box set of Ivens’ works (2009), all of these people except Murphy and Oatley are cited. In addition he mentions Ken Coldicutt, the Melbourne ‘Realist’, whose footage shot on the Melbourne wharves was not used (Hughes 2007b).

Charlotte Maramis cites others also working on the film (unfortunately without attribution):

*John Sendoeck, who had worked on a Dutch radio station in California during World War 2, John Soedjono, a former soldier*

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54 As Ivens was bedridden with asthma during the final stages of editing, Oatley cut the audio to his instructions (Oatley, interviewed by Shirley, NFSA, 1979).

55 The people who were making Indonesia Calling […] wanted footage, any footage we could provide of ships held up in the port in Melbourne […] stop-work meetings of the wharfies in Melbourne. And this I was able to supply […] we didn’t get any recompense for that […] but we were doing something useful. (Coldicutt 1992, interviewed by Lowenstein, NLA).
of the Dutch East Indies Army and a Javanese dancer who appears in the film, and the two Joris had met in Brisbane, Soendardjo and Soeparmin (Maramis 2010: 139).

Michelle’s recollection is probably a good clue to the whole process. She said in an interview with Stufkens in the 1970s, “it was never intended to be a film” (Stufkens 1977). The project seems to have ‘evolved’. Perhaps the Indonesian Sub-Committee of the Trades and Labour Council did sponsor a newsreel; maybe the shoot with Jan Wandalouw and the Seamen’s Union leader, E. (Elliot) V. Elliot, was directed by Heyer and shot with ANFB equipment, or maybe the sound camera was hired from Merv Murphy and the scenes shot by Arthur Higgins. Does it matter? Maybe not.

‘Business manager’ Allison says it was shot with Ivens’ personal camera, the old Kinamo he used to shoot The Bridge (1928), as does Michelle (Cutts 1985: 356). Ivens himself says in a letter to his American colleague and distributor Tom Brandon, “most of the filming was done with an ancient dilapidated Kinamo held together with hairpins” (Ivens 1946: 3). That this was Ivens’ own camera is denied elsewhere (Stufkens 2009), and anyway it does not explain the two sync-sound scenes. Unfortunately the business records of Supreme Sound have not survived, otherwise many of these questions could be answered. The questions were the subject of intense controversy at the time, and Ivens could have been prosecuted in relation to them. In writing to Brandon he says, Another difficulty was that I could not be identified with the making of the film, as I had just quit the Dutch with considerable publicity here, but my contract extended for several months longer, so it was necessary to work in secret (Ivens 1946: 3).
In his letter to Brandon in 1946, Ivens says *Indonesia Calling* “is a type of fighting film, in the sense that it takes sides, attacks its opponents with facts, and takes part as a film in the general struggle it portrays.” He says the film was started in October—but he does not specify by whom—and followed events until April 1946. He is mindful of the sensitivity around those who worked on the film. He praises Duncan for her commentary:

*One of the most promising young writers in the country... since she is at present, and was at that time, working for the Australian National Film Board, her name cannot be made public* (Ivens to Brandon, September 15, 1946: 4).

He talks about the film not being ‘anti-Dutch’, but rather it is directed at Dutch colonial policies, telling his American distributor that publicity should emphasise that “many Dutchmen in Holland think just as expressed in the film” (Ivens to Brandon, September 15, 1946: 4).

The first screenings and the after-party at Duncan’s flat are described euphorically in notes made by Ivens in Sydney in 1946 and Duncan, dated Paris 1952 (see *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia*, 2009). The response from Dutch officials in Australia was far from euphoric.

Allison submitted the film for export approval, but the Chief Censor decided the film offended Item 25 of the Customs (Cinematograph Films) regulations, as it was “likely to be offensive to the people of [a] friendly nation”—the Dutch (memo, J. J. Kennedy, Comptroller-General Department of Trade and Customs, to A. S. Watt, Acting...
Secretary Department of External Affairs, August 8, 1946: NAA: A1838 1283 409 1/3/9/1/4). The Department of External Affairs and the Department of Trade met to consider Allison's call for a review of the Censor's decision, but a response from External Affairs was repeatedly delayed. Allison wrote again in September calling for the export ban to be overturned; the Department of Trade again sought the views of External Affairs, who finally replied on October 11, 1946, advising that the Prime Minster had said External Affairs should not express an opinion on the matter, putting it back into the hands of the Department of Trade (NAA: A1838 1283 409 1/3/9/1/4).

While the film was banned for export, the Dutch Consul and the conservative opposition demanded the film be banned from exhibition in Australia. 56 This focused the government's attention on the wildly discordant regulation of film certification and censorship between the states. The matter quickly became an agenda item for the next conference of COAG (Council of Australian Governments).

States that had censorship provisions in place responded to an urgent telegram (August 10) from Prime Minister Chifley reporting

56 The Royal Netherlands Legation in Canberra (Baron van Aerssen) wrote to Chifley in August condemning the film and demanding public screenings be banned. The Chargé d'Affaires J. A. Renitz wrote to Evatt on September 4 when a Canberra screening was planned, and again on November 7 and November 14. External Affairs had cabled the Australian ambassador in the Hague in October asking him to explain to the Dutch Foreign Minister that the Commonwealth did not have the power to ban the film, and requesting the demands be withdrawn as the Government found them “embarrassing” (Cablegram October 18, 1946). However the complaints continued.
the Dutch demand, by declining to ban the film, citing their opinion that the film simply recounted events already widely reported (NAA: A1838/283 401/3/9/1/4). Despite the absence of state censorship in Australia, the film could only find its way into the leftist film society movement. After seeing the film in Sydney, Daniell was able to advise his old Commander, Quispel, now in Batavia,

*I doubt if there will be any other release in Australia, except possibly in Newcastle, as all the trade interests are opposed to screening it anywhere* (Daniell to Quispel, August 23, 1946).

### Local reception and the export ban

Daniell had sent Quispel a copy of a *Film Weekly* edition that carried a detailed story on the film, published shortly before its Sydney premiere. In the letter Daniell wryly notes the film's origins. Quoting *Film Weekly*, he says,

*By the veiled reference ‘it was made by people who know their business’ I think we can draw the conclusion as to who was the mainspring of the work, and by the statement ‘the script was written by a girl connected with films’ I think we also know who this means* (Daniell to Quispel, August 6, 1946).

Jan Lingard says *Film Weekly* “condemned the film as one-sided propaganda” (Lingard 2008: 228), but the article also expressed more ambivalence than this. *Film Weekly* praised the film’s professionalism:

*Technically the film is first class. It was made by people who know their business. It should excite great interest when publicly released.*

While exaggerating the ‘anti-Dutch’ editorial of the narration (“almost every line containing a stinging indictment of the Dutch”),
*Film Weekly* cites ‘the people behind’ the film, arguing “they have merely presented the Indonesian angle” (*Film Weekly*, August 1946: 4).

A resolution of the export ban took some time; there was an election looming and the Opposition saw an opportunity to attack the government over Australian-Dutch relations. The Department of External Affairs advised the Department of Trade in mid-October that following discussion with Prime Minister Chifley, External Affairs felt it would be better if they were not involved in this decision at home. They went ‘over the head’ of the Legation in Melbourne, asking the Dutch Foreign Minister in the Hague to withdraw demands to ban the film.

A Federal election in September 1946 returned the Chifley government with a substantial majority in both houses. When Parliament resumed, questions without notice began to reappear about the export ban. Chifley arranged for a screening of the film to Cabinet (November 6), and Evatt said in Parliament on November 7 that the export ban would be lifted. He explained that it was not a matter of what the government thought of the film, but rather,

> The question was whether censorship should be imposed at the point of production, when censorship could be exercised by governments or authorities in the countries to which the film might be sent. The government decided it would be an abuse of power to invoke the censorship (Hansard, House of Representatives, November 7, 1946).

On the same day that Evatt announced in Parliament the lifting of the export ban, the Dutch * Chargé d’Affaires* J. A. Renitz wrote to Evatt, citing a newspaper article from *The Newcastle Herald* commenting on the screening of the film before Cabinet,
I sincerely hope that this is the last time I hear about this film, as even a screening before “a limited public audience” can, to my opinion, do no good to the relations between our countries.

The export ban lifted

Allison announced to the press (November 14) that copies would be sent to Europe, the US, Indonesia and New Zealand. Michelle later wrote that the film screened in open-air screens throughout Republican Java (cited in Lockwood 1975: 288). Prints and ‘lavenders’ (duplicate negatives from which prints could be made) probably traveled with Jan Walandouw, President of the Sydney Independence Committee when he left with the third repatriation aboard the HMAS Manoora on November 19, 1946 (Bennett, 2003: 226). Newspapers reported the film screening in Republican Java, noting copies were to be made in Jogjakarta (The Argus, December 111, 1946: 5). Ivens reports that as he left Australia in January 1947, he received a cable from Jogjakarta advising that the film had been received and inviting him to Indonesia (interview with Ivens, Groenewout 1988; Hughes 2009).

Eric van ‘t Groenewout discovered documents suggesting that a

57 Walandouw had replaced Bondon as CENKIM’s representative on the Australasia Syndicate following Bondon’s departure on the Esperance Bay in October 1945.

58 Australian authorities had promised the Indonesians repatriated from Australia safe passage to Republican-held territory, and despite intervention by the Dutch, who were blockading Republican ports, the Indonesians aboard the Manoora were safely received in the Republican port of Cirebon in early December.
dozen Malay-language copies of the film had later been gathered in Indonesia by the Dutch and exported to Holland. However he was unable to locate them (interview with Marion Michelle, Groenewout 1988).

*We sent Malayan copies, naturally, to Indonesia. I can’t tell you what the commentary said. It certainly wasn’t the commentary that Catherine wrote... when we showed [the Malayan version] to some of the friends of the seamen, they laughed at parts that weren’t funny in the English version... They might have used some of it [Catherine’s commentary] but there was no reason to use it because they were talking about their own story* (Marion Michelle interview, Groenewout 1988).

Screenings in Australia were largely restricted to non-theatrical exhibition, following the initial theatrical release at the Kings Cross newsreel cinema. But this is not to say that the film was not effective in its work. The Realist Film Association in Melbourne bought their own print and screened it frequently and to large audiences (although they also complained that special screenings organised for trade unions were seldom well attended). The film society movement was in its infancy in Australia at this time, but the film, and the controversy surrounding it, had a lasting impact.

**Meanwhile at the ANFB**

When the ANFB’s first Producer-in-Chief, Stanley Hawes, arrived from Canada in May 1946 to take charge of production with the Department of Information’s Film Division, *Indonesia Calling* was being edited. Both the first Australian Film Commissioner Ralph Foster and the Producer-in-Chief Stanley Hawes knew Ivens, and
although there appears to be no record of them meeting in Australia, it is most unlikely that they would not have been in contact.

In his essential *Continuum* article of 1987, Moran identifies a number of factions that developed in the ANFB's Film Division during its earliest post-war days. His analysis is in keeping with later research by Williams, and the recollections of Duncan. Keen to get 'runs on the board' for the new government film agency, Foster appointed around 25 people before Hawes arrived. This 25 probably includes those such as Maslyn Williams and others inherited from the Department of Information (DOI) newsreel units, already part of DOI's Film Division.

The factions Moran mentions divide the older newsreel people from the younger documentary faction. He notes a Catholic/Protestant divide within the newsreel group and a more nuanced division between those with a social and political orientation to documentary and those like Maslyn Williams (inherited from the pre-1945 Department of Information staff) and Heyer, whose interest was more 'aesthetic'. Moran says at one point,

*For the most part the situation was one in which the newsreel people were simply servants to the documentary people* (Moran 1987: 59).

This may be how it appeared to some, but 'the newsreel people' included Williams, and importantly Jack Allen, who exercised considerable influence as a Senior Producer, as Director of the Australian Diary Unit and as the continuing executive with the 'trade' organisation, the Film Council of the Australian Motion
Picture Industry.\textsuperscript{59}

Bertrand and Collins point to a hard edge of these schisms when they note,

\textit{(An) anonymous source (perhaps Frederick Daniell of the National Film Council) warned the government that the documentary film movement was “largely in the hands of the left-wing producers, who […] have been able very cleverly to condition the minds of theatre audiences to long-range socialist ideas”} (Bertrand and Collins 1981: 115).

Hawes has said that some of the people he wanted to hire in the late 1940s and early 1950s were vetoed by security; others, having been hired, were sacked without any consultation with him (Hawes 1983; Hughes 2006). Geoffrey Powell was one of these, and Geoffrey Collings may have been the other. Collings worked closely with Watt on \textit{The Overlanders}, was a stills photographer and directed a number of ANFB films between 1946 and 1950 (Allen 2002). Both were reinstated following Hawes insistence, but both soon left. According to a letter Hawes wrote to Foster in 1947, Axel Poignant was also sacked by Bonney at this time (Hawes Papers, NFSA).

\textsuperscript{59} Jack Allan was the producer of \textit{Menace} (1952), the government’s answer to Bob Mathews’ ‘realist’ film, \textit{They Chose Peace} (1952). One of the black marks against Hawes, from ASIO’s point of view, was his resistance to this film, made in close collaboration with right-wing politicians and ASIO’s Director General, Charles Spry (NAA: A6122 40 157 Volume 2). According to Dick Mason, Jack Allen “claimed to be ASIO’s representative” in the Unit (Dick Mason, interviewed by the author in 1981; see also Hughes 2008).
As the film started its brief theatrical season at Potts Point in August 1946, questions were raised in Parliament by Harold Holt, echoing newspaper reports from almost 12 months earlier (Sydney Sun, November 22, 1945: 2). Holt wanted to know,

*Whether any assistance was given by any government department or any permanent or temporary government official in the preparation of the propaganda film Indonesia Calling.*

Chifley replied, “Neither the government nor any of its officers were connected with the preparation of the film” (CPD, volume 188: 3852-53, August 7, 1946).

**Security interest in *Indonesia Calling***

The security services closely watched and ‘spoiled’ security clearances for those they suspected of being involved with *Indonesia Calling*. An involvement with *Indonesia Calling* was not the only reason that filmmakers in government employment were targeted, but it was sufficient reason. Most of those targeted for their involvement—or suspected involvement—were believed also to have participated in other ‘subversive’ acts, such as attending film society screenings.

The security services had advice that the government’s film production house—with its mandated brief to deliver all government department film needs—had among its staff people who had worked on *Indonesia Calling* (e.g., Heyer, Duncan, and Poignant). Geoff Powell is another person said (by Moran) to have had a hand in *Indonesia Calling*. He was close to Heyer, as both were active with
the Sydney Film Society. After his sacking, and later reinstatement, Powell joined Heyer at the Shell Film Unit, resigning from the Film Division in 1950. With Hawes' regret and blessing Heyer left in 1948. Powell, like Axel Poignant, was later a celebrated stills photographer.

Poignant was considered by security one of the “half-pie comms” clique (NAA: A6119 369: 48). In 1943 he was noted as “associating with Communists” and of a “bohemian class” (NAA: A6119 369: 6, 49). He worked as a camera assistant with Watt on The Overlanders. It was through Watt that he came to work on Indonesia Calling. In 1946 (or early 47) he was brought into the Film Division by Ralph Foster, the first Film Commissioner, and in March 1947 named in a security investigation as “one of a clique formed by a number of suspected Communists” (NAA: A6119 369: 14). Poignant had another strong connection with the Indonesian independence cause and the Film Division, as it was there he met his life partner, filmmaker and writer Roslyn Poignant (née Izatt), who was an editing assistant at the Division and a student activist

60 Powell had had a troublesome youth before he turned to the Mosmon Branch of the Communist Party and worked as a photographer with the Communist Party newspaper, 'Tribune'; he had been for some time before the war a self-confessed supporter of Nazism. It has been said that he confessed to being a security plant in the Communist Party and also that he was approached in late 1945 by the Commonwealth Investigation Service, but declined the offer (‘Petrov’ Royal Commission Report, Commonwealth of Australia, 1955: 238-9, 405).

61 Axel Poignant migrated to Australia at the age of 20 in 1926. He first ‘came to notice’ when he subscribed to the Worker’s Star in WA in 1938. (The secret police had copied two receipts issued to Poignant in June 1938, each for two shillings, purloined from the offices of Worker’s Star.)
supporting the Indonesian independence struggle.\textsuperscript{62} She came to the Film Division in February 1949. Izzat was reported ‘adversely’ in 1954 as she had been noted in 1952 as “one of a group of alleged Communists employed in the Department of the Interior, Film Division” (NAA: A6126 680: 19).\textsuperscript{63} This typifies the quality of ‘intelligence’ that occupied the attention of those dedicated to ‘counter-subversion’, and that compromised the careers and conditioned the atmosphere for Australians interested in documentary filmmaking in the early post-war years. In 1956 Axel and Roslyn Poignant left for the UK where they mostly remained; he developing a successful photographic studio; she pursuing a series of important works in history and anthropology.

The ‘adversely known’

\textsuperscript{62} She spoke at public meetings supporting the Indonesian independence movement, and gave evidence in court supporting a fellow student arrested at a demonstration outside the Dutch Consulate General’s office in July 1947 against the so-called ‘police action’ of the Dutch military against Republican Indonesia. She participated in a committee at Sydney University seeking to force an inquiry into police violence that attended these demonstrations, which included among its number Professor A. K. Stout, appointed an inaugural board member of the ANFB in 1945, until his "services were terminated in 1947" (NAA: A6119/79 1363: folio 3). See Part Two on Stout, the ANFB and Ivens. In addition to her ‘suspicious’ political activities as a student, Izzat was also the Secretary of the Motion Picture Technicians Association (NAA: A2126 560: 18).

\textsuperscript{63} Nine folios out of 26 are suppressed; five pages note events between 1948 and 1952. In 1951, “C” Division of ASIO, concerned with vetting public servants and citing a censored paragraph, remarked, “It is thought that the information held concerning the girl could be profitably passed on to the Public Service Inspector, Victoria” (NAA: A2126 560: 12).
Duncan slipped through early; she was a foundation member of the ANFB’s production staff, hired by Foster, probably on Ivens’ recommendation. In 1946 and 1947 she wrote and directed the Division’s first series, *Australia and Your Future* for the Immigration Department: *Men Wanted* (1947), *Christmas Under the Sun* (1947) and *This is the Life* (1947) (Williams 2004).

As the Cold War settled in and Australia became increasingly enmeshed in the American and British nuclear programs, the security apparatus ‘grew and grew’. Catherine Duncan remained a target among many, despite the fact that she had been out of the country since 1947. When she returned to Australia her visits to the home of Ted Cranstone and his wife in 1957 and 1958 were observed and noted. The ‘snoops’ concluded that her relationships with various men, Ivens among them, and others at the ANFB’s Film Division constituted a threat to national security. Indeed, Hawes

64 It was Ted Cranstone, with Bob Mathews and later Ken Coldicutt, who initiated regular film screenings at the New Theatre in Melbourne in 1945 that led to the establishment of the Realist Film Unit and later the Realist Film Association. Cranstone’s security file does not note this. The first time he ‘came to notice’ was in September 1949 when ‘Bluey’, an informant in the Department of Information, told CIS operative Gamble that Cranstone was considered a “fellow traveller” by an unnamed informant at the Film Division. The second reference appears when his name was published in the youth peace newspaper *Challenge* (November 21, 1951) as a member of the film sub-committee for the Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship. He was thereafter considered a security risk. Twenty years later ASIO’s Director General of Operations for NSW asked his Deputy to find out if Gamble could verify the reliability and source of ‘Bluey’s’ advice. Gamble could not remember, remarking that, “the informant would have been passing on information he had gathered from gossip in the Department” (NAA: A6199 4621, folios 81-2).
was himself accused of suspicious relations with Duncan. This, along with the fact that Duncan was believed to still be in contact with Ivens, led to security agency surveillance for decades afterwards of a number of people with whom she was associated. These dossiers, of course, were secret, and none of those affected, despite what suspicions they may have had, could have known definitively of the files' existence. Nor would they have had the opportunity to know their accusers, or answer the allegations against them.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) considered Hawes a secret communist, and classified him as “adversely known” and a security risk up until about a year before he retired from the public service in 1970. He was considered a person of interest to

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65 “An undoubted communist”, the security files assert of Duncan, “she slept with anyone and did not care who knew it”, and all those networked with her therefore, “due to their past intimate relationships with Communist Catherine Duncan [...] could be call[ed] to heel whenever it suited her.” Furthermore, the security logic concluded, Consequently information concerning the current activities of the Film Division [...] could be passed not only to the Communist Party of Australia but also abroad, possibly to Ivans [sic] (NAA: A6199 4611: 2).

66 Hawes’ ‘association’—if it could be called that—with Ivens continued to be of interest to security. In 1963 the following note was made: “To commemorate the 65th birthday of Ivens in November ‘63, it is proposed to issue a commemorative booklet for international documentary week in Leipzig... Stanley Gilbert Hawes (h/1/22) of the National Film Board, 57 Wellington Road Sydney, has been asked to write an article for this booklet...” Whether this knowledge was obtained from an informant at the Film Division (at this time the Commonwealth Film Unit) by mail or telephone intercepts is not
the counter-espionage branch of ASIO. This may have been because Foster, who fell foul of the Canadian Royal Commission on Espionage of 1946, had recommended Hawes to the ANFB. However the suspicions about Foster, and indeed about John Greirson, raised by the Canadian Security Services were entirely groundless, and found to be so by the Canadian Royal Commission. Clearly, the hounding of the left under Cold War conditions was ideological. Its origin and effect was political and cultural. While there were real security issues, the activities of the agencies concerned with security intelligence and acting under the rubric of ‘counter-subversion’ pursued a broader political agenda in targeting the left; documentary filmmakers were among their targets.

Geoffrey Collings, one of those who actively lobbied governments about establishing an Australian National Film Board in the early 1940s, and who was appointed to the Film Division in 1946, resigned in the early 1950s. Although he returned later, he observed, “this business of security in the public service; security is a dead hand [you] stop adventuring” (interview with Dahl and Geoffrey Collings by Hugh McInnes, cited in Allen 2002).

At one point the apparatus of the Department of Supply's division that was managing security around the Australian-British atom bomb tests and other Department of Defence programs suggested that these people should simply be culled during one of the many ‘restructures’ of the Film Division (NAA: A6122 1616: 17).\(^{67}\)

\(^{67}\) Memo: March 26, 1959, A. B. Carter, Regional Security Officer NSW Department of Supply to Regional Director ASIO:

\[\text{[...] Information received as a result of inquiries [censored]... has convinced this Officer that all Film Division personnel should be}\]
Hawes’ defense of some of his staff contributed to his own difficulties—he was under enormous suspicion and pressure during his career with the variously named Film Division/Commonwealth Film Unit/Film Australia. He was on limited contracts from 1946 until 1970, and was never given public service permanency. When Hawes planned an overseas trip in 1967, ASIO sought his itinerary and inquired into his ticketing on suspicion that “he may confer with an old friend of his, one Joris Ivans (sic)” (NAA: A6199 2007 4046 Volume 1: folios 58-9).

Eventually (January 17, 1968) Hawes was “cleared”. ASIO’s NSW v vetted, and two clearances reviewed, in the interests of Commonwealth security. […] Taking into consideration the fact that a number of the production personnel have graduated to the Division from Communist front film units and the full extent of their current association is not known; also the information received concerning the Producer-in-Chief, Mr. Hawes, and several other members of the Division, it is believed that the risk of leakage of defence information to communist organisations is a very real one… the complete vetting of the personnel of the Film Division is necessary… […] It was reported in the press recently that Mr Kennedy of the Prime Minister’s Department had reviewed the activities of the News and Information Section of the Department of the Interior [under which the Film Division was administered at the time]. He is reported to have recommended a big reduction in the activities of the section, and in particular, that official filmmaking become the province of private enterprise. If such is the case, it is suggested that any pruning of the Film Division staff [censored] be [censored] on whom an adverse report is entered.

68 A telegram in Hawes’ file records a claim by the Director General of Security, without citing evidence, that Hawes was a member of the CPA until 1954.
office carried out an exhaustive review of the files, including liaison with the counter-espionage branch after which the Director General determined the organisation need have no ongoing anxiety about Hawes (NAA: A6119 4047: 115). It is highly unlikely that suspicions about Hawes in 1946 could at any time have been plausibly related to ‘the case’ (ASIO’s raison d’être). It is telling that it took the Australian security services 22 years to acknowledge this. When they finally did so, they were careful not to disclose it outside their protected environment, as they knew how “embarrassing” to ASIO a conversation with Hawes might prove.69

The early post-war years enabled a start to be made towards an independent Republic of Indonesia. Concurrently, a committed and engaged documentary film culture in Australia emerged. Soon the Cold War locked off this early post-war optimism—optimism for both an independent cinema and ‘imagined communities’ of independent nations forging their own futures with autonomy from metropolitan powers. The Cold War nurtured instead another kind of ‘secret history’.70

Sometimes the surveillance provided security with an opportunity. One film society subject to surveillance was the Sydney Film Society (SFS). Hawes and Professor A. K. Stout were in the audience for a SFS screening on January 9, 1947; CIS noted their attendance with

69 The files disclose a debate within ASIO about whether Hawes should be called in for an interview; in March 1968 the Director General decided against it because it “could prove embarrassing to ASIO” (NAA: A6199 2007 4046: folio 147).

70 A definitive history of Australia’s cultural Cold War is yet to be written. I have published elsewhere how the security services became interested in film societies (The Archive Project, 98 minutes, 2006); see also McKnight 2004.
cross-reference to the files of others attending. They noted that SFS President, John Heyer, was known to security as one with “radical tendencies”, “reported to expound the theories of Marx”, and that the Society’s Patron, Stout, had “recently been dropped from the Australian National Film Board”; Watt had addressed the gathering in January, apologising for the absence of Ivens, who had recently left for Europe with Michelle (NAA: A6119/74 484: folio 6). From the point of view of security in Cold War Australia it looked like a subversive Communist conspiracy. However the SFS was simply a community-based organisation screening and discussing films. It was the apparatus of the state that conducted the actual socially subversive secret conspiracy.

Des Alexander (by this time Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Service) was alerted to Ivens’ and Michelle’s departures and visited Ivens aboard the Otranto when it docked briefly in Melbourne on January 10, 1947. They had met before, courtesy of Russo in late 1945. In conversation with Alexander, Ivens said he might return to Australia if “suitable employment is offering.” Perhaps Alexander was proud as he reported to his superiors that Ivens had said the “activities of the Branch in Sydney delayed the final completion of the film by some months” (NAA: A6126 18: folio 13). Alexander notes that he had made arrangements for a contact aboard the ship to “discreetly question

71 SFS’s February 6, 1947 screening included Stanley Hawes’ recently completed ANFB film on distance education, School in the Mailbox (1946). Hawes addressed the gathering; the Commonwealth Investigation Service report records “nothing of significance was noted in his address” (NAA: A6119/74 484: folio 6).

72 “The security service set up by Labour essentially as a counter-espionage organisation [under Menzies] systematically undermine[d] the very liberties it was designed to protect” (McKnight 1994: 155).
Ivens" and furnish a report from Fremantle. The Dutch had been informed of Ivens' passage and “perhaps London should be advised.” Duncan’s exit was noted as she left in June 1947; her file records that London would be notified of her movements.

While *Indonesia Calling* may, from the point of view of the 'secret state', exemplify the negative example of ‘film as a subversive art’, the more mundane apparatus of bureaucratic politics also had a corrosive impact on early post-war documentary in Australia. *Indonesia Calling* was the anomaly—the exception; the ‘rule’ was the Australian National Film Board. The design and construction of government documentary for the post-war period is the subject of Part Two.
AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

Part Two: “The Commonwealth should establish a film authority”

This second part of my exegesis looks at two moments of significant change in Commonwealth government policy related to the production of Australian documentary. Firstly, the emergence of the Australian National Film Board (ANFB), which was coming into being during the period when Ivens was in Australia and making *Indonesia Calling*. Behind the scenes security interest in the ANFB’s production division and those involved with Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* has been outlined in Part One. The focus in this part is on the ANFB at a bureaucratic or institutional level. This particular aspect of the political context of Ivens’ project is pertinent not only as Ivens himself was implicated in the process, but also because the conditions that gave rise to the ANFB and the manner of its early implementation offer insights about how documentary was imagined and regulated in Australia in this early post-war period. Secondly, the closure of the institutional descendent of the ANFB’s production division, Film Australia, coincides with my ‘re-visit film’\(^73\) on *Indonesia Calling*, and similarly a glance at the conditions surrounding this context in the making of the 2009 film illustrates continuities and differences in the way documentary is imagined and regulated in the present. At this time we see a radically reconfigured environment for documentary production generating

\(^{73}\) The term ‘re-visit film’ is a European one referring to a film that builds a new work around an already existing film.
new structural obstacles to the ‘creative’ and essayist documentary in Australia.

This second part of my exegesis therefore offers another beginning and another ending. What began as an optimistic cultural program in the social engineering of consensus through the production and distribution of documentary film with the establishment of an Australian National Film Board in 1945, ended—was swept aside, decommissioned—during the transition to a new model of support for Australian film from July 2008. Both *Indonesia Calling* films (1946; 2009)—for different reasons—were of necessity made on the margins of government and industry. Of course the ‘beginning’ was not necessarily the beginning, just as the ‘end’ is not really the end.

Just as other moments of origin can be formulated for a chronology of Australian government filmmaking, so the reception of Ivens’ Australian work is not in any sense finally addressed or ‘locked off’ by this new work. An institutional descendent of the ANFB, Film Australia’s National Interest Program, continued in another form under the administration of Screen Australia in the new arrangements announced in May 2007 and was established July 1, 2008. However, the ANFB did begin with its inaugural Board meeting in June 1945, and its institutional descendent Film Australia was liquidated and its functions dispersed on June 30, 2008.

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For example, when Film Australia published a booklet celebrating its history in 1991, it played down the 1945 ANFB moment in favour of an 80-year heritage, with the origins of the organisation traced to 1911 and the first official Federal government appointment of a photographer and cinematographer: “On December 6, 1911 James Pinkerton Campbell (JP to his friends) was appointed... and Film Australia was born” (Film Australia 1991).
'Joris Ivens in Australia' was a phenomenon that well outlasted Ivens’ brief residency (1945-1947). The impact of his achievement with *Indonesia Calling*, allowing that ‘influence’ cannot easily be categorically proven, may nonetheless be traced through the enormously productive Waterside Workers Federation Film Unit (1953-58) on the one hand,\(^{75}\) and the constraining, covert ‘spoiling’ practices of security services on the other. As we have seen, Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* was a ‘scandal’; indeed, the very presence of Ivens was cause for alarm in some circles.

**Before the post-war period**

War powers were in force when Ivens arrived, and while Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies and New Guinea were being effectively wound back by March 1945, the Allies were also engaged in ‘strategies of position’ between themselves in anticipation of planned influence in the region at the war’s end. The complexities of cooperation, rivalry and control in the deployment of military and diplomatic forces led the Americans, whose authority over operations in the Pacific was paramount until August 1945, to make sure that the someone they believed to be a Soviet agent was kept well away from the uncertainties unfolding on the front-lines.\(^{76}\)

\(^{75}\) See *Film-Work*, 1981; Milner 2003.

\(^{76}\) Java was transferred from the command of MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific Command to Mountbatten’s Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) following hotly contested post-war planning at Potsdam. The date of the transfer of jurisdiction over the ‘theatre of war’ from the Americans to the British was August 15, 1945, the same day the Japanese announced their surrender. The English signed an agreement to collaborate with the Dutch in the reoccupation of Java on behalf of the Dutch on August 24, but
When control over the Netherlands East Indies shifted from the Americans to the British and Dutch, it became possible for the NEI authorities to plan around the American ban on Ivens’ travel, should they choose to do so. Until his forced resignation in 1948, the liberal H. J. van Mook, an Ivens supporter, was the main architect of Dutch policy in the NEI. But as we have seen (in Part One), as the Dutch hastily mobilised to reoccupy the NEI, Ivens and his crew remained in Sydney, despite van Mook’s apparent plans to sidestep the American ban.

Complexities of cooperation, rivalry and control also informed more modest post-war planning further back from the front lines. The ANFB as it emerged is just one such instance. When Ivens arrived in Australia in March 1945, the establishment of the ANFB was well advanced. Ivens was invited to address members of the Board during an adjournment in proceedings of the Board’s inaugural meeting. Later that same day he addressed a wider Canberra audience at Albert Hall (The Canberra Times, June 26, 1945: 3). The title of his address was “The Meaning of Documentary Film in National Development.”

Twelve months later suspicion of the Board’s production division and its possible involvement and support for Ivens’ Indonesia Calling provided grounds for Parliamentary questions very early in the life of the new organisation (August 1946, CPD, volume 188: 3852-53), and also provided grounds over a considerable period of time for covert hostility to some of its personnel (see Part One). The Mountbatten was badly equipped and misinformed about the strength and determination of the Indonesian Independence movement (Anderson 2006: 131-134).
commercial film trade was hostile to the ANFB from its inception, “denouncing ‘cineamateurs’ who ‘preach the fanatical gospel of one John Grierson who can’t even make decent films himself’, and warned the Board to expect ‘very little cooperation from the trade as a consequence in the post-war period’” (Bertrand and Collins, 1981: 106; cited in Film Weekly, June 21, 1945). Complex alignments around political ideology, cultural practice and business interest are seldom easily disentangled, and this is certainly the case with regard to government and documentary in Australia, then and now.

ANFB origins, Grierson, Conlon, nation and empire

The origins of the ANFB have been examined by Bertrand and Collins (1981), Bertrand (2000), Moran (1991) and Williams (Williams 1999, 2000, 2008), among others. As Williams points out, the narrative favoured in most accounts gives emphasis to the pioneering visit to Australia in 1940 by the ‘father of British documentary’, Scotsman John Grierson (Williams 2000: 35). Grierson was here on a mission from the British Imperial Relations Trust with the objective of establishing mechanisms for the production and distribution of government films throughout the Commonwealth. While his efforts bore fruit in Canada and New Zealand in the early years of war, in Australia his diplomacy was “ignored” (Williams 2000: 37). A conservative United Australia Party–Country Party Coalition government was in power (the ‘Menzies-Fadden’ government), and while Grierson did meet with Menzies, Grierson’s submissions were rebuffed.
While the ‘ignored’ Grierson was respected among those planning a national film board during World War 2, the ANFB arose as a political technology intended to contribute to solving local problems anticipated in post-war Australian society. Williams says Grierson’s visit was a “catalyst” rather than an “inspiration”, as “one influence among many” (Williams 2008: 16, 100-101). He notes, “Stout, Heyer and others had been lobbying for a government filmmaking body unlike the newsreel units” (Williams 2008: 101).

Williams (1999: 3-4) notes that Grierson’s "Memorandum to the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister" of 1940, composed as he left Australia for New Zealand, echoed the rhetoric and sentiments of his advocacy for the power of film as a vehicle of social engineering elsewhere in the British Commonwealth (Britain, Canada and New Zealand). Williams teases out Grierson’s ‘empire and nation’ in an analysis emphasising an Australian reception of Grierson’s ideas that favours the national over the imperial.

Williams also rightly reminds us that the state as an agency of ‘nation building’, with adult education for citizenship and national development, has a number of persuasive precedents on which Keynesian-informed social planners were keen to elaborate. Williams says Roosevelt’s New Deal "provide(s) a mirror to Australian government initiatives.” Drawing on O’Regan (1987), Shirley and Adams (1989), Moran (1991) and others, Williams concludes that what we see in the emergence of the ANFB of 1945 is a negotiation between ‘empire’ and ‘nation’ in which a post-war Australian nationalism is predominant (Williams 2008: 101-104).

While an Australian ‘new deal’ was certainly envisaged by post-war planners, there were also threats that planners foresaw. Williams mentions “anxieties about foreign influence” (American wartime
presence), and “xenophobia” (about Asia) (Williams 2008: 85-86). In the official history of Australian civil society during the war period, Paul Hasluck refers to anxiety among political elites around questions of ‘morale’ (Hasluck 1952: 564).

Political elites were alert to the ‘social unrest’ that had disrupted established norms in Europe following World War 1: Communist revolution and the rise of fascism. Questions of political legitimacy, trust or ‘morale’ at a moment of national crisis were precisely the kind of problem that the technologies of modern public relations promised to solve (Ewen 1976; Carey 1995). Grierson's project was an exemplary instance of these technologies at work in the service of Britain and its dominions (L’Etang 2000).

In Australia an early exponent of these ideas was Alfred Conlon, whose Prime Minister’s Committee for Morale (1942-1946) was established under the Curtin government (within the military command of General Blamey in recognition of the immediate threat from Japan). The terms of reference establishing the Committee declare that it would advise the government on comprehensive measures directed towards “influencing public opinion into an essential weapon of national defence” (NAA: 672405: CS 328/21).

In his memoir Trial Balance, H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs, the Director General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction (PWR) says that a platform from which ambitious post-war planning began was ‘Alf’ Conlon’s Morale Committee that had “emphasised the need for positive and creative objectives with which the public could identify” at the war's end (Coombs 1981: 24).77

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77 Despite Chifley’s concern to give the work of the Ministry a sober, practical air, there was evidence that the Ministry was
Conlon advocated an ambitious and broad-ranging project of public relations for the post-war period; making and distributing documentary films was one of the functions his program envisaged. Stout and Heyer were contributors to Conlon’s Committee (and also foundation members of the NSW Documentary Films Committee, a group formed in 1940, following Grierson’s visit, to agitate for State government support for documentary—another forum informing PWR).

Conlon was in touch with Coombs’ Department through PWR staffer Colin Dean, who alerted Conlon to the Department’s interest in “making documentary films” in June 1943. Conlon was instrumental in introducing Stout into the process at PWR when he told Dean that the Committee for Morale’s Documentary Films Committee (read Stout and Heyer) could “assist the Department generally with its project” (Conlon to Stout, June 1943, Stout Papers).

ANFB origins – Post-War Reconstruction

When in 1944 Coombs initiated a process designed to create an Australian national film board, he also noted a desire to advance an Australian film industry as an end in itself. His project proceeded with partial success. An Australian national film board was established, but as we will see, it was vulnerable and damaged in envisaged by Ministers as an instrument of social change [...] The task was to ensure an economic and social context in which positive opportunities were present rather than merely an absence of constraint [...] We were conscious that there was in the community generally a conviction that a better world could be built (Coombs 1981: 26-7).
its implementation. Coombs’ next opportunity to pursue this aspect of his intention had to wait another 30 years, but that is another story.

While Grierson’s overtures at the Federal level were rebuffed in 1940, some State governments and State-based organisations were more receptive. A Documentary Committee was established in NSW, arising partly from Grierson’s advocacy (Stout 1977; Hodsdon 1996), and committees were established in other states as well to explore possibilities for the use of ‘non-standard’ (i.e. 16mm) film in educational contexts, including within communities. These initiatives also have their own local antecedents and champions who welcomed the impetus of Grierson’s moral authority, not to mention his Empire loans.

It was not until the Department of Post-War Reconstruction proposed an Australian scheme based on the Canadian model that the actuality of what might be recognised as a ‘Grierson Plan’ began to take shape. My reading of the archives supports Williams’ argument that the ANFB was an Australian initiative driven by cultural nationalism, and imagined in a context conscious of an international documentary milieu essentially ‘left-wing’ in its political orientation.

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Correspondence between Heyer and Stout from as early as 1941 evidences their shared concerns about ‘the trade’ taking actions to limit community use of 16mm films. Specifically, Heyer’s concern was the Australian Motion Picture Distributors Association resolving to “oppose” 16mm film distribution and exhibition outside schools and requiring their members to “police” this “unfair competition” in their States (Heyer to Stout, December 1941, Stout Papers).
Bertrand and Collins (1981; 103-118) provide a nuanced and concise account of the establishment and problems attending the early years of the ANFB, and evolution into the Commonwealth Film Unit and later incorporation as a branch of the Australian Film Commission in the mid-1970s. My contribution here accords with Bertrand and Collins’ broad outline and supplements this and Moran’s 1991 book-length study, *Projecting Australia: Government Film Since 1945* (pp. 1-29 deal with the early years), by returning to primary sources and teasing out in more detail what seems to me to be the disabling wound inflicted on the infant institution at its birth. My account gives more emphasis to Coombs and his associates at PWC, and factors in the ‘back-room’ machinations of the Conlon group, including Heyer and Stout.

What follows is something of a forensic—perhaps obsessive—unpicking of aspects of the bureaucratic policy process. One purpose of this archival dig is to illustrate continuities and differences in process, substance and discourse that characterise Australian government policy concerning documentary in the two periods under discussion (1945-6 and 2007-2011). Issues around the Board's ambivalent loyalties towards Australian film production on the one hand and the 'trade' (the largely foreign-based commercial exhibition and distribution chains) on the other are also canvassed. This ‘business on the border’—tension between the local and the global ('nation’ and 'empire’)—is another familiar refrain echoing though more recent times ('Australian content’, ‘global television’).

**Affirmation and critique**
Williams has pointed out that during the war and early post-war period there appears to be an absence of an aesthetic discourse easily recognisable to documentary studies today. Instead, there is in contention “two disparate groups... practitioners and bureaucracy... and independent filmmakers” (Williams 2008: 102). While the discourse and context have changed dramatically, positions in contention have striking continuity and resonance with debates today around policy and the practice of documentary, if not with its scholarly reception and teaching.

The broad platform that constitutes contestation around values and the politics of documentary during the 1940s and 1950s can be seen as an argument involving social affirmation on one side and critique on the other. A schematic dichotomy setting out the logic of this conflict does not account for the complexities of individuals positioned within it, or changes over time, but nonetheless, it can help in general terms in understanding central elements of the conflict in play.

Supplementary articulations of this fundamental positioning arise in the figures of the ‘pragmatic professional’ in contrast with the advocate of ‘documentary art’. These are the terms that distinguish the (old) newsreel from the (new) documentary in the 1940s and 50s. They are a ‘right’ and a ‘left’, a conservative and a progressive approach, not only to filmmaking, but to culture and society, the former favouring individual enterprise and the laissez faire, the latter ‘planning’ and the collective. The former tends to see social critique as ‘negative thinking’ and the latter welcomes it as an agency of change.

Different perspectives across the political spectrum envisaged different images of a post-war Australian nation; there were
different kinds of loyalty in play. Just as Ivens—in defying his government, resisting colonialism, supporting his government’s enemies—practised actions loyal to a more idealised Netherlands, so Stout, for one, considered a documentary film culture would be nothing if not critical; they shared a ‘second kind of loyalty’.  

A national film board could serve the interests of ‘domestication’ and the laissez faire just as it might encourage critique and participation. This was the politics of cultural production played out at an institutional level in the formation of the ANFB and the operations of its production division. A parallel politics is discernable in debates around the reconfigured documentary context of recent times, with, of course, their novel elements.

Ideological critique of Grierson’s ideas and practice complicates any easy affirmation of a Griersonian heritage in service of a ‘left’

79 The ‘second kind of loyalty’ is a Chinese saying, coined by reform journalist Liu Binyan. It refers, for example, to Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang, dismissed in 1989 following Tiananmen on the grounds that he "supported turmoil and split the Party"; he practised the 'second kind of loyalty' by “pointing out the Party's faults rather than bowing to them” (Nathan 2009: 23).

80 ‘Domestication’ is deployed here with reference to Paulo Freire’s usage:

_Cultural action for freedom is characterised by dialogue [...] cultural action for domination is opposed to dialogue and serves to domesticate the people [...] Those who use cultural action as a strategy for maintaining their domination over the people have no choice but to indoctrinate the people in a mythified version of reality [...] By contrast for those who undertake cultural action for freedom, science is the indispensable instrument for denouncing the myths of the Right, and philosophy is the matrix of the proclamation of a new reality_ (Freire 1972: 76-7).
cultural nationalism (Nelson 1988). There are both radical and conservative imperatives at work in his achievement, and a critical moment and an affirmative one. The workings of the administrative apparatus that gave birth to the ANFB under wartime conditions are also expressive of these contradictory impulses, and the unresolved working through of these contradictions sow the seeds of the organisation’s demise a little over 60 years later.

**PWR + DOI = ANFB**

Other dichotomies can be fashioned from the bureaucratic records that document a struggle between progressive, visionary and ambitious social planning from Coombs and his colleagues at PWR and the conservative, constraining forces of the Department of Information (DOI), keen to hold on to their wartime monopoly. As Bertrand, Collins and Moran (1991) have pointed out, a fundamental rift of philosophy and policy divided PWR and the DOI, the two main players in the ANFB’s establishment. It is the evident concern of Coombs and his PWR colleagues, Ellis and Dean, to establish certain parameters and powers within the structure and functions of the proposed ANFB that might enable it to serve PWR’s ambitious social program, rather than simply seeking to control it.

The DOI seemed to be dragged to the table somewhat reluctantly, in the belief perhaps that this new initiative was unnecessary; that their practices during the war were sufficient for post-war government filmmaking. They were content to see government filmmaking dedicated to publicity for Australian produce abroad, and news and entertainment for ‘the widest possible audience’ distributed through commercial cinemas. They appeared threatened by the creative ambition of documentary, but equally determined
that if it was to go ahead, then it must be under the control of the DOI. It was assumed that PWR would be decommissioned at the wars’ end, and that the implementation of its planning would be carried through by departments that could be expected to continue.\textsuperscript{81} It was also clear that the department with carriage of wartime film production and distribution would of necessity become the lead agency in any post-war structure for government film.

Nonetheless, the architects of the ANFB at PWR did not simply advise a continuance and expansion of wartime propaganda through the DOI, nor did they propose, as ‘Alf’ Conlon’s PM’s Committee for Morale had done, the abolition of the DOI. Rather, they initiated a broad program of policy research and development that was inclusive of a range of government departments and interested community groups, but to the express exclusion of ‘the trade’.

The Minister responsible for the DOI was Arthur Calwell, later to become also Minister for Immigration. He was to chair the Board, but chaired only the first two meetings. Coombs describes him as “an ambitious irritable critic” who supported the establishment of PWR only because he “feared [...] an opportunity to turn victory in the war to the advantage of working-class Australians would be thrown away by lack of forethought” (Coombs 1981: 24).

The DOI was established immediately on Australia entering the war (under Menzies’ United Australia Party-Country Party Coalition

\textsuperscript{81}I had been committed since its inception to the phasing out of the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction... (and to) place in continuing Departments both responsibility for the plans we had developed and the key members of the staff which had been involved in their preparation (Coombs 1981: 29).
government), with media entrepreneur Keith Murdoch as Director General. It aggregated a number of Commonwealth government media resources, including the Melbourne-based Cinema Branch of the pre-war Department of Commerce (established circa 1921), into a Film Division. The DOI housed two other committees—the National Film Council of the Motion Picture Industry and later a Films Production Advisory Board (established 1944). These committees managed the approval of scripts and the distribution of war propaganda throughout the commercial cinema chains. Their members were the senior executives in Australia of the US and UK distribution and exhibition chains that dominated the industry (‘the trade’) and some aligned local media entrepreneurs, for example, producer Frederick Daniell (see Part One).

When the Labour Party came to power in August 1940 and Calwell was appointed Minister for Information, Murdoch’s position was untenable. Calwell considered Murdoch a “fifth columnist [...] a megalomaniac who cannot help himself” (Calwell cited in Kiernan, 1978: 93). Murdoch therefore retired from the position, and the ex-editor of The Argus, Edmund Garnet Bonney, took over (Kiernan 1978: 89-111).

**ANFB = (DOI + PWR) + (BONNEY – CONLON, HEYER + STOUT)**

Bonney had been appointed Chief Censor as the war broke out and was a close ally of Calwell in the DOI’s ‘war’ with the press. In the

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83 Calwell’s biographer, Colm Kiernan, considers that Calwell’s hatred of the ‘capitalist press’ “was more fundamental than generally recognised.”
six months or so before Bonney’s appointment there had been a sustained attack on the DOI both from sections of the press and from within other branches of the government and army. Behind the scenes the Prime Minister’s Committee for Morale was among DOI’s most ardent critics. Conlon’s PM’s Committee for Morale was concerned about the DOI’s use of American advertising agencies, their lack of strategic thinking, their lack of engagement with modern technologies of public opinion, and the quality of their propaganda efforts.\textsuperscript{84} The liquidation of the DOI and its replacement with a new organisation with greater powers and more comprehensive media, including documentary film production, was a major project of Conlon’s Committee.

According to the minutes of one Morale Committee meeting, Conlon was interested in seeing documentary films made because they (the army) “could not get a fair deal from newspapers or radio” with regards to the kinds of war propaganda they had in mind (minutes, June 1942, Stout Papers, items 27-32). Stout was closely involved with the development of this program as convener of the Conlon

\textsuperscript{84} In an interview with Ina Bertrand, Stout cited an example of the Committee’s opposition to DOI:

\textit{The only thing the D. of I. did for us was intercept letters from within Australia and send us extracts indicating the state of morale, and we were so furious with this, because this was exactly the thing we were fighting against. Not only did we not use them, but we managed to get the Prime Minister to countermand this} (Stout 1979 [audio]).

Before his appointment as Minister for Information, Calwell said of Murdoch, “I make it clear that in my opinion Public Enemy No. 1 of the liberties of the Australian people is the Murdoch press” (Kiernan 1979: 92-3).
Committee’s Research sub-committee and convener of its Documentary sub-committee (Stout Papers, items 231-241).85

Conlon’s Committee presented a submission to the War Cabinet in March 1942 recommending dissolution of the DOI and its replacement with a National Public Relations Service to undertake large-scale public information campaigns in a variety of media.86 (It is probably this report to which Coombs refers in identifying the objectives of PWR with public relations.) The Committee’s submission to the War Cabinet, considered and rejected in March

85 At a meeting in June 1942 Conlon says, “If between us we could think of another word for ‘information’ we could get a new department. It should be a channel for the understanding and the distribution of government policy.” Stout replies, “I was thinking of something in the nature of a corporation, something that was neither government or private, like the BBC” (minutes, June 1942, Stout Papers, items 27-32). Indeed, the Committee’s ‘Plan for a national Public Relations Service’ does recommend a Commission independent from direct government control, and the abolition of the Department of Information (NAA: A5954 328/21: folio 12).

86 In an ‘exposé’ of Conlon and this Committee in The Sunday Telegraph in June 1946, journalist Elizabeth Riddell wrote,

Conlon was more concerned than most (with) the poor display he considered the Department of Information was putting on at that time... the Committee suggested that the PM should take over the Department of Information and that the Morale Committee should be consulted about all appointments to the DOI. The Committee prepared a Report on the DOI and handed it to the Prime Minister, who handed it to the DOI, with results that might have been expected (Riddell 1946).

(It is unclear whether Riddell refers to the official War Cabinet submission for a National Public Relations Agency, or to the confidential report Bertrand mentions. Maybe they are one and the same.)
1942, included the proposal that “full control of the production of film for the Commonwealth should be vested in the Commonwealth Public Relations Service” (NAA: A5954 328/21: folio 13).

Bertrand and Collins cite a confidential report of August 1942 that is scathing in its denunciation of the DOI, its Film Division and the National Films Council, accusing the advisory panels appointed by the NFC of profiteering from government production under the conditions of war, waste and opportunistic contracting of work to themselves and their associates. The solution proposed to address this was "a central government propaganda and morale committee (one different from the Conlon version).” They go on:

\textit{Its condemnation of the private sector probably contributed to later government decisions not to allow commercial representation on government film bodies} (Bertrand and Collins 1981: 97).

Heyer prepared a number of reports on the DOI’s work with films for Stout and Conlon between mid-1942 and November 1943. He wrote detailed critical assessments of the work of DOI’s Film Division comparing their production and distribution practices, and the regulatory context, with American experience. His reports at this time lament the difficulty of developing:

\textit{a planned program of local documentary production ...because such a program would have to be drawn up by unskilled Allen [sic: he means Jack Allan] in association with the National Films Council... [which is] primarily concerned with the box office... and unaware of the potential of the documentary... something they still regard as dry... that the audience has to sit out, instead of the vital absorbing documentary it can be} (Heyer, ‘Memo PM Committee on National Morale – Films’ November 1943, Stout Papers, items 240-241).
Heyer’s advice in these notes corresponds with the orientation to documentary and ideas about the institutional structures most likely to enable it, which Coombs, Dean and Stout pursued in the wake of the failure of Conlon’s grand plan. For example, Heyer notes that in the UK and the US, “production is planned by an expert body employed by the Government and the majority of films they plan are produced by government units.” He recommended that in light of the difficulty of working through the DOI, encouragement should be given to other government departments such as PWR to establish their own film production units. In imagining other kinds of work that might be made he notes by way of example a recent article by Coombs, ‘Training for Peace’, in the Journal of the RAAF that he considers an “excellent synopsis of an immediate documentary film” (Heyer, ‘Memo PM Committee on National Morale – Films’ November 1943, Stout Papers, items 240-241).

In this context, therefore, even putting aside ideological differences, it might not be surprising to note the DOI’s less-than-wholehearted welcome of big new plans for government filmmaking arriving on the desk from ‘Nugget’ Coombs.

**ANFB = PWR vs. DOI**

Coombs set out his strategy to create an Australian national film board in a memo to his Minister in May 1944, a little over a year after the establishment of the PWR. It reads very much like a memo confirming a done deal:

*I refer again to the proposal submitted by the Chairman of the NSW Theatres and Films Commission for assistance of the Commonwealth government in establishing an Australian film*
industry and to my recommendation that we should explore the possibilities of establishing an authority dealing with documentary, educational and instructional films as a preliminary step in any participation in film production and distribution.

Reports have been received of the experience of Great Britain and Canada in this kind of work and it is apparent from these reports that other countries have found that there is little hope of establishing films for educational purposes without initiation or at least assistance by government authority... A proposal along the same lines as the one adopted by the Canadian government for the establishment of the Canadian National Film Board might prove a convenient starting point for such interdepartmental discussions.

I accordingly recommend that we call a representative meeting between ourselves and the following departments to discuss the form of Commonwealth action in initiating a film authority: the Department of Information, State Departments of Education, Department of Labour and National Service, Department of War Organisation of Industry, Department of External Affairs, Universities Commission, Army Education Service, R.A.A.F., Education Service (Coombs 1944, NAA: A98.16: item: 1944/502).

Coombs’ language is exquisite. He first establishes an Australian reference for the broad proposal (NSW, not Coombs, not Grierson); then immediately the big picture objective “establishing an Australian film industry”, in which he distinguishes “documentary” from the “educational” and “instructional” (Coombs knows the difference). He sets out a ‘back fill’ in the second paragraph
defending against the predictable, ‘free-trade’ reproach that the government might be stepping into free-enterprise territory; the air of modest reluctance (“little hope... at least assistance”) backed by international research; it is perfectly pitched. Then the concrete model, the precedent (NFB Canada) and the organisational strategy: surround the DOI with a thoroughly researched proposal and a whole of government consultation.

From this point, they move quite quickly. In May 1944 Dean is asked to compile data about films currently available for distribution to support Coombs who wishes to “start convening conferences” about “the Commonwealth making its own films”. A meeting is arranged (June 14, 1944) with Stout to discuss “the nature of further steps which should be taken”. In late June a two-day conference follows; here, already, certain key details are in place:

*It is proposed that the Commonwealth should establish a Film Authority...known as the Australian Film Board... six members and a Chairman, Government Member of Parliament. Plus two members of the Commonwealth civil service, one of the defence forces, two members of the public not financially connected in any way with film interests* (NAA: A9816/3: 1944/502).

The document also proposes an advisory committee of government departments that will recommend films that need to be made, but

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87 Stout’s papers make reference to a meeting with Coombs on February 2, 1944 in Canberra, but disclose no details. The next entry cites a meeting agenda and papers for the June 23, 1944 meeting: present Coombs, Lloyd Ross, Stout, WGK Duncan, Mr R. McGrel (Exec. Officer Doc. Films Committee NSW), Major Wilson (Army Education), Gastabury (RAAF Education) and Colin Dean.
also, (under ‘Functions: D’) “the Board may initiate production
without reference to the Committee.”

One month later, Coombs writes to Bonney, the first official
communication between them on file. He sets out a background to
his approach: the letter from NSW and the Minister’s instruction
that they carry out research:

*The need in post-war Australia for large-scale training... and
adult education... films of the right kind can play an important
part [my emphasis]. The Minister has therefore suggested that
a meeting be called... As your Department has had much
experience in the use of theatrical films during the war... I
should welcome the opportunity of discussing the general
question with you before the meeting is called. I shall be in
Canberra on Wednesday, 26th, and Thursday, 27th July, and
would be glad of an opportunity to see you some time on either
of those days. Sincerely, H. C. Coombs, Director General.*

While there are no notes on what transpired at this meeting, a draft
letter convening an interdepartmental meeting of the kind proposed
by Coombs in his May letter to Curtin suggests certain problems
had already surfaced. This draft, dated July 31, proposes a joint

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88 This is a key clause that PWR has managed to maintain as a function of
the ANFB and which will eventually devolve to a National Interest Program
(National Documentary Program 2012); the last remaining function of
Film Australia as it was slashed, ‘downsized’, privatised and finally
liquidated from the early 1980s to 2008.

89 Prime Minister Curtin then wrote to the State premiers inviting
them to send representatives to this second, expanded conference,
initially planned for August 17 and 18. He again contacts the
premiers by telegram, advising them that the conference will now
be held in September.
invitation from Coombs and Bonney. The text suggests Bonney’s meeting with Coombs may have emphasised certain disagreements in their approach; but here it is ‘spun’ as an opportunity:

While the interests of our Departments overlap to a certain extent, it is clear that the Department of Information is principally concerned with bringing Australia’s point of view to overseas countries, and the Department of Post-War Reconstruction as representative of other authorities is more concerned with the use of films for educational purposes. The difference in purpose, however, is one which could, it is felt, be satisfactorily resolved with joint action and it is to discuss the means of such action that is the reason for the calling of the meeting.

The Conference of September 20, 1944 remained on message, almost. As a political milestone it achieved its objectives, bringing a strategic spread of government to the table and opening the agenda to public notice.90 At the same time the conference brought into sharper focus some of the troubles ahead, clearly illustrating differences in outlook that were to characterise struggles within the ANFB and documentary policy more broadly. Bonney took the foreground and delivered the opening address:

On behalf of Dr Coombs and myself, I welcome you to this conference... In migration, trade expansion, international relationships, tourist publicity and many other Commonwealth activities film publicity must play a part if we are to keep abreast of other progressive nations... the Films Division of the Department of Information was established as the authority to

90 The conference and its resolutions were reported in the press in each state (September 22, 1944) following a joint press release from PWR and the DOI.
control Commonwealth-wide film activities relevant to the war situation. For this work the Department of Information acquired some of the best equipment available and a number of the best technicians. It was also given first claim upon the remaining film production resources. The bulk of these resources were, until recently, employed in publicising Australia's contribution to the allied war effort at home and overseas [...]

We have in existence a film organisation with five years’ experience in co-ordinating the production and distribution of national films for theatrical exhibition, both in Australia and abroad... The agenda (of this conference) has been framed to permit the widest possible discussion, and to give each one present an opportunity to present constructive ideas and to outline his special needs. It is by no means rigid, but I would appeal to speakers not to carry the discussion into fruitless channels beyond the realms of practicability (NAA: SP 109, item 56).

In this rather defensive statement it is clear that Bonney seeks to use the conference to different ends than those of Coombs, Ellis and Dean. His opening address affirms the status quo. He sees progress in technology, and purpose in publicity. While claiming an open discussion, he immediately cautions against “fruitless channels”. He rests on the DOI’s laurels, “the authority to control” and the ‘actually existing’ film organisation. This is the man who will come to chair the ANFB, and whose crude manipulation will reconstruct the Board’s functions and membership to suit the purposes of his Department. Although Coombs and his colleagues from the beginning seek to establish that the Board be chaired by a government minister, Calwell on Bonney’s advice will delegate this
to his Departmental head, and soon after Bonney has the Board’s constitution altered to formalise this.

By the time Bonney is overturned in early 1947, the mould is well and truly set. You could say he is a man with a vision of the future and the determination to bring it to fruition. Bertrand describes this vision succinctly: “He wanted films which would advertise Australia abroad, and he wanted them made as cheaply as possible” (Bertrand 2000: 23). The DOI did not control the September conference, and a number of resolutions were passed. Lloyd Ross of the Department of Labour and National Service (soon to move to PWR) proposed the decisive five-part resolution, seconded by Stout.

**ANFB structure and functions**

It was proposed that the Commonwealth government appoint and make financial provision for the ANFB: documentary, instructional and publicity films:

1. **Persons with a pecuniary interest in the commercial film industry shall not be eligible for membership of the Board;**
2. The Board should promote, assist and co-ordinate production, distribution, importation, films for school and adult education, rehabilitation, social development, international understanding, trade and tourist expansion and immigration;
3. For administrative purposes, [ANFB] should be attached to the Department of Information;
4. The Department of Information should be the Commonwealth authority responsible for the production of films recommended by the Board; and
5. The Board should form advisory sub-committees as it judges necessary.
A press release issued at the conclusion of the conference summarised the main points and listed the resolutions; the take-home message was that:

*Establishment of an Australian national film board will be recommended to the Commonwealth government by a Conference of all Commonwealth and State authorities interested in educational documentary and publicity films which met in Canberra yesterday and today* (press release, September 21, 1944, NAA: A9816/3: 1944/502).

Dean wrote a critical commentary for Coombs on the conference outcomes. He had reservations about the DOI exercising control over the proposed new body. Noting that the Cinema Branch of the DOI had not made a film since 1940, Dean imagines the new body by contrast as a well-staffed production house directed by an Executive Officer (a Film Commissioner), who may on occasion commission work out but not “allow the present inefficient system of farming out to independent producers … to continue.” On the relations between the Board and the Executive Officer, Dean says, if the Executive Officer is experienced, you need a Board that can help “him” achieve his plans, whereas if “he” is Australian [i.e. less experienced], then the Board would be better loaded with “persons with a keen appreciation of the way film activity should develop…”

*The Executive Officer should therefore be a man who is an educationalist and a politician as well as one who has had film experience. We need in effect another Grierson.*

Dean worried about the danger of a Board weighted in favour of a “tourist and publicity outlook”, warning,

*The DOI is keen to fill all posts associated with these developments from its own staff… It is therefore suggested that the matter of appointment of the Executive Officer be left
to the Board should it be set up... We should aim at setting up this authority in such a way that it will in time become the body responsible for all government film activity (Dean to Coombs, undated paper, NAA: A9816: 1944/517 Part 1).  

Lloyd Ross also wrote to Coombs concurring with Dean's recommendations and adding, “I think this is satisfactory providing that it is clearly understood that the Board would have the right to make special recommendations for special productions” [my emphasis] (Lloyd Ross to H. C. Coombs, Sydney, September 27, 1944, NAA: A9816: 1944/517 Part 1).

By January 1945 both PWR and the DOI were each developing proposals for a submission to Cabinet. There were a number of outstanding issues from the previous year's September conference. One concerned the relationship of the proposed Board with ‘the trade’. PWR from the beginning had proposed prohibiting ‘persons with a commercial interest’ in the industry from the Board, but the DOI, with its wartime experience, was against this. Its view was that the presence of a representative of the commercial industry on

91 Dean worries that “it would become, under existing conditions, more of an advisory than administrative authority” (i.e. an advisory body to the DOI, rather than having the power to commission and administer its own functions). He anticipates that one inhibition to the success of the proposal through Cabinet might be the government’s “fear of opposition from commercial interests”, which could be overcome by “drafting the Act on similar lines to the Canadian pattern, that is without specifically mentioning commercial interests” (NAA: A9816: 1944/517 Part 1).

92 As mentioned above, this crucial function later became the National Interest Program, sustaining Film Australia from the late 1980s, and continuing as a source of financing after 2008.
the Board would facilitate distribution of the Board’s commissions into cinemas. PWR held out on this point and finally the question went to Cabinet to be resolved. The debate on this issue took place under the rubric of ‘the seventh member of the Board’. The Departments’ joint submission included an appendix in which these differing views were set out, beginning with the DOI’s argument and then setting out PWR’s position:

*The majority opinion on the committee*93 *however is opposed to this recommendation [a member of the National Film Council as a Board member] mainly on the grounds that representation of the Board would give the film industry the opportunity to frustrate the activities of the Board if they conflicted with commercial interests. It was agreed to refer the matter to Cabinet with an expression of these views. In the event of the Cabinet deciding against the appointment of a member of the Films Council as the seventh member of the Board, the committee agreed that a woman member should be appointed by the government* (Appendix B, Memo to the Treasurer from the Minister for Information and the Minister of Post-War Reconstruction, NAA: SP109/6:CS 56).

Another unresolved question was the involvement of the states: should ‘users’ represented by the State-based distribution offices be represented with a Board member; or moving one step closer to community, should the film societies be represented? The decision was taken to avoid State representatives on the grounds that the Board was established as an agency of the Federal government.

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93 At a crucial interdepartmental meeting in February 1945, the DOI’s proposal that a representative of the National Films Council be included on the Board was defeated by three votes to two (minutes, interdepartmental meeting, February 28, 1945. NAA: SP109/6:CS 56).
Nevertheless Stout was appointed to the Board representing 'adult education'. In practical terms, he represented the NSW Documentary Film Council. Debate over this clause is a disguised clash about the inclusion or exclusion of Stout from the Board, an appointment advocated by PWR with support from the Department of Education.

This language warning of a danger that the "film industry [would have] the opportunity to frustrate the activities of the Board if they conflicted with commercial interests" clearly reflects an historical analysis arising from the experience of previous decades in the political economy of Australian film. It also reflects (as Bertrand noted) the wartime experience with the National Film Council specifically, and the Conlon Committee’s assault on the DOI and the National Film Council.

“Dealt with”

Advice that Cabinet had approved the submission with exceptions was returned to PWR with the words "dealt with" scrawled in the margin. However Bonney’s resistance to the documentary project, and the hostility of some sectors of the industry to government filmmaking, were not about to go away.94 Tensions were soon also evident within the Board itself, as Bonney quickly assumed the position of Chair. Further tensions emerged as the Board began to appoint senior staff.

94 See, for example, Film Weekly April 26, 1945; Australian Exhibitor June 21, 1945; and Film Weekly June 21, 1945 (cited above) for attacks on the ANFB.
Ivens was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the ANFB chaired by Calwell (June 25, 1945). The Board adjourned their proceedings while they spoke with Ivens and Ralph Foster, the representative of the National Film Board of Canada, about possible Film Commissioners and other issues on which the new Board sought advice.

Later the same day, as mentioned above, an invited audience at Canberra’s Albert Hall heard Ivens deliver an address entitled, ‘The Meaning of Documentary Film in National Development.’ Little could he have known at that time that, in exercising his own ‘second kind of loyalty’, he would soon make a decision regarding “documentary film in national development” that would virtually exile him from his own homeland for decades.

Many of the aspects of national life are not expressed by the fiction film of the entertainment industry... from being largely an aesthetic and artistic movement it [the documentary] gradually became more and more humanitarian [...] The good documentary film was alive and had guts... I do not believe documentaries were invented by filmmakers... they were born of the natural need of the people to express themselves on all facts, actions and situations which have to do with the social, economic, cultural and political developments of their country (Ivens cited in The Canberra Times, June 26, 1945: 3).

An urgent task of the Board was to appoint its Film Commissioner, a Head of Production (Producer-in-Chief) and Senior Producers. Board consultation with Heyer, Foster, Grierson and Watt supported the appointment of Ralph Foster, the first and last Film Commissioner
on a 12-month contract in August 1945. Moran says that Foster was engaged to recruit an experienced expert for the Film Commissioner position, but found he had to take on the task himself (Moran 1991: 4-5). Foster was responsible for distribution and publicity of the National Film Board of Canada's films in Australia. He was known to Ivens and others from Canada where he had worked closely with Grierson.

ANFB = Ivens + Stout

Ivens wrote to the ANFB in July 1945, thanking the Board for the opportunity to speak at their inaugural meeting, advising that he had offered to liaise with Maslyn Williams (a producer with the DOI), offering training opportunities for Film Division staff with Ivens' unit and providing confidential notes on a number of people that the Board might consider for the position of Film Commissioner. His letter unequivocally advocated the appointment of Foster (letter, Ivens to McCauley, Acting Executive officer, ANFB, July 3, 1945, Stout Collection, NFSA). Ivens copied this letter confidentially to Stout when he wrote to him on July 13, confirming a meeting between them for the 25th.

95 Foster’s formal appointment was delayed until January 1945 while a solution was found to the Public Service Board’s objection to Foster’s salary matching his Canadian salary. Finally it was agreed the NFB Canada would pay his salary and the Australian Government would reimburse these costs.

96 The other (seven) possible candidates Ivens surveys in his letter were candidates that the DOI garnered from inquiries conducted in England on their behalf by DOI producer Maslyn Williams (Stout Collection, NFSA: 0784841). In his archive Stout has noted that this letter, sent to him on July 13, 1945, was ‘received on July 19, postmarked 3.15, July 18.’
Records of the ANFB’s early staffing decisions are illusive; the appointment of Duncan, Heyer and other foundation members of the production staff are difficult to specify. Both Duncan and Heyer were certainly working for the Film Division by November 1945 at the latest. Duncan told Williams in 1995,

Joris had been working in Canada where he had known Ralph Foster […] when Ralph was appointed [to the ANFB], Joris said, “take Catherine”, and so that’s how I got the job (Duncan 1995, audio).

One of Foster's early tasks was to recommend a Producer-in-Chief to manage the Film Division’s productions. He recommended Hawes, since "Stanley was the first person that Grierson ‘summoned’ from the UK when he was charged with setting up the Canadian operation” (NAA: CP815/1:CS 023.32). Hawes is also given positive reference in Ivens’ letter to McCauley (July 3, 1945). Hawes duly arrived from Canada and took up the position of Producer-in-Chief in May 1946.

In the period between the appointment of Foster and the arrival of Hawes, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed (Foster’s interview was on August 9, the day of the Nagasaki bombing); Japan had surrendered; the Indonesians had declared their independence and Ivens had staged his dramatic resignation from the position of Film Commissioner for the NEI (see Part One). Indonesia Calling was in the final stages of postproduction at Merv Murphy’s Supreme Sound in Sydney and the Film Division had completed a number of short films for the ANFB (including being well advanced on the series for

Perhaps as a member of the PM’s Morale Committee and well versed in wartime mail surveillance, Stout was suspicious.

As the first anniversary of the Indonesian declaration of independence approached (August 17, 1946), the premiere of *Indonesia Calling* was being planned; Duncan may well have been planning the after-party, scheduled to take place at her Kings Cross apartment.

**ANFB – Bonney Chair, Stout sacked**

Foster was keen to return to Canada, and Bonney took the opportunity—ending Foster’s 12-month contract—to consolidate the Department’s power over the ANFB by abolishing the position of Film Commissioner. In a memo dated August 5, 1946, Bonney wrote,

*I am of the opinion that there is no need to appoint a successor to Mr Foster. When he goes the best plan would, I suggest, be to give Mr Hawes full control under Board of the Board’s productions, and to leave with Mr McRae, under my direction, responsibility for the business administration of the Films Division* (Bonney, memo, August 5, 1946, Stout Collection, NFSA; see also Bertrand and Collins 1981: 109-10).

The abolishment of the Film Commissioner position was one among a number of moves concentrating authority with Bonney and the

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97 *Australia and Your Future* is a series of four short films designed for exhibition in the UK to encourage migrants (including *Men Wanted*, 10 minutes; *This is the Life*, 10 minutes; and *Christmas Under the Sun*, 18 minutes). It was commissioned by the Department of Immigration (see Williams 2004; Hughes 2006).
DOI. The formal deputation of the position of Chair to the permanent Head of the Department (rather than a government minister) was another. The removal of Stout from the Board followed in December 1946. Stout soon found himself:

_at odds with Mr Bonney’s film policy... It seemed that he wanted the Board to be primarily an instrument of the DOI and its films to be propaganda. I stood out for the production and sponsoring of films whose object was ‘to give a true and objective picture of Australian life and Australian problems, to encourage self criticism rather than complacency, to inform rather than to sell a policy’, as I wrote in ‘Making Films in Australia’, an illustrated article on the Board published in Australia Today, 1947. There were other Board members (not to mention the people who actually made the films) who shared my view, but as a private citizen I was in a stronger position to express it. However, I didn’t last long. I was unceremoniously removed from the Board in December 1946 with what were palpably specious excuses […] (Stout 1977: 13).

In these notes written 30 years after the events they describe, Stout does not mention that his ‘Making Films in Australia’, with its strong advocacy towards what we might call today the ‘creative documentary’ as opposed to the ‘factual’ or publicity film, was also published a year earlier than its appearance in the 1947 Australia Today. It also appeared in 1946 before he was removed from the Board. It is a thoroughly celebratory essay on the nascent ANFB, handsomely illustrated and quite outspoken. It makes reference among other things to the idea that more money from government would help:

_We have yet to convince our government as Grierson very early convinced the Canadian government, both that the part_
which film can play as an instrument of government policy is important enough to justify generous financial backing, and that cheap films will do more harm than good (Stout 1946: 2 [not paginated]).

This may well have been considered impertinent by both Bonney and Calwell, and was certainly anathema to Bonney’s view. But possibly equally importantly Stout had recently published an opinion piece on education and religion in which he had argued against the teaching of religion in schools (cited in Pix 19: 9, March 1, 1947: 3-4). This may also have offended Calwell, a dedicated supporter of Catholic education. As Stout says, he was ‘freer to speak as he was not a public servant’, but he was still susceptible to a restructure of the Board in which his position was made redundant while appointing new members from the Departments of Commerce and Industry, and Immigration.98

In an interview with Bertrand, Stout said,

98 Letter, Norman McRae (Secretary ANFB) to Stout (December 13, 1946):

In the absence of the Director General the Minister has asked me to inform you that the government has found it necessary to reconstitute the Australian National Film Board. It was felt that because of the vital importance of immigration to Australia’s future and the growing demand for tourist publicity material, experts in these two fields should be added to the Board. As it was considered undesirable to increase the Board’s membership, it is with great regret that I have to inform you that it has not been found possible to include you on the reconstituted Board. Both the Minister and the Director General have asked me to convey to you their appreciation of the big contribution you made to the work of the Board in its formative stages.

Handwritten note, the usual Stout red pen: "Bonney wasn't game to write to me himself" (Stout Papers, NFSA).
Anyway it wasn’t Calwell got me sacked... it was a fellow called Bonney... the real reason for my sacking was I think that I got in Bonney’s hair, he wanted to carry on in the old way with films favourably describing what we did in Australia, he didn’t want any criticism... he wouldn’t have the educational sub-committee in on something because he said, “this is simply a matter of a hard sell and you don’t know anything about that” (Stout 1979, interviewed by Bertrand, audio).

Stout says Bonney was irritated by Stout’s support for the filmmaking staff, by his insistence that Australian composers should be commissioned to write music for the Boards’ films and his advocacy in favour of the appointment of Foster, against Bonney’s wishes. Stout claims he was instrumental in negotiating the deal in which the National Film Board of Canada ‘loaned’ Foster to the ANFB. He says, “I had to sort of fight Bonney under the nose of Chifley and won and that I don’t think endeared me” (Stout 1979, interviewed by Bertrand, audio).

But Stout was not easy to shut up.99 Early in 1947 a feature article in *Pix* (Vol. 19: 9, March 1, 1947) announced on its cover (just under a pin-up illustrating ‘Hollywood fashion in Australia’), “Democracy in Peril’ – Prof. Stout”. Inside a sympathetic story on “Alan Stout, the philosopher Calwell sacked” appeared. *Pix* editorialised:

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99 Stout proved more amenable to persuasion when in the late 1950s he was persuaded by Peter Hastings and Brigadier Spry to publicly renounce his participation in an ANZ Peace Congress organised by the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD). In his files on this prominent public controversy he notes in hand, referring to the Hastings visit, “I was impressed by it at the time” (Stout Papers, items 916-937).
Bureaucracy or Democracy: the dropping of Professor Stout from the Australian Film Board is not a good sign for lovers of freedom and democracy. He was the only independent public representative on the Board, which is now composed entirely of public servants under the Ministerial control of Mr Calwell.

Among a number of illustrations in this edition of *Pix*—showing Stout at the University with Professor John Anderson, Stout with his wife Evelyn and daughter Judith, his son David aged 14, and Stout with pipe and so on—we see a photograph showing (‘Stan’) Hawes, Watt, Foster and Stout ‘snapped’ together at a party. This photograph became a handy item treasured by the Commonwealth Investigation Service, filed with its secret inquiry into subversives associated with the ANFB’s Film Division. A CIS memo of November 1948, reporting on the vetting of Film Division staff in 1946-7, attached a copy of this photo and noted “all those named are regarded with suspicion and will be known to the Directorate” (CIS memo, Deputy Director NSW to Director Canberra, November 19, 1948: NAA: A6119/79).

**ANFB – Bonney out, Hawes stays**

1947 must have been a very tough year for Hawes too. He recalled later that he would not have stayed had he known what was in store. In fact he said he was misled regarding the status of the ANFB in relation to government, but he does not say by whom (Hawes 1980). At a Board meeting early in 1948 (February 17),

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100 Security interest was again aroused when Stout joined a committee including Sydney University students concerned about fellow students being roughed up by police at demonstrations in support of Indonesian independence.
Hawes drew the meeting’s attention to the death of Sergei Eisenstein and cheekily proposed that a motion noting the passing of the famous Russian director be referred to the Department of External Affairs, with the suggestion that it be brought before the Soviet Embassy. A letter duly went to the Department of External Affairs to this effect. Stanley may have been feeling a little encouraged as he was finally free of Chairman Bonney. Bonney announced his retirement from the Board to this same meeting; he was to take up a position as director of the DOI’s New York Bureau.

In a personal letter to Grierson ("probably never sent“ in Hawes’ hand appears across the top of page one), Hawes relates a story about how this came about. He says Bonney was promoted sideways following a confrontation between them before Minister Calwell. Hawes had requested a meeting with Calwell and Bonney to deal with what Hawes found a continual undermining of his authority. After the meeting Bonney called Calwell on the phone to complain about Hawes; Calwell thought Bonney should have had his say while they were meeting together, so he decided to support Hawes (Hawes Collection, NFSA).

Kevin Murphy, the new acting permanent head of the Department, therefore became the new Chair. Duncan had left by this time. She had sailed off to work with Ivens in Eastern Europe. Hawes was just at the beginning of his long battles with ‘the trade’ on one side and the bureaucracy on the other. Political controversy was not an infrequent distraction for Producer-in-Chief Hawes; it was more a way of life. It began almost as soon as he arrived from Canada in 1946. In 1947 there was controversy around projects for the Commonwealth Office of Education, controversy around Duncan's film on Nuropena, *The Meeting Place* (1947), and controversy around the sacking of members of staff on security grounds.
(without Hawes' consultation) and later reinstated.\(^{101}\) As we have seen, the security services marked him down from the minute he took up the job.

However the problems with the ANFB were seeded in the compromises of its planning and establishment. In his memoirs Coombs notes, in his typically understated way, that the ANFB he had hoped for in the 1940s “did not achieve its real promise” (Coombs 1981: 248).

Soon after Stout’s sacking Ulrich Ellis, a key figure in the PWR project, wrote an opinion piece for *The Sydney Morning Herald*:  
*There is a fiction that the National Film Board still exists—with a change in personnel. The present Board may retain the name of its predecessor but in actual fact it is nothing but an interdepartmental committee advising the Department of Information, which need not seek nor accept its advice. The seeds of death were incorporated in the compromise constitution upon which the original board was based. The Board was established towards the middle of 1945, not by an Act of Parliament but by administrative edict... A Film Commissioner was appointed as executive officer of the Board. He was made responsible to the Board for policy, but he was given no establishment of his own with which to carry out that policy. The film production staff and equipment were maintained by the DOI... by leaving the administrative machinery with the DOI it became the toy of a particular department* (SMH, January 22, 1947).

**Government filmmaking under attack**

\(^{101}\) Geoff Powell; see Hawes Papers, box 61a. See Part One.
The ebb and flow of policy priorities, ‘taste’ and values have startling correspondences with similar debates today; the more things change... History may not repeat, but sometimes, as Mark Twain may have said, “it rhymes.”

The Production Division charged with delivering commissions of the ANFB was reconstituted a number of times. At first it was called the Film (or ‘Films’, both terms were used) Division of the Department of Information. With a change of government and the return of Menzies in 1949, the Department of Information was dissolved and responsibility for the Film Division was transferred to a News and Information Division of the Department of the Interior (traditionally a creature of the Country Party under Coalition administration). Staff of the Film Division was reduced from 80 to about 60 and inquiries began to determine whether “additional economies could be achieved by farming out to industry some of the processing and production work, thus enabling staff to be reduced still further” (NAA: CP815/1: control symbol: 023.01).

Bertrand and Collins suggest that the only reason the Film Division survived at all at this point was because Menzies’ Country Party Coalition partners thought perhaps films could help sell Australian primary produce overseas (Bertrand and Collins 1981: 118).

102 Regarding "History may not repeat itself, but it rhymes a lot", Wikipedia notes, “Twain scholars agree that it sounds like something he would say, but they have been unable to find the actual quote in his writing” (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mark_Twain, accessed May 24, 2011).
Hawes’ unit was under relentless pressure from within the bureaucracy and also from sectors of the commercial industry.\textsuperscript{103} The Public Service Board conducted a series of intensely intrusive inquiries and engaged the Division in unrelenting staffing restructures, while ‘the trade’ deployed demands about unfair competition, government monopoly of commissions that they argued might otherwise support a ‘sustainable’ industry and claims to superior competence and professionalism, untainted by what it regarded as the pretensions of documentary (Bertrand and Collins 1981: 118; Moran 1991: 40-44, 57-9, 79-81). In 1956 the Film Division became the Commonwealth Film Unit, in 1973 Film Australia, briefly as a production branch within the Australian Film Commission (1973-1976), and next, in the 1980s, a government-owned business contracted to deliver films ‘in the national interest’ to government on three-year contracts.

Moran (1991) has provided the most comprehensive analysis of the organisation’s contradictions, notions of national identity, national development, gender and politics over the course of several eras of the organisation’s work (1945-1990). Recently FitzSimons,

\textsuperscript{103} For example, the ACOFS (Australian Council of Film Societies) wrote to Prime Minister Menzies in May 1952, concerned to have "been informed that a section of the film trade has been making personal representations to you with a view to securing the disestablishment of the Film Division of the Department of the Interior... Naturally the Australian Council of Film Societies is alarmed at any attempt to curtail the quantity or reduce the quality of the films available to its members, since Australia is so critically short of good films. However it is for quite unselfish reasons that we say the closing of the Commonwealth Studios would be a calamity to the Australian film industry (NAA: A571: item 1944/3611).
Laughren and Williamson in *Australian Documentary: History, Practices and Genres* (2011) provide an astute overview of the shifting fortunes of Film Australia under various regimes after the 1980s (FitzSimons et al.: 146-158). There is still room for further analysis of documentary made in Australia through government commission as well as ‘independent’ documentary. A critical account of Film Australia’s production units refashioned under ‘neo-liberalism’, its contradictions and achievements since Moran’s study is also well overdue. FitzSimons and colleagues make a substantial and effective contribution to such a project.

From the mid-1960s the Commonwealth Film Unit was also under pressure from the inside, as younger filmmakers shared ideas inspired by broader social change and aesthetic innovations of the British ‘free cinema’ movement, US ‘direct cinema’ and so forth, and struggled against the conformism that had become institutionalised and personified for many in the figure of Hawes. This was a critique arising in part as a response to the very constraints that the organisation had adopted to survive under the conditions with which it was established (see, for example, Wallace 1976; Moran 1991: 69, 79-80). The 1964 Commonwealth Film Unit production *From the Tropics to the Snow* (D: Richard Mason and Jack Lee) canvassed these issues with insight, humour and admirable ‘self-reflexivity’. Hawes supported the film, while insisting drama sequences be directed by Jack Lee, displacing the young originator of the idea, Richard Mason. The character of Stanley Hawes was played in the

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104 Moran (1991: 80-81) argues that under pressure from the political culture of the period, Hawes as Producer-in-Chief was able to sustain his ‘classic’ (Griersonian) orthodoxy, while at the same time accommodating the ‘old school’ newsreel and factual film discourse favoured by the conservative filmmakers who remained with the organisation.
Mason has said, "Film Australia was never the same. It just changed the whole thing."  

**Film Australia: the later period**

After Hawes retired in 1970-71, a series of managers sought to negotiate the organisation's survival within the bureaucracy by a variety of accommodations to reigning management theory and desires of government. Central to these negotiations, with every rearticulation of the organisation's form and parameters, was its relationship with the current version of 'the trade'. In this post-Hawes phase (1971-2008), 'the trade', its political economy and its context were also undergoing constant change.

In the late 1960s and 70s an emerging 'independent film community' formulated its identity around 'identity politics', imperatives of the New Left and the counter-culture. This discourse was often highly individualistic, celebrating as it did the *auteur*, and hostile towards received authority and 'conformism'; it practised an editorial militancy that challenged journalistic dedication to 'objectivity' and 'balance'. The 'independent' film community was by definition *other than* government media like Film Australia and ABC TV, although both from time to time were making excellent documentaries (FitzSimons et al. 2011: 70-75).

Another strand of hostility towards Film Australia in the post-Hawes period was resentment among some sectors of producers that a government agency was capturing commissions that might otherwise have gone to private companies. This came into sharper,

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105 For Mason’s account of making *From the Tropics to the Snow* see Mason (1981 audio).
effective focus later, as neo-liberal ideas began to assume their force in policy development of governments, and 'privatisation' began to displace public sector enterprise across a range of government activities.

Film Australia surrendered its key 1945 platform, the monopoly on Federal government department commissions, in 1991, instead tendering for projects under regulated conditions on a 'level playing field' with 'independent' companies. This provided a platform for producers to argue that Film Australia retained its privilege as its infrastructure was subsidised, and claiming it maintained privileged relations with government departments, such as the Department of Defence, which was a major source of commissions. Film Australia itself also bought into the zeitgeist of entrepreneurial endeavour during this period (under Managing Director Bruce Moir and Executive Producer Chris Oliver) while overseeing the radical 'downsizing' of the organisation, setting it up for the last but one restructure that virtually emptied the production facilities at Lindfield entirely of film production staff.

From the time of Hawes’ retirement the organisation was under pressure from its traditional rivals in business on the one hand, and from a new constituency of independent filmmakers on the other. Ironically, it was only a matter of time before these constituencies became aligned, and for different reasons, aligned also with policy drivers in government, determined to close down government filmmaking in the interests of greater 'efficiency'.

Just as government determination to 'downsize' ABC television production staff and facilities in favour of 'outsourcing' coincided with demands from independent filmmakers for access to broadcasting—delivering over time a reversal in the filmmaker’s
relationship with television in which editorial and creative independence was sacrificed, and 'independent' filmmakers became ‘television outworkers’—so the cunning of history conspired to reconstitute ‘cottage industry’ documentary filmmaking into a practice dedicated to building ‘viable enterprises’ servicing an equally transformed public broadcasting sector (see also Thomas 2010: 4-16; Anning 2008).

Commonwealth policy and documentary in Australia today

A complex dynamic has generated the spectrum and mix of Australian documentary filmmaking today; a significant determinant of this pattern is the structure of Commonwealth investment. After six decades of government-sponsored film production, Film Australia was liquidated finally on June 30, 2008, along with the Australian Film Commission and the Film Finance Corporation, in a restructure that has seen Film Australia’s remaining substantial remit—the National Interest Program—only partially maintained (under a program known in 2012 as the National Documentary Program [NDP]). However the role and character of the NDP remains in an ambiguous and opaque relationship with other documentary financing, and may well yet be dissolved into other Screen Australia programs. The NDP is the descendent of PWR’s ‘D’ clause that insisted the ANFB have an allocation to make work in ‘the national interest’ and with a budget allocation separate from the needs of government departments.

Since 2008 the NDP has supported mainly specialist factual television series, such as Gallipoli from Above, Life at 7 (2 x 55
minutes), *Raising the Curtain* (3 x 55 minutes), and increasingly fewer individual documentary films.\textsuperscript{106}

What follows here is an account of the policy process that accompanied the liquidation of Film Australia, and the refashioning of Commonwealth support for documentary. Just as an account of the bureaucratic and policy process that accompanied the origins of what became Film Australia fills out a picture of the context for Ivens’ project of 1945-6, what follows here offers an account of an arguably equally transforming reconfiguration instituted during the period of *After Indonesia Calling*.

While the constellation of factors in play during this present period is quite different in many ways from those of 1945-6, nonetheless there are uncanny echoes and intriguing correspondences linking

the two that inform the understanding of recent changes we observe. Taking them together in a kind of freeze frame—apart from the chronology of change that links them over the passage of time—illustrates a broader insight. To put this another way: seeing these two sets of detailed observations, the reference points—the then and the now—momentarily as one thing compiled into a single image in the same way as this part, constructs a dialectical image that shows,

*In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition from a conformism that seeks to overpower it* (Benjamin 1979: 257).

The ‘tradition’ in this case is the tradition of a certain kind of documentary film practice; to translate this into the language of generality: the ‘tradition’ is the tradition of resistance, a tradition of the anomaly, to the rule.

Consideration is given to the role of a variety of government departments and agencies, and industry groups in refashioning Australian documentary during this period, just as it was in relation to the ANFB. It is argued that in the present period, the changing priorities of television, as well as the changing relations between filmmakers and broadcasting have converged with the interests of a certain sector of factual television production (a new form of the ‘trade’) and the sympathetic agency and departmental policy architects to bring about these changes. An account of the professional experience and attitudes to documentary among key figures in the design and implementation of the new administrative regime could be revealing of reigning priorities among elite decision makers and managers in the present day, but this is not attempted here. (No ‘character-based’ narrative of key players is offered; this task is for another day.)
Australian documentary production in recent years has been reconfigured from a practice of independent filmmakers developing and producing works in an artisanal mode, like novelists, writers, independent scholars or painters, in favour of a rationalised ‘creative economy’ where consolidated, larger companies deliver factual programming as outsourced producers to television broadcasters. For decades (since the 1960s and 70s ‘renaissance’ of government support for arts, film and television), ‘independent documentary’, separate from the ‘National Interest Programs’ commissioned by the government, have received modest support from State and Federal agencies for this purpose. Most of this independent documentary had distribution and exhibition through the filmmakers’ cooperatives, film societies, community organisations and non-theatrical educational sales.

After the late 1980s public broadcasting, with its charter requirement to reflect Australian experience and to ‘support Australian creative resources’, commissioned work proposed by filmmakers in a contested context where, even though only five to ten percent of projects proposed were commissioned, for the most part the ideas were initiated from the grassroots creative community. Projects proposed by filmmakers and commissioned by broadcasters committed a ‘presale’ of around 30 percent of a budget in exchange for a license to broadcast. Filmmakers could then seek the remaining 70 percent ‘investment’ mainly from Commonwealth agencies (with minority support from State agencies). These Commonwealth agencies (the AFC and FFC) maintained financing programs that juggled imperatives of development and production reflecting to various degrees changes evolving in technologies and creative form. Film Australia dealt in this environment as both a competitor with other producers for
commissions from broadcasters, a potential employer, and later as a potential coproduction partner for independent filmmakers.

Over recent years the system of financial support has been restructured. Three Federal agencies (the FFC, AFC, and Film Australia) have been collapsed into one (Screen Australia). Support for Australian film and television production has changed from direct to indirect financing. The new mechanism is a tax offset system designed to replace direct investment through the Commonwealth agencies. However the Tax Offset does not work for documentary, as opposed to feature films, a fact apparent and acknowledged at the point of the policy’s implementation.

Under the tax offset scheme’s settings in 2008, feature films can structure their financing to recover up to 40 percent of approved expenditure, whereas television drama and documentary (considered as television by the policy planners) can recover up to 20 percent.107 This funding mechanism is designed to encourage big budget feature films; the policy settings for documentary encourage filmmakers to lever their budgets up; it is structured in such a way as to encourage bigger budgets, with the ambition to create ‘viable businesses’.

In various ways these changes implemented in 2008–2009, attended by complementary policy ‘enterprise development’ financing from Screen Australia, tend to squeeze the already marginalised documentary sector into ‘industrial’ patterns of factual programming favoured by broadcasters. Within Screen Australia

107 Screen Australia research in 2011 states that when offset returns were made to documentary in 2008-9 they averaged 18% of project budgets.
only a single fund countenancing documentary proposals without a television presale survives. This program (the ‘Special Documentary Fund’ or ‘Signature Fund’) receives less than 5 percent of the documentary allocation, but produces a high proportion of the ‘creative documentary’ made in Australia. Works supported by this low-budget, minority mechanism receive positive critical attention and awards, as well as local and international festival invitations.

In 2009, for example, there were an unusually large number of Australian films invited to IDFA. All of the films were Australian stories and almost all of them were distinguished by their performance as creative (‘authored’) documentary. Many of these films had Australian broadcasters attached by the time they got to Amsterdam but few originated as television projects. Most were too long (features) or too short for Australian public broadcasters (two were less than a TV half hour), which usually require very specific durations. Four of the 11 invited films had their first support from the SDF. More often than not these projects had been rejected at the treatment stage by the public broadcasters.

As the ‘creative documentary’ becomes less welcome in the systems and structures that regulate and finance documentary in Australia, work of this kind is denied to Australian audiences. Without an adequate budget it becomes more difficult to achieve professionally plausible standards. Filmmakers entering the field are drawn to that portion of the genre spectrum that can be financed. Over recent years creative documentary that has won critical acclaim here and overseas has not only been passed over at the commissioning

108 See ‘Australian films at IDFA 2009’ in filmography.
109 Of the seven feature-length projects, only *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* was broadcast at feature length.
stage, but also often refused by Australian public television altogether (e.g., [the special case of 10 Conditions of Love, 2009]; The Snowman, 2009; Strange Birds in Paradise, 2009; Breaking the News 2010 and The Locust Man, 2010) (see Hughes 2011a; Hughes 2011b).

Unlike the policy-driven emergence of Australian documentary in the early post-war period, the primary focus of government attention in recent times has been the feature film industry with television drama second, and documentary barely considered. In this most recent refiguring of Commonwealth support for Australian film, documentary has been an afterthought, a minor contributor of local content for television. The particular contribution of documentary as distinct from factual television formats is not acknowledged in the newly created financing mechanisms.

The policy process over recent years, managed by inquiries, reviews and experiments in ‘designing markets’, has been in response to abiding problems. Since the late 1960s, Australian film and television has been considered as a public good that should be supported for cultural and political reasons. While mechanisms are sought to draw private investment into the industry, it is acknowledged that it cannot survive without government support. Governments have chosen not to regulate distribution and exhibition—with the exception of some subsidised non-theatrical, educational distribution in the 1980s—but instead to subsidise film production. Television drama is supported more with regulation and quotas, and also with direct subsidy. Documentary production has some ineffective quotas supporting Australian content on Pay TV but is otherwise supported through direct subsidy. The documentary
sector is a marginal enterprise; filmmakers often describe their circumstances as a ‘crisis’.\textsuperscript{110}

In what follows here I supplement FitzSimons et al. (2011: 231-244) with an abbreviated account of the process of change, as observed from the perspective of a filmmaker with an abiding interest in the capacity of the system to support the ‘creative documentary’ portion of the spectrum, in addition to subsidy to the factual creative industry as it responds to audiences and markets, real and imagined.

One response to the increasing anecdotal sense of ‘crisis’ early in 2003 saw the plenary session of the Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC) adopt resolutions (prompted by the Australian Film Commission itself) calling on the AFC to provide research data on documentary, and to assess “the effectiveness of the current range of documentary assistance programs.” This was the first attempt to quantify the conditions of documentary with comprehensive data collection. The resulting research has been periodically updated (while the comparative assessment process has not). In 2004, analysis of the data showed that while in Canada the share of documentary within Canadian audio-visual industries had shown growth over the previous five years from an eight to 13 percent share, in Australia the equivalent measurement was four percent. The report showed that the total hours of documentary produced was declining, as was the real cash value of expenditure on documentary. Budgets for independent documentary had remained the same (read declined) for at least a decade (AFC, \textsuperscript{110}See Anning (unpublished 2007) for documentation of the economic conditions and work experience of this ‘crisis’ for documentary filmmakers in Victoria during the period under discussion.)
'Documentary production in Australia: A collection of key data, February 2004).

While the AFC compiled and published this data in 2004, it commissioned out the policy assessment dimension of the project to the SPAA-ASDA Documentary Council (SADC). Where in 1944 ‘Nugget’ Coombs’ PWR convened a series of structured conferences with interested parties (‘stakeholders’) responding formally to prepared papers and resolutions, in 2004 the AFC funded ‘the trade’ to commission a commercial consultancy to develop a proposal to SADC’s brief.

SADC commissioned the Brisbane firm ‘Content Strategies’, with lead researcher Peter Higgs, to prepare the report. It was anticipated that this would be delivered to the AIDC in February 2005. It was to be a ten-year plan for the Australian documentary industry. The research project’s orientation was entirely concerned with business strategies, and proceeded on the

111 SADC was established in 1998 as a mechanism for policy advice to government, Federal and State agencies with the hope that this might allow more dedicated policy development and lobbying than either the Screen Producer’s Association of Australia (SPAA) or the Australian Screen Director’s Association (ASDA; later the Australian Directors’ Guild, ADG) could manage.

112 SADC successfully sought AFC funding for this ‘scoping study’ that would:

click a five to ten year strategic plan that would inform both the strategic direction of filmmakers and provide a clear framework for informing innovation and change in the way government support is administered to the industry (SADC, ‘Proposal for the preparation of a ten-year plan for the Australian documentary industry’, March 16, 2004: 1).
assumption that the objective of a documentary ‘industry’ must be
to build businesses. This orientation was amplified in a series of
bulky, poorly conceived and clumsily argued draft reports. The first
was issued to SADC in May 2005, a little over a year after a
promised “two months” delivery projection, and about three months
after the proposed presentation to the AIDC.\footnote{The consultant originally estimated this “would cost between $25,000
and $30,000 and require two months to prepare” (SADC, ‘Proposal for the
preparation of a ten-year plan for the Australian Documentary Industry’,
March 16, 2004: 4). The actual costs of the Higgs Report are unclear. The
AFC acknowledges its initial provision of $30,000 for the ‘Documentary
industry strategic plan’ as an allocation from its Research and Information
branch in 2003-4 (AFC Annual Report 2004), but does not specify further
allocations. It does, however, acknowledge in the Annual Report 2004-5
an expenditure from Policy, Research and Information of $111,801 for
unspecified “research projects”.

The report was completed shortly before AIDC 2006 where it was
informally ‘debated’. Marred by internal contradictions,
misconceptions and naive and improbable proposals, the report
drew comment mostly on its bulk, which impressed some
commentators. Producer John Lewis, for example, reported for
online industry newsletter Screenhub (February 17, 2006):

\begin{quote}
Peter Higgs is a brave man. Brave to take on SPAA-ASDA’S
Documentary Council’s brief to come up with a blueprint for the
future of the documentary industry. Brave to produce a report
running to 332 pages (“Humungous,” according to Susan
MacKinnon)... Disclaimer: Screenhub can’t handle the fine detail
in a short report—you can read the Higgs Report, which is well
formatted and very readable, even at 332 pages, on
\url{www.spaa.org.au}.
\end{quote}
Director/producer Tom Zubrycki who read the report remarked,


During this period two other major policy debates with potentially far-reaching implications for audio-visual industries were in play. One was the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement. The other was a radical review proposed by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) announced in May 2006.

The DCITA Issues Paper of July 2006 set the agenda: review the balance of direct and indirect subsidy with an emphasis on private investment and tax mechanisms, assess the agencies (the AFC, FFC and Film Australia), and consider whether their functions should be “realigned”. This Issues Paper anticipated the review would be completed in October 2006 (DCITA 2006, ‘Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support: Issues Paper’, July 2006).

The review’s primary concern was with feature films. While noting that Australian feature films had a greater market share in Australia than Canadian films had in Canada, “since the 1990s, there has been a contraction... of Australian (and other independent) feature films to overseas markets” (DCITA 2006: 5). With uncanny echoes of the Tariff Board Report from some 30 years before, _sans_ the
Tariff Board’s engagement with structural issues of distribution and exhibition, DCITA said:

_The Australian film production industry is made up mainly of a large number of small firms with low profitability. In contrast, the film distribution and exhibition sectors are more profitable and the major companies involved in these sectors have links to US companies [...]_ What does the Australian Film Industry need to do to increase its chances of success and sustainability? [...] _It is frequently suggested that the industry needs to make a transition from a cottage industry to one which is based on successful business enterprise, possibly through a restructuring_ (DCITA 2006: 9).

DCITA called for submissions on these questions, having set out in its Issues Paper an intention clearly readable between the lines that it was planning more indirect subsidy and less direct subsidy, and a “re-alignment” of agencies.

The broader political context of this Review may be pertinent. In 2006 the conservative Howard government was in its tenth year and its fourth term. The Howard government was under pressure for its policies around asylum seekers and refugees, climate change and industrial relations. A change of government in the Federal election due in 2007 was considered likely. Over the course of ten years—‘the Howard Years’—cultural change arguably had an impact across Australian institutions and society. The universities, the ABC and SBS were subject to these influences at different levels. One element of the Howard era was a politics of neo-liberalism that positioned economic discourse at the very centre of policy determination. This is not to suggest ‘neo-liberalism’ should be
aligned with the Howard era alone.\textsuperscript{114} Policy planning to support Australian film and television has for decades been regulated within discourses informed by ‘neo-liberalism’, with the Gonski Report under the Hawke-Keating Labour government one striking instance. While following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the Rudd-Gillard governments have delivered some critical rhetorical reflection on this;\textsuperscript{115} it has not changed the orientation of policy ideas or practice. As Waleed Aly noted, it is not so much “the degree to which neo-liberal economics has been implemented; it is the fact that its underlying vision of society has been absorbed” (Ali 2010: 37).\textsuperscript{116} This observation is crucial.

Stakeholders responded to DCITA’s invitation to comment on the review. A variety of positions were argued regarding documentary. Public broadcaster SBS argued that the AFC, FFC and Film Australia were obstacles to industry development, characterised by “fragmentation, prevarication and inefficiency”. While (ironically

\textsuperscript{114} Damien Cahill’s genealogy of Australian neo-liberalism locates its origins with the Whitlam government cutting tariffs and Haydon’s ‘monetarist budget’: “But the process of neo-liberalism as state ideology began in earnest in 1983 [...] and has been continued, even more aggressively, under John Howard’s Coalition government since 1996” (Cahill 2004: 90).

\textsuperscript{115} E.g., Kevin Rudd, 2009.

\textsuperscript{116} In his book, Market Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest, Colin Leys elaborates this idea as it unfolded in public broadcasting in the UK (Leys 2001: 101-162). A parallel process can be observed here, particularly obvious in the case of SBS. The sad, untold story of the liquidation of SBS Independent (2004-8) and the decline of SBS could illustrate this idea chapter and verse, but there is no space to examine this here.
enough) celebrating the effectiveness of SBS Independent ("SBSi"), SBS wanted more control: “Broadcasters should determine their own development priorities as they are closest to the market/audience.” Their submission argued for the ‘consolidation’ of the functions of three agencies to one, supporting a shift from direct financing to the extension of the offset to local production: “Government funds redirected [my emphasis] to SBSi will be funding rights acquisitions for Australian audiences [...]” (SBS, 2006 submission to the DCITA Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support, August 2006: 10-12).

In other words, SBS envisaged a structure in which an offset scheme would provide production investment to SBS-commissioned projects, and SBS would contribute higher presales ("up to 65 percent") as they would have the budget allocations from government that in the existing system were under the control of the AFC, FFC and Film Australia. Take the documentary direct financing controlled by these agencies and give it to the broadcasters; this was an idea advocated by a number of parties. The cultural implications of this structure were not examined.

Film Australia took the opposite view: “direct subsidy will be needed for documentaries that are not supportable in the marketplace, and Film Australia is ideally placed to manage the production of programs of national significance” (Film Australia 2006: 27). However, they favoured a ‘ratings driven’ or ‘populist’, market-oriented approach, rather than following through with the cultural imperative that frames their opening position. It would have been difficult for Film Australia to follow through with their first principle here as the practice of the agency for decades has been for the most part driven by ‘the marketplace’ (television).
The greatest potential for growth in the factual sector is not in localised Australian documentary production but in production for the international market (often requiring large budgets and high production values) and factual entertainment or ‘light’ documentary that consistently attract audiences of over 1.5 million for commercial platforms (Film Australia 2006: 13, 26).

The question of the ‘consolidation’ of existing agencies (which would include Film Australia) is not directly addressed. Instead, Film Australia provides a narrative of its relations with government that emphasises Film Australia’s adaptive restructuring over several decades to meet changing policy priorities. They supported a tax rebate on the grounds that this would facilitate ‘viable businesses’; they recommended a threshold of $240,000\(^{117}\) and a rebate of 35 to 40 percent (Film Australia 2006: 14).

The FFC took another tack. Referencing agency consolidation forming the UK Film Council in 2000, the structure of the Danish Film Institute, and recommendations drawn from a Copenhagen ‘think tank’ of 2006, the FFC took the view that a “cohesive delivery of film support” would be better achieved in Australia with a “comprehensive” restructure (FFC 2006: 2, 39-40). Advocating a

\(^{117}\) “Threshold” means the minimum amount of qualified expenditure that can qualify access to the offset. That is to say, a threshold of $240,000 would mean producers spending $240,000 or more on a project on costs approved as Australian and in categories allowable under the scheme would be eligible to claim a rebate in this Film Australia model at somewhere yet to be decided between 35% to 40% of that amount. This threshold relates to per hour of screen time. For example, a feature documentary of 90 minutes would need to show an expenditure in qualified categories of one and a half times this amount—$360,000—to have access to the offset.
tax offset scheme, the FFC recommended for documentary a threshold of $250,000 and a rebate of 30 percent (FFC 2006: 32).¹¹⁸

The FFC draws attention, with approval, to a subtle and significant shift in the language regarding government support for the industry. Noting DCITA’s Issues Paper, which says, this is “for both cultural and economic reasons”, the FFC goes on:

This reference to economic reasons indicates a shift in view from 1997, when David Gonski described the government’s reasons for supporting film as solely cultural: ‘The Commonwealth provides this support in order to achieve its cultural objectives and to enrich the cultural life of all Australians’ (FFC 2006).

A new peak organisation of producers’, directors’ and writers’ guilds, along with the union (actors and technicians) and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, called the Australian Screen Council (ASC), also submitted proposals to the DCITA review.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ The FFC charts anticipating government expenditure imagines a gradual increase in “TV Docs eligible for offset” from $15 million in year one and up to $23 million in year 5, while costs for “TV docs not eligible for offset” would be held static at $12 million dollars a year for these five years (FFC 2006).

¹¹⁹ The ASC suffered a similar fate to SADC (SPAA-ASDA Documentary Council), i.e. they collapsed during this period, and for very similar reasons. The urgent necessity of ‘one voice’ from the screen production industry to government in policy advocacy was well known, and in most respects the interests of these various sectors are aligned. However, the ASC collapsed under pressure of competing claims for privilege in access to the ear of the agencies and government, and differing values and approaches.
The ASC’s submission was ambivalent on every point, reflecting the internal differences the Council sought to reconcile. For instance, on the question of restructuring support to favour larger over smaller production houses:

A one-size-fits-all approach to an appropriate industry business model is more likely to stifle talent, preclude new entrants and limit the number of voices making programs... Nonetheless, the ASC recognises that too many businesses struggle and that a truly healthy industry would have more large players than is the case at present (ASC 2006: 3).

This submission argued for a 40-percent rebate across feature film, television drama and documentary, to the exclusion of direct financing (ASC 2006: 6).

The Independent Producer’s Initiative (IPI), a small group of highly productive, creative producers, collaborated with the Australian Screen Director’s Association (ASDA, later ADG). These producers formed IPI because they felt SPAA (the Screen Producer’s Association of Australia) did not represent their values and approach as producers. This difference is expressed succinctly in the ASDA/IPI submission:

ASDA submits that cultural objectives should remain the primary rationale for government involvement... importantly, the government has recognised that it also needs to support and sustain a healthy, vibrant and growing industry in order to best deliver these outcomes. What is of interest is the particular priority that governments have consistently given to the concept of an independent sector—on the basis that the independent sector is generally more efficient than large agencies and broadcasters, is creatively driven, and has a
flexibility that allows it to adapt and respond to rapid change (ASDA/IPI 2006: 25).

This submission expressed reservations regarding “re-alignment” of agencies; they wanted diversity of ‘doors’, but also “a more unified structure”. They advocated ambitious proposals; tax concessions should apply to research and development of projects and to distribution; mechanisms should be developed to allow individuals and foundations to make tax-deductible grants to documentaries and filmmakers. They were interested in encouraging lower budget projects, not larger ones, and suggested the government consider:

- a sliding scale within the offset mechanism that would provide an incentive (for) producers to keep budgets low, while not restraining their capacity to use the offset for larger productions (ASDA/IPI 2006: 6).

The submission took issue with a number of assumptions underlying DCITA’s agenda, questioning DCITA’s criteria of “success”, for

120 ‘Many doors’ was seen as one way of achieving diversity. Diversity—in the audio-visual products available to Australian audiences, and in the enterprises that create them—remains a key objective. As Gonski noted, the fewer agencies there are, the more likely they will be captured by a certain aesthetic or world-view that could freeze out particular filmmakers and productions. In an industry where judgment is so based on opinion and taste, there is value in having many possible avenues for projects to find support and funding. Any unification of the agency structure must contain safeguards to ensure that a range and diversity of product is being generated (ASDA/IPI 2006: 40).

121 Their scaled rebate concept suggested a 50 percent rebate for work under $1 million through to 30 percent for films between $7 million and $10 million.
example, and its exclusive focus on the “commercial”:\textsuperscript{122} the submission argued its proposals with a continual attention to cultural imperatives. It was the only submission that reiterated the real barrier to growth in documentary:

\textit{The capacity of the sector to grow is being seriously constrained simply due to the fact that the government’s direct investment envelope has not increased for some time} (ASDA/IPI 2006: 19) “[and] the fact that the funding agencies have not received any increases specifically for documentary for over ten years” (ASDA/IPI 2006: 23).\textsuperscript{123}

ASDA/IPI also drew attention to an obvious absence in DCITA’s agenda not noted elsewhere in submissions. If it were to address industry growth properly, “the government would be required to consider broadcasting policy and content regulations alongside subsidy and support mechanisms” (ASDA/IPI 2006: 25). This is the only submission that aligned documentary with the feature film, rather than with television:

\textit{Some genres and formats, particularly those in television, are more audience driven in their conceptions, while some, such as feature films and documentaries, may require the creators to lead the audience} (ASDA/IPI 2006: 22).

\textsuperscript{122} “It is artificial and unproductive to set definitions of a ‘commercial’ versus a ‘cultural’ film. Productions supported originally for cultural or national significance may also have strong commercial appeal, and there is no hard dividing line” (ASDA/IPI 2006: 40).

\textsuperscript{123} In the previous year (2004-05) Commonwealth funding to documentary in total was just under $23 million (Film Australia 2006: 30). There was no real increase in Commonwealth funding to documentary (the AFC, FFC, Film Australia) between 1996 and 2005 (Film Australia 2006: 31).
Thus ASDA and IPI took up a position resistant to what had become the ‘dominant (business) paradigm’ insofar as they return an emphasis to the creative dimension of this particular ‘creative industry’, and allow their argument to reflect concerns of a constituency (directors and ‘creative producers’) whose orientation is to the work itself, rather than an institutional self-interest (like the ABC, SBS, the AFC, FFC and Film Australia), or primarily an interest in management and business (DCITA, SPAA).

*Independence also requires a level of self-determination within the industry. Screen practitioners and production companies should, for example, not be seen as merely ‘suppliers’ to wholesalers and retailers. In order for the independent industry to succeed it must be engaged in the generation and development of ideas, and have a reasonable level of control over how these ideas are realised and reach the screen and retain an equity stake in their outcome (ASDA/IPI 2006: 25).*

They recommended strongly in favour of a tax offset to producers, set, on the basis of AFC modelling, at 40 percent across feature films, television drama and documentary, with a documentary threshold of $300,000 (ASDA/IPA 2006: 34).

In the first instance the film industry was given a little less than four weeks to respond to DCITA’s Issues Paper.\(^{124}\) The policy development process was conducted clumsily throughout and in haste. DCITA communicated with the government agencies but not formally with industry representatives, other than to receive their submissions.

\(^{124}\) It was released on July 12, 2006 and required responses by August 11, 2006.
Review outcomes announced: May 2007

To all appearances the AFC, FFC and Film Australia had no knowledge of the outcome of the Review until the government announced its intentions in the context of the budget in early May 2007. The May budget announced the anticipated amalgamation of the AFC, FFC and Film Australia. A Working Party was to be established to engineer the accomplishment of this merger into a new ‘super agency’, the Australian Screen Authority. The fate of the functions, programs, staffing and budgets of the three agencies was uncertain, and remained so for more than 12 months. A new Authority was to be established on July 1, 2008. At the end of May, Daryl Karp (CEO of Film Australia since July 2004) was still of the view that Film Australia would continue to do what it had done before, but in the context of amalgamation between the AFC, the FFC and Film Australia (Senate Estimates, May 30, 2007).

In the May budget the government also announced its intention to establish a Producers Tax Offset, with a 40 percent rebate to producers of feature films and 20 percent to television drama and documentary ($300,000 qualifying threshold). This was to begin on July 1, 2007; however many details had not been determined. For example, no-one had planned a mechanism to deliver cash flow to producers who, under this scheme, would need to find 40 percent of their budget on the basis of a provisional speculation that they may be able to recoup it from the Australian Taxation Office in the financial year after the project was audited, which could be two or three years after it was needed. Banks could not be expected to extend loans on this basis; the ‘modelling’ simply had not considered this.
It is possible the Producers Offset scheme was designed to exclude documentary on the assumption that this sector would continue to draw on direct subsidy, administered by the new agency, with television presales determining what was made and how. If the FFC’s submission were any guide in this scenario (see above), documentary funding would remain static for five years after which it would decline. Alternatively, the policy experts may have misunderstood the implications of their settings. Submissions from industry peak bodies, and the AFC’s modelling, had identified that either 30 per cent or above would be needed to support documentary. Documentary production budgets were a known quantity from published AFC data, few reaching the minimum QAPE required in DCITA’s settings.\(^{125}\) However the AFC was excluded from the modelling process at some point during 2006, and their advice replaced with that of the AFTRS Screen Business.

FFC staff member Ross Mathews said at a public meeting in Melbourne that he believed the policy insiders had “forgotten about documentary”. When it occurred to them they were ‘designing markets’ for documentary, they assumed it should have the same settings applied as television drama. Other informal speculation has it that the television settings were a preference from Treasury, who sought by these means to contain the possible costs of the Offset. But all this remains speculation as the reasoning driving the policy settings, if there was any, has not been disclosed.

\(^{125}\) In May 2012 the government’s Convergence Review, assessing policy settings from the point of view of enhancing Australian content, advocated increasing the Offset for “premium television content” from 20 percent to 40 percent, matching the feature film Offset (Convergence Review, Final Report 2012: 59).
Screenhub interviewed FFC CEO Brian Rosen shortly after the scheme was announced. He was delighted with the Ministers’ decisions. He thought it was “fantastic”, especially as the Tax Offset was not capped; the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) would continue rebating producers just as long as they could raise the finance and release the films.

I am very sure that the mini studios in LA, the specialty divisions, will be actively looking at getting involved with Australian filmmakers, because it is a very attractive rebate (Rosen, in Screenhub, May 8, 2007).

He made no comment on the documentary rebate.

Another surprising decision of the Ministers\footnote{There was by this time a new Minster and a new Ministry. Senator Kemp had been the Minister for Arts and Sport with oversight of DCITA since 2001, and had initial responsibility for management of the review. Senator George Brandis became the Minister for Arts and Sport on January 30, 2007 and Senator Helen Coonan was Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts from July 2004. Brandis and Coonan jointly launched ‘Backing the Australian Film Industry’ in May 2007.} announced with the May budget papers was an instruction to shift the AFC’s research functions to the Australian Film, Radio and Television School (AFTRS) Centre for Screen Business. This decision was reversed soon afterwards, but the policy function of AFC research was lost in the process. As a result, in the new structure, policy development is an exclusive domain of the DCITA. Screen Australia discretely limits its research to data and public relations, rather than policy advice and advocacy. This, and the gaping uncertainties over a variety of functions and programs of Film Australia and those of the AFC, plus the unanswered (and indeed unasked) questions about the actual
functioning of the Producers Offset, were to occupy the attention of filmmakers for yet another 12 months.

In all of these matters no effective forum was convened by the government or their agencies to discuss the implications for documentary. Pat Laughren noted the government’s Statement of Intent of 2008 promised a second round of industry consultation and remarked,

*This was welcome news for a documentary community concerned about its exclusion from negotiations around the merging of the FFC, the AFC and Film Australia* (Laughren 2008: 116).

While the FFC and Film Australia sought limited engagement with selected individual documentary filmmakers, neither found an effective method. Both Karp (Film Australia) and Rosen (FFC) sought meetings with selected individuals and groups under varying conditions of confidentiality. A slightly chaotic jostling among the agencies and their staff, very much aware that with the merger savings were to be made in redundancies, despite assurances from government to the contrary, fuelled speculation and rumour about DCITA’s process.

In early June 2007, about 20 documentary filmmakers met with FFC staff in Sydney to discuss how the Offset scheme might work, as it was to be functioning from July 1. The filmmakers present pointed out that the Offset scheme could not work for most documentary projects. Rosen, considered by many to have been one of the main authors of the scheme, said:

*They (the government) don’t want to discriminate against documentaries, they are looking for enterprise growth and more volume. One-off, one-hour documentaries are not*
necessarily going to build businesses. They have picked longer series—this may have come from the ABC—as being of more value to them. They obviously picked this up from someone (minutes, filmmakers meeting with the FFC, June 6, 2007, Sydney: 2).

In other comments, as the government finalised enabling legislation for the agency merger, Rosen said that he did not know if further consultation was planned by DCITA. In this, and in his “picked this up from someone”, the pervading character of this 2006-2008 review process is crystallised in microcosm; it is characterised by a practiced reluctance of those responsible for policy development to disclose and debate their reasoning.

**Debate among filmmakers**

Following public meetings convened by industry guilds and filmmaker groups,¹²⁷ a committee was formed to seek views from the ‘documentary community’ through a questionnaire. But this committee itself was compromised by various differences among its membership, and differing attitudes to political strategy and different ambitions for documentary practice.

One meeting in Sydney heard that Film Australia’s CEO Daryl Karp considered herself the representative of documentary filmmakers in her role as a participant in the government’s Working Party on the amalgamation of the agencies; but filmmakers did not agree. Graeme Isaac reported,

*The universal response of the meeting (about 20-30 *

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filmmakers from different sectors of the industry) was that practitioners have had no opportunity for formal representation themselves through the industry guilds and associations, and should be directly represented in these discussions (Isaac ‘Film Australia/Ozdoxs meeting in Sydney on Tuesday 14’, ‘Australian documentary filmmakers policy forum’, August 16, 2007).

This meeting, and others like it, convened by filmmakers, discussed options for the National Interest Program, the Film Australia library and Film Australia’s other programs. Some individuals decided to take unilateral action following another public gathering at Film Australia’s Lindfield studios. Film Australia's presumption in positioning itself at this meeting so alienated many of those present that a small group of individuals decided urgent action was necessary and composed a provocative public letter expressing a virtual 'vote of no confidence' in Film Australia.

This was driven in part by old prejudice, but the greater fear was that when the new ‘monolithic’ organisation was established, a branch that would be a virtual Film Australia writ large may end up managing all documentary financing. This discussion persuaded many of those present that Film Australia did not appreciate the fact that the documentary community was not in favour of such an outcome. The letter certainly established that there was, to say the least, divided opinions regarding the future of Film Australia. Filmmakers were asked to sign the statement and 40 people did so; many did not. Many of those who signed were filmmakers who had made major projects with Film Australia in recent times, so it could not easily be dismissed entirely as the work of ‘disappointed applicants’, a rebuttal that frequently greets community attempts to express critical views of financing criteria or administration (see also FitzSimons et al. 2011: 239-240).
The letter (dated August 21: see ‘Australian documentary filmmakers policy forum’, August 2007) went out to a mailing list including the Minister, the heads of the various agencies and the documentary community in general. The Minister replied (September 11) to the effect that no one need worry as all these concerns were being looked after by the powers that be (‘Australian documentary filmmakers policy forum’, October 4). Film Australia replied via an article in Encore (August 23, 2007) conceding that the views expressed in the letter did not come as a surprise, claiming that consultation with the documentary community was taking place and promising consultation by those managing the amalgamations with the documentary community, quoting Karp:

It is really important that there is a mechanism to communicate and engage with all stakeholders.

Franco di Chiera, a filmmaker with executive experience with SBS and Film Australia, lodged a post saying that he had been cited as a signatory to this ‘no-confidence’ letter against his wishes (‘Australian documentary filmmakers policy forum’, September 12, 2007). He took the opportunity to set out his views on the positions that the letter had adopted. In seeking to defend Film Australia, di Chiera referred to the ‘greed is good’ decade’s Gonski Inquiry [1996-7], which was probably the most sustained assault on Film Australia’s existence in recent decades. Di Chiera said Gonski wanted to sell everything, including the library (with a rumoured willing buyer in the person of Steve Vizard). Di Chiera’s

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128 “Mr Gonski recommended that Film Australia lose its current Executive Producer role to become purely a commissioning body [and] sell production facilities [...]”, AFR February 7, 1997: 2; see also Gonski 1997.
Summarising debate among filmmakers around the DCITA review, Pat Laughren (2009: 122-3) noted unanimity regarding the inadequate 20 percent offset and the excessively high budget threshold, and noted also differences of opinion regarding the constraints of decision-making structures and the productivity of broadcasters’ preferences. He says these differences of opinion are grounded in the history of the relationship between documentary and television, and in differing views about television’s impact on the future of documentary.

He quotes a paper by Steve Hewlett at the AIDC in 2008 to make the points so frequently made by filmmakers in meetings and online discussions, that in pursuing ‘the tyranny of ratings discourse’ (ironically Jane Roscoe’s formulation: see Roscoe 2004: 288), public broadcasters are in danger of putting their public purpose remits second to their competition with commercial broadcasting (Laughren 2009: 122-3). Hewlett comments:

Television... is less concerned about creativity and public purposes and more concerned with audience metrics and commercial survival (Hewlett 2008, cited in Laughren 2008: 124).

The dominant determining factor really is how public television has changed, and how agile filmmakers have been in creating new work against this background. Preference among broadcasters for factual television series over ‘one-off’ documentary has led to an increasing amount of documentary allocations financing factual television programs:
There can be no easy reliance on those programming commercial or public broadcast television to ensure the future of the documentary. On the contrary, given the substantial underwriting of documentary production by the State, it is imperative for policy to be formulated so that no single institution, such as broadcast television, wields a de facto veto over the form or content of the range of documentary projects, budgets, and approaches (Laughren 2008: 126).

I have argued that a ‘de facto veto’, while not total, is an effect of policy and structure. This may be portrayed as a shadow of neoliberalism; audiences are seen as consumers, rather than, say, citizens. Public broadcasters need ratings more likely delivered by series. A remit to represent ‘cultural diversity’ and to support ‘Australian creative resources’ does not extend to a commitment to the full spectrum of Australian documentary. Steve Thomas argues in his thesis examining issues of rights, responsibilities and ethics in documentary today that the values and practices now commonplace in factual production militate against ethical practice with regard to relations between filmmakers and their subjects (Thomas 2010: 77).

Much of the criticism directed against Film Australia during the DCITA review derived from the small business sector in documentary production represented by SPAA. An abiding ‘free enterprise’ hostility towards the government production house has continuity with that of the ‘trade’ and the local production sector of the mid-20th century, while at the same time being a product of

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129 During the last three months of 2011 (September 25 - November 6) ABC TV ran a series of seven feature documentaries (Sunday Best, 8.30 PM, ABC 2), not one of which was Australian.
contemporary conditions. Another strand of critique found Film Australia too timid, a creature of government long unwilling to meet its remit to ‘reflect Australia to itself’ in a fearless and robust way (see Ulrich Ellis 1947; Cecil Holmes 1954; Colin Bennett 1958; Sylvia Lawson 1966; *Filmnews* 1988 and Stephen Wallace 1991 among others).

Indeed, Hawes himself tended to this view, despite the fact that he was often accused of being part of the problem. He said that he would not have taken up the job in the first place had he known that the ANFB was controlled within a government department.\(^{130}\) These concerns precisely echo the anxieties of Stout, “the man sacked by Calwell”. However, it is also true that Film Australia has produced some wonderful and politically challenging films, along with its tame ones, all along.\(^ {131}\)

Distinctions between the body of work commissioned and curated under the sponsorship of government for ‘national interest’ purposes over the last ten to 15 years, in contrast with documentary films commissioned by television from independent filmmakers over the same period, can be teased out: there is certainly an element of ‘house style’ in the Film Australia oeuvre, and a greater tendency to a singular, authored ‘voice’ in the independent work. There is generally less reluctance to adopt an explicit editorial point of view in the independent work, and a

\(^{130}\) Hawes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, AFTRS, 1980 <www.abc.net.au/aplacetothink/#watch/graphic_history/origins> [audio at last frame; Pike/Long/Hawes 1980].

\(^{131}\) Something of this diversity is available, with an emphasis on the stronger, more engaged end of the spectrum, at <www.abc.net.au/aplacetothink/#watch> with annotated selections from 60 years of Film Australia’s films.
greater tendency to ‘be there’ when politically decisive events are taking place. Actuality reportage is uncommon in the Film Australia catalogue and much more likely to be found in independent film (with some notable exceptions: *On Sacred Ground*, 1980 comes to mind). An ideological critique built purely around the concrete contents of these differing modes of cultural production in documentary would be more difficult to discern. After all, both Film Australia and the ‘independent sector’ have been answerable to the shifting preferences of (almost exclusively) public broadcasting for a couple of decades.

The Film Australia collection—in contrast with the ‘independent’ catalogue—has been archived and catalogued in one place; it is shot listed, digitised and accessible for the moment,\(^{132}\) whereas the body of work financed through the Accord and Non-Accord programs of the FFC or AFC-financed films are hardly documented. These have been produced among competing independent practitioners and are not aggregated as a collection, unlike the Film Australia archive.

**Screen Australia intervenes**

A subtle shift engineered in the ‘consolidation’ of the agencies, in addition to the recuperation of policy development back to DCITA, concerns the institutional status of Screen Australia and its relationship with public service procedures and values. Film Australia and the FFC were ‘government businesses’ and the AFC was a statutory body. These identities provided the agencies with a degree of flexibility and distinction from the DCITA and the Minister.

\(^{132}\) Following the 2008 restructure, the Film Australia library and archives have devolved to the care of the NFSA.
The new organisation is more subject to the disciplines of the public service of which it is a part. Its establishment, administration and staffing reflects this. The agency’s role in co-financing factual development production chosen by television becomes increasingly routine.

At the same time this centralisation has provided Screen Australia with a monopoly power that it has used to lever a greater financial contribution from broadcasters.

In 2010 the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet’s Office for the Arts announced a Review of the Independent Screen Production Sector to address various problems that had become apparent, and Screen Australia announced its own review (June 2010): a ‘review of Screen Australia’s role and objectives in television funding’. This sought to clarify the conditions of the new agency’s subsidy of broadcasting in light of the fact that the Offset did not work for documentary and yet the agency budget was programmed to decrease on the grounds that the Offset would over time replace the need for direct funding. The review produced a “blueprint” document in November 2010 (Funding Australian content on ‘small screens’).

In its preamble Screen Australia made the point that the introduction of the Offset scheme carried with it an assumption that direct financing would decrease:

*In establishing the Producers Offset, the Australian Government anticipated that productions with a more commercial focus would be financed by this mechanism, leaving Screen Australia’s funds (consequently reduced by government) to be directed to other quality, culturally significant and innovative programming. As Screen Australia’s*
appropriation from government and ability to provide funds contracts, it is timely to review the role of the agency in relation to television funding in terms of allocation and investment. Perhaps more importantly, it is also necessary to review Screen Australia’s role in terms of supporting the demand for Australian content in a fast-evolving media landscape.

In this document Screen Australia announced a role for itself, among other things, in “establishing minimum terms of trade between broadcasters or channels and producers” (Funding Australian content on ‘small screens’, Screen Australia, 2010). In practice this meant that Screen Australia would begin to deny financing to projects in drama and documentary that did not have attached what Screen Australia considered adequate television presale offers. In a sense, Screen Australia began to define a new function for the Commonwealth agency in re-regulating broadcasters’ financial contributions to television production. In a sense, Screen Australia began to define a new function for the Commonwealth agency in re-regulating broadcasters’ financial contributions to television production.133

Previously the agency’s insistence on a television presale was based on an argument about access to large audiences for works made with public funds, now it was about shifting the scarcity of funds to broadcasters.

At the same time Screen Australia vacated the field of ‘curatorial oversight’ of what was once Film Australia,134 making more explicit

133 The ‘deregulation’ of presales began around 2002 when Glenys Rowe, then Managing Director of SBS Independent, declared at the AIDC that SBS would in future determine “what a program was worth to us.” Needless to say, presale levels fell, with both public broadcasters increasingly seeking more rights and editorial intervention with less financial commitment.

134 Screen Australia in 2010 described this as a shift “from a
the broadcasters’ (i.e. the ‘market’s’) decision-making power over documentary that it had exercised in actuality for some years (with ‘special’ exceptions). These Guidelines were first implemented in July 2011.

In the same document Screen Australia reaffirmed the agency’s role in “helping to ensure the Australian production sector is robust and sustainable”; this was exercised by providing ‘enterprise funding’ to a small number of larger-scale production companies and encouraging independent filmmakers to provide their creative services to television through these favoured companies. The larger companies were expected by these means to prosper, with commissions for higher budget factual programming, preferably in series form and easily digestible formats, and subsidised by Screen Australia with budgets derived from what was previously the ‘National Interest Program’ and ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ documentary funding. You could say the dominant sentiment in today’s factual film industry is in accord with Andy Warhol: “good business is the best art” (cited in Foster 2008: 23).

To summarise: Over the last decade, let us say, we have witnessed another transformation of Australian documentary. An incomplete refiguring for sure, there is some financing at Commonwealth level still available for the agile documentary filmmaker. But the current tendency is now well established. It is driven by the imperatives of the television schedule, with a preference for series, across a spectrum from specialist factual through to factual entertainment commissioning model, in which the agency acted as executive producer and rights controller, to the current equity investor model” (Funding Australian content on ‘small screens’, Screen Australia, 2010).
formats. This has come into being through a convergence of shifting priorities of public broadcasters in concert with the economic interests of a determined faction of the production industry and a policy formation process favouring notions of enterprise and economic viability over cultural criteria.

Just as the political advocacy documentary *Indonesia Calling* (1946) was of necessity made ‘underground’ in the political and policy context of the early post-war and emerging Cold War, *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (2009) was made on a diminishing fringe in Australia of support for the ‘creative documentary’ and the ‘essay film’. The constellation of factors in each case are constituted quite differently, yet superimposed there are ‘echoes’ of continuity apparent (dare I say it—a hegemonic ideology) seeking homogeneity, conformism and is resistant to a ‘second kind of loyalty’.
AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

Part Three: “It’s good it turned out well”

And so the opinion I give is to declare the measure of my sight, not the measure of things.

Michel Montaigne, *Essays*

The essay’s innermost formal law is heresy. Through violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which it is orthodoxy’s secret and objective aim to keep invisible.

Theodor Adorno, *The Essay as Form*

Figure 1 ‘The Golden Calf’, Damien Hurst
Introduction

Part Three of my exegesis offers a third approach to Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling*. This part proceeds more closely in parallel with the moving image Project. In contrast with the empirical tendency of Parts One and Two, Part Three proceeds in a more refracted, speculative mode.

This speculative exercise is introduced through a brief encounter with recent documentary scholarship on the essay film. An engagement with the ‘essay film’ and more particularly an ‘essayist moment’ in Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* provides a pathway into a reading of Ivens’ film that evokes Adorno’s “violations of the orthodoxy” (epigram above), something I have referred to as a kind of ‘delinquency’ in Ivens’ film. Following the argument of Part Two and also the specific concerns of Gibson and Leahy (2003), it is noted that attributes that render the essay film appealing, and that are intrinsic to the creative documentary are precisely the attributes that Australian television increasingly rejects. The project *After Indonesia Calling* (2012) and *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (2009)—like much of my earlier work in documentary—also partake in various ways of this ‘essayist’ tradition in documentary.

Two European television news stories about Ivens deployed in early and later sequences of the 2009 film and in the Project—his moment of 'redemption' on the one hand and his burial on the other—have an ironic resonance with the closing section of Part Two, where it is suggested that the ‘fall’ of a certain kind of documentary practice is occasioned by the hegemony of television. It also refers to the ‘newsreel’ in Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* later in
this part. Thirdly, it echoes earlier discussion concerning the ‘newsreel faction’ as a constraining influence within the office politics of the ANFB (Moran 1991: 34; Williams 2008: 102-103). In *Indonesia Calling*, this newsreel idea—redolent in the early post-war period with a practice the new documentary sought to escape (one today we might call ‘factual’)—is deployed rhetorically by Ivens. But this is getting ahead of an introductory overview of Part Three.

In this part the figure that links these late 20th century television newsreels depicting Ivens’ ‘fate’ is the Golden Calf (an overdetermined sign if ever there was one), proclaiming both the power of the image and its fecundity. Nicolas Poussin’s (1594-1665) Golden Calf picture is linked through its central figure (the calf) with the first of the newsreels (1985), giving rise to reflection on word and image, and through this, a reading that challenges Ivens’ comfort with the reconciled relations between himself, the film *Indonesia Calling* and the Dutch sovereign. The image (the Golden Calf) performs a treacherous betrayal of its words (Minister Brinkman’s apologia), and in so-doing provides a critique that dissolves the myth of reconciliation, or ‘progress’, proposed by the ‘happy ever after’ tableau occasioned in an historic presentation ceremony, pictured courtesy of a frozen moment from the newsreel.

Pursuing these speculations a little further, formal attributes of Poussin’s 17th century tableau are linked with ideas from Walter Benjamin on allegory in a transition towards a close reading of certain sequences of Ivens’ film. The correspondence between Poussin’s Golden Calf and Ivens *Indonesia Calling* is to be found at the level of form, where figural tableau calls forth an allegorical dimension to the film, nestled among its uneven visuality.
In an analysis that fractures or breaks down the film into distinct representational modes (the newsreel, the staged observation, the stylised tableau), an ‘essayist’ dimension, ‘moment’ or voice in *Indonesia Calling* is teased out in the very heterogeneity of the work, as it were, between the ‘cracks’ of its uneven surface, despite the film’s decidedly pedagogic and instrumental intentions. In parallel with this analysis, concrete historical reference is noted, echoing concerns elaborated in Parts One and Two.

Benjamin’s critical ideas are deployed throughout to guide a transition from this relatively formalist approach to certain scenes from Ivens’ film, resolving in a reaffirmation of an ethics and purposefulness in the documentary, valorising by implication a social function for documentary.\(^{135}\)

**The essay film**

*The essays’ transitions repudiate conclusive deductions in favour of cross connections between elements.*

*Adorno, The Essay as Form*

The problem of categorically distinguishing the genre of ‘essay film’ among the variety of documentary textual strategies, treatments

\(^{135}\) An incidental aside might note that in working through *Indonesia Calling* in this way, the argument pursues a hidden correlation with the mid-1930s dispute between Benjamin and Adorno (around the ‘mechanical reproduction’ essay and the Baudelaire essay) concerning the degree to which an expressive work can be called upon to unconsciously articulate the material conditions and structure of its production without “mediation through the entire social process” (Adorno in Jameson, 1977: 129-130).
and modes of address was discussed during 2009 on a ‘list-serve’ of the *Visible Evidence* mailing list. This forum is an informal exchange that includes participation of the foremost professional scholars of documentary studies in English. Laura Rascaroli was closely engaged with the discussion, as her book *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*—a theoretical monograph on the subject—was just about to come out.

A refreshing aspect of the *Visible Evidence* online exchange, apart from its informality, was a general acknowledgement that definitive boundaries constraining what might, for argument’s sake, be considered an ‘essay film’ were not necessarily a productive critical strategy (*Visual Evidence List-Serve*, May-June 2009). An essayist tradition in documentary is also subject to reconfiguration over time, as new works comment on, or remake, earlier works (Gibson S. C. and Leahy 2003: 12-13). An approach deploying the idea of the ‘essay’ as one ‘moment’ among diverse ‘voices’ in a work or a tradition is another way of engaging critically with documentary and hybrid works. This Bakhtinian approach provides more agility in

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136 [While] driven by a strong central character and clear narrative chronology [the film] works with enough depth to open up a speculative domain for the spectator [...] It doesn’t look anything like what we used to call the essay film [in the 1980s] but that doesn’t mean the essay form is gone [...] it’s breathing life into more contemporary forms [...] the essay has moved on (JH cited in Gibson and Leahy [2000]; noting Amiel Courtin-Wilson’s *Chasing Buddha* [2000] as a contemporary essayist observational documentary).

137 Mikhail Bakhtin’s ‘dialogical principle’: this question of delimiting genre is one instance of the productivity of his approach to literary criticism. For example, “In the word” says Bakhtin, “contextual harmonies (of the
the deployment of the essay idea in approaching the works under consideration here.

For Rascaroli the essay film is an “experimental hybrid self-reflexive form, and consequently an erratic and inconsistent one.” She says the essay film “systematically employs the enunciator’s direct address to the audience” (Rascaroli 2009: 84). The position of the ‘enunciator’ in the documentary (or any text for that matter) is not necessarily immediately obvious. The enunciation of the work might also be called the work’s ‘performance’. This ‘enunciation’ is not limited to concrete material and concepts gathered together in the work or to narration, voiceover, or situations or scenes depicted, but is more the manner in which a combination of these elements together ‘perform’ the work.138

Rascaroli says the documentary essay “must introduce and muse about a philosophical problem or set of problems” both as concrete content and as enunciation. The exemplary instances for her are those in which a work “creates the conditions of its own communicative negotiation, and takes it as its subject matter as well as its textual strategy” (Rascaroli 2009: 98-9).

During the course of my work on this Project another monograph on the essay film appeared: Timothy Corrigan’s 2011 The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker. It is mostly consistent with Rascaroli. The differences between them are more the agendas they choose to pursue and emphasise than substantive disagreements.

138 This performative dimension of a work is not dissimilar to what Beattie calls “documentary display” in his book of this title (2010).
Both struggle with an imperative to formulate a definition while at the same time wanting to err on the side of keeping the category open.

Corrigan favours a strategy with which I concur: he makes good use of the notion of ‘a continuum model’ courtesy of Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). Where Hutcheon is interested in the degree to which a particular film remake (or adaptation of a text) might reinterpret or recreate the work to which it refers, Corrigan is interested in a spectrum he proposes as ‘adaptation as commentary’ to ‘adaptation as criticism’: “faithful commentaries at one end of the spectrum and… essayistic criticism at the other” (Corrigan 2011: 189). He calls the more ‘essayistic’ “refractive”. In this, Corrigan’s refractive essay has resonance with an early sequence in *After Indonesia Calling* in which—adapting a scene from *One Way Street* (Hughes 1992)—I cite Benjamin’s formulation (from his Goethe essay)139 distinguishing these terms (commentary and critique) in a manner closely echoing Bazin’s critical method and its ‘destructive character’ (the breaking down, “mortification” of the text), a reference that underlies Corrigan’s ‘refractive essay’.

For Corrigan the notion of ‘adaptation’ is liberally applied to a reference, explicit or implicit, that a work might make to another earlier work. This provides Corrigan with an opportunity to coin a new category: the ‘refractive essay’. Citing Bazin on adaptation, where some adaptations can be “a new aesthetic creation, the novel multiplied by the cinema” (Bazin 2000, in Corrigan 2011: 190):

*Refractive suggests a kind of ‘unmaking’ of the work of art or film... like a beam of light sent through a glass cube, refractive*

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Corrigan notes the value of the “essayistic” (after Renov 2004: 69-89) as an attribute that might be discernable in films that otherwise might not appear immediately as ‘essay films’. The ‘biopic‘ I’m not there (Haynes 2007) is an example Corrigan cites as essayistic in its enunciation (211), whereas the biopic Milk (van Sant 2008) is not (85). Also Corrigan identifies the productivity of Bakhtin, a reference I have also found relevant insofar as the notion of the dialogic clarifies the play of forms as voices within works.

Parallels between literary and cinematic treatments of essay forms often call on traditions founded with Montaigne (Corrigan 2011; Rascaroli 2009; Renov 1993, 2004; Gibson S. C. and Leahy 2003; Gibson 1996b). Phillip Lopate, who concludes that the essay film can best be summarised as a work that is “a search to find out what one thinks about something” (Lopate 1998, cited in Gibson and Leahy 2000: 6), tends to favour the presentation of reasoned argument in a singular unified voice, to the exclusion, for example, of the poetic.

Renov (2004) draws attention to the heterogeneous tendency of the essay form, its “resistance to generic encirclement”, its “digression, fragmentation, repetition and dispersion”:

\[
\text{Knowledge produced through the essay is provisional rather than systematic... Descriptive and reflexive modalities are coupled; the representation of the historical real is}
\]

\[\ldots\]

\[\text{A pity Corrigan probably has not had the opportunity to see the wonderful essay film by David Perry on Tatlin and the Russian Constructivists, The Refracting Glasses, 94 minutes, Australia, 1992.}\]
Consciously filtered through the flux of subjectivity (Renov 2004: 70).

Consequently for Renov, the key characteristic of the essay (in particular since Barthes) is indeterminacy. For Adorno, the (literary) essay’s preservation of ‘multiple interrelated meanings’ as ‘equivocation’ arises from the essay’s distinctive interpellation of the ‘concrete’ (empirical historical descriptive material) with the conceptual. The essay form therefore is resistant to instrumental reason. Thus Renov’s ‘indeterminacy’ and Adorno’s ‘equivocation’, and in certain ways Gibson and Leahy’s “voice” are in accord on this ‘political’ moment of the essay form; this element of resistance to instrumental reason. This is an idea that carries over in imagining what we might call the essayist moment in film, and correspondingly, with the ‘poetic’.

Adorno says the essay “thinks in fragments… and finds its unity through the breaks” (cited in Nicholsen 1997: 103). In this he evokes Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’. Adorno draws out philosophical implications of these tendencies to be looser in rhetorical formulations and less instrumental in their language; indeed, as Nicholsen observes, “closer to image than to concept” (Nicholsen 1997: 109).

*The essay redirects both logic and rhetoric away from power and domination. This redirection occurs through the loose connections the essay employs* (Nicholsen 1997: 109).

It is precisely these attributes that militate against the normative journalistic, didactic and indeed pedagogic tendencies in non-fiction film, and that cause such anxiety and distaste among broadcasters commissioning documentary. The authorial ‘voice’ that Gibson and Leahy talk about, which for them generates the appeal of the essay
film, almost by definition elides the authority, the clarity and the certainties that factual television, including documentary, will mostly allow (Gibson, C. G. and Leahy 2003; Laughren 2006).

These kinds of ideas are in the first instance antithetical to a work such as Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling*, with its realist imperative to persuade and advocate. However, when we unshackle the concept (‘essay film’) from its constraining tendency to fix a category around an artifact, and favour instead the potential of this category ‘essay film’ as discourse, an ‘essayistic’, poetic voice emerges from within the very delinquent mode of production that of necessity figured *Indonesia Calling*.

Here I want to argue that the conditions of possibility, and the conditions of constraint that combined to allow *Indonesia Calling*, “which was never meant to be a film” according to Marion Michelle (cited in Hughes 2009), to emerge as it did are articulated in the text itself in such a way that an essayist dimension, almost despite itself, is now legible. But first, let us go back to shortly before the end.

**The Golden Calf, closer to image than to concept**

*At 10.3 million pounds the top seller at Sotheby’s was the Golden Calf, a white bullock in formaldehyde, with crown, horns and hoofs made of 18-carat gold: dance on idolaters (Foster 2008: 23; Figure 1).*

The Golden Calf is a prolifically over-determined figure. In his essay on Damien Hirst’s ‘The Golden Calf’ (Figure 1, described above), Hal
Foster quotes Andy Warhol: “good business is the best art”. As we shall see, this might be the rubric channelling Australian documentary into the 21st century. With his “dance on idolaters” Foster also evokes Poussin’s famous Golden Calf picture.

In art history Lucas van Leyden (1530), Poussin (1635) and Chagall (1931) constitute an imagistic discourse on the biblical text (Exodus 32). But the image is ubiquitous, as well as the dearest in British art (Hirst) and new media (Jeffrey Shaw142). At the turn of the 19th century there was the famous ‘Cave of the Golden Calf’ dance club café in London popular among the European avant-garde. In the history of world cinema one thinks first of Cecil B. De Mille’s The Ten Commandments, with the magisterial Charlton Heston as Moses—so much the Torah’s Joe di Maggio—pitching the first edition of the stone tablets and smashing the idol, with brother Aaron standing by in shame.

In the context of the current discussion, our Golden Calf is also ‘the Dutch Oscar’, the most prestigious award of the Netherlands Film Festival, presented annually since 1981. While Berlin has its Golden Bear and Venice its Golden Lion, the Netherlands responds with an ironic icon, a wry comment, among other things, on the function of official festival awards in the ‘art-house’ cinema market. It is of course firstly a gesture among artists warning against the worshipping of false gods, and against the ‘sin of pride’.143 The

141 The quote is from Warhol The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, cited in Foster 2008: 23.
142 Jeffrey Shaw’s Golden Calf (1994) is a ‘responsive’ video installation (see Palmer 2007: 76; < www.youtube.com/watch?v=paaacElF6wU>)
143 There is dispute over the origin of the idea. The Netherlands Film Festival Director Jos Stelling says it was film director Wim Verstappen’s
The statuette itself is a solid, slightly brutal representational figure evoking a kind of dumb pride, its gesture ambiguously baring the throat for slaughter, or in defiance, (probably both) (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). It is a wonderfully ambiguous icon, bursting with immanent contradictions, and as an award for cinema, both honour and riposte. Ivens was the recipient of the Golden Calf in September 1985.

Figure 2.1 The Golden Calf with André Brinkman, depicted by television news coverage at a ceremony in Paris, September 11, 1985 (Beeld en Geluid, Netherlands)

Figure 2.2 Joris Ivens accepts the Golden Calf, Marceline Loridan beside him. Television news, September 11, 1985

idea, but the designer of the sculpture Theo Makaay says it was his idea (according to Wikipedia). In either case it is a wonderful idea.
The presentation ceremony hosted by the Dutch Minister for Culture André Brinkman was no ordinary industry function. The presentation speech was negotiated in advance with Ivens insisting that officials bring the award to him in Paris (Schoots 2000: 353-5). To recap from the Introduction to this exegesis, Brinkman’s speech was an apology to Ivens on behalf of the Dutch state for the damage inflicted on him as a result of *Indonesia Calling*. Brinkman went further, saying that Ivens had been right in the stand he took in making *Indonesia Calling* and the Dutch government had been wrong.

*Now that we have the opportunity today to meet each other, I do not want to deny that past. Often, in many ways, the Netherlands inhibited your work as a filmmaker. I recognise that history has agreed more with you than with your opponents. As Dutch Minister for Culture I intend to offer my hand and I hope you will accept* (Brinkman, September 1985 [translation: Madelin Wilkins, cited in Hughes 2009]).

The Golden Calf in its biblical context (Exodus 32) can be read as an allegory pitting word against image. The Golden Calf is an *ur-form* of the image. It is at one level ‘appearance’ itself, it is beauty, eidolon, phantasmagoria; whereas the divine language—text carved into stone tablets by the hand of Yahweh in this case—is the divine law, a law echoed in its ‘fallen’ condition (as Benjamin would have it) by the state through its monopoly on violence (Benjamin 1979,

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144 The Golden Calf also came with ‘reparations’, 100,000 guilders for his archive, plus 300,000 for the completion of *A Tale of the Wind* (1988) (Schoots 2000: 354).

145 See also Schoots 2000: 354.
‘On language as such and on the language of man’, 107-123; Benjamin 1979: 132-154 ‘Critique of Violence’).

My favourite depiction of the biblical story is Poussin’s ‘The Adoration of the Golden Calf’ (1635) (Figure 3). As a work of the 17th Century, it is made in the same epoch as the ‘mourning play’ genre rescued from obscurity in Benjamin’s The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Benjamin 1977). The painting was made in the period of the Thirty Years’ War when despair and catastrophe coincided with the Protestant obsession with counter-reformation and sin, a time when cultural production seemed haunted by death; a period when hope was invested entirely in a troubled faith in the afterlife. The central image of this epoch was the corpse (the skeleton, the skull).

As image, the corpse concentrates into a dialectical unity the subjection of the human spirit to the creaturely, to the consignment of all things to ruin. The corpse is the most graphic representation of subject turned object. But at the extreme limit of allegorical reflection, the corpse is also the hope for redemption encoded into the most physical and profane of all possible images (Pensky 1993: 180).

In terms of its ‘over determination’, in Poussin’s Golden Calf picture we see a 17th century Christian ‘adaptation’ of a Judaic image initially composed in the 6th century BC. Poussin’s allegory depicts a thoroughly liberal, joyful celebration. We see the shoulders and breast of dancing figures, as Moses’ brother Aron, gesturing to his own eyes, beckons the men and women crouching on the right of the frame to partake in the pleasure of the scene.

David Freedberg’s critique in *The Power of Images* notes the irony involved in “a picture that has as its subject the epitome of the negative consequences of looking, admiring and adoring” (Friedberg 1989: 384). The pleasure of looking that the painting simultaneously both depicts and evokes, also reminds the spectator of the ‘corrupting power’ of the image. In *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting*, Oskar Batschmann observes Poussin’s negotiation of the genre of history painting on the one hand and the representation of myth on the other in this picture. Drawing attention to certain ambivalence around the figures dancing before the Calf, Batschmann asks, “Is the return to the happiness of myth impossible, once one has reached the level of history?” (Batschmann 1990: 73).

The presentation of Ivens’ award in Paris in 1985 was a prelude to another ‘happy ending’, as Ivens soon after was knighted by Dutch
Queen Beatrix. This ‘redemption’ of Ivens in the eyes of his sovereign reversed what was earlier considered betrayal, his “second kind of loyalty”, now recognised as worthy of the sovereign’s highest honour. Paradoxically the tableau with Ivens, Loridan and Brinkman ‘dancing’ with their Golden Calf (Figure 2.2) evokes another dialectic of myth and history; the instability of the redemptive moment in general; its reversibility. The Golden Calf is pregnant with explosive negativity.

We are reminded of the capacity of ‘Merdeka’ (freedom), of utopia, of communism, of the deeper meaning, to ‘melt into air’. The Republic of Indonesia itself succumbed to third world fascism 20 years after its declaration of freedom from colonial rule. Ivens’ redeemed, exemplary figure may also become ruin, ‘melt into air’. Today we read Indonesia Calling in this knowledge. In the knowledge that nothing is ever ‘settled’, I ended the 2009 film with Ivens comment, “It’s good that it turned out well, but you have to live a long time” (Ivens, cited in Schoots: 358-9). Even at his gravesite, driven by the imperatives of television journalism and the political ambivalence of Ivens' reputation, Dutch television invited controversy, conjuring ‘balance’ (those for/those against), order (reconciliation) and the human-interest value of celebrity (who was seen there) (see Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia; Figures 4.1 to 4.3).

While the words of the Minister for Culture constitute retrospective justice in Ivens' lifetime, the ironic image of the Golden Calf negates the gesture, turning the moment into a kind of parody. And all along Ivens too was well aware of the incommensurate relationship between the discrimination he experienced and that of Indonesians in their revolution against colonialism:
An Indonesian victim at that time weighed a thousand times heavier than taking away a filmmaker’s passport (Ivens in Schoots 2000: 360).

Figure 4.1 Joris Ivens buried, Montparnasse, July 1989; Figure 4.2 Ivens’ grave 2008; Figure 4.3 Aftermath (timecode/black border)
Despite Ivens’ advice against ‘revisiting Indonesia Calling’ (Schoots 2000: 360), new commentaries pile up around the work, ‘ruin upon ruin’, my own among them. I have noted Ivens’ homeland ‘burying’ him again—20 years after his death—through the erasure of his name from what was until 2009 the IDFA ‘Joris Ivens Award’, now instead the ‘IDFA AVRO Award’. While elsewhere his work continues to excite audiences and scholars, his displacement at IDFA symbolically chronicles the passage of documentary as a tradition from one historical horizon to another, signalling the epoch of television hegemony (also subject to its own passing) in the political economy of documentary film.

The Golden Calf: Word and image

But the Golden Calf has more to say. Batschmann remarks that Poussin put painting on an equal footing with poetry by means of his ‘speaking figures’:

*The painter (Poussin) neither transposes the text into a picture nor does he illustrate the text. Rather, he invents a number of figures who represent emotions with their actions and turn thus into talking figures* (Batschmann 1990: 115).

In the 17th century the question of the word and the image constituted a kind of ‘culture war’. Poets composed works in which nymphs, and the phenomena of the echo, for example, mocked painting “which can produce everything except the voice”. When Poussin made his Golden Calf picture, the authority of writing (over image) was official; the Council of Trent confirmed it. Artists could
at any time find themselves answering to the inquisition on arcane issues of image and ideology (Batschmann 1990: 113-117).\footnote{It is also a theme of cultural theory in antiquity: in \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato has Socrates praising the text above painting, as painting can more commonly be misunderstood.}

Susan Buck-Morss has shown (particularly in her \textit{The Dialectics of Seeing}, 1991) how Benjamin seized the image for his philosophical poetics and deployed its attributes in strategies for thinking through cultural and political history; these ideas and textual strategies drew on insights he had developed in the study of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century ‘mourning play’ (see also Friedlander 2012: 129). For Benjamin the allegorical form is antithetical to representation characterised by symbolic imagery, which, by its nature, he says, is complicit in myth, as it smooths over the gulf between representation and referent. The overcoming of myth through allegory becomes a textual strategy in Benjamin’s critical method. In its application to history, to criticism, to art and philosophy, Benjamin works with the poetic image as an expressive force in his assault on discourses of modernity that he identifies as being complicit with ‘dreamscape’ and myth.

In Benjamin we have a writer dedicated to engagement with the historical play of difference between word and image. His ‘dialectical images’ become the weapon of choice for cutting through myth with the ”whetted axe of reason”.\footnote{“To cultivate the fields where, until now, only madness has reigned. Forge ahead with the whetted axe of reason, looking neither left not right so as not to succumb to the horror that beckons from deep within the primeval forest [...]” Benjamin, ‘Convolute N [Re theory of knowledge, theory of progress]’ in Smith, G. 1989: 44.} For example in his late work,
'Central Park', Benjamin’s cultural critique of commodity culture takes up the dialectic he had figured in the image of the corpse, and applies it to the souvenir, figuring the souvenir as modernity’s corpse.

The souvenir is the relic secularized... in it the increasing self-alienation of the person who inventories his past as dead possession is distilled... the relic derives from the corpse, the souvenir from deceased experience (Benjamin 1985: 48-49).

Adorno took another path, but a closely related one, drawing substantively on these ideas. While Benjamin pushed his creative critical method into an engagement with montage, seeking through his ‘dialectical images’ ‘profane illumination’, Adorno worked more with an elaborate rhetorical strategy of ongoing immanent critique he called ‘negative dialectics’. Adorno’s account of his own essayist

The Project alludes to this ‘dreamscape’ nostalgia—without making explicit the reference—through the redeployment of an image from the film All That Is Solid (Hughes 1988), in which a young woman (played by Louise Smith) lovingly contemplates a snow dome souvenir containing the figure of an angel. She wants to be ‘horizontal’, while all around her the powers that be reconstitute the mode of production in Australian documentary ‘moving forward’ away from ‘cottage industry’ like a belated, microcosmic transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Susan Buck-Morss refers to the historic, “unforgettable” meeting between Benjamin and Adorno in Konigstein in September or October 1929, where Benjamin’s insight that his methodology and ideas about the Trauespiel could be developed as a materialist critique of modernity initiated a shared intellectual project that inspired Adorno’s later work. See Buck-Morss 1977: 22-3, 139-140; Buck-Morss 1989: 176. See also the famous letter (of November 10, 1938) in which Adorno expresses his “disappointment” and criticises the first developed draft of Benjamin’s ‘Baudelaire’ essay and makes reference to the Konigstein meetings (Lonitz 1999: 281; also Jameson 1977: 127).
method in ‘the essay as form’ arises through an elective affinity of Benjamin’s textual strategies and Adorno’s ‘negative dialectics’. All these ideas are useful in addressing the notion of the ‘essay film’ and its application to Ivens’ 1946 film, the 2009 ‘revisit’ film and *After Indonesia Calling*.

**Indonesia Calling: The voice of the newsreel**

*These films ask us not to think so much about the aesthetics of film—the genius behind it, artistic strategies, or its emotional and imaginative communications. Rather, refractive cinema tends, in a variety of ways, to draw attention to where film fails, or more precisely, where and how the cinematic can force us beyond its borders and our borders, can force us to think about a world and ourselves that necessarily and crucially exist outside the limits of the cinema* (Corrigan 2011: 191).

Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* opens with two title cards and a map (Figures 5.1 to 5.3). These titles are as they appear in the first version of the film that appeared in 1946. A later version, 1947, has ‘key creatives’ cited in a presentation credit and a different typeface for the film’s title, evoking an ‘exotic east’. This is the only difference between these two versions. The first version declines to name those who made the work (see Part One). The later prints, naming Ivens, Michelle, Duncan and Finch, do not identify others who collaborated (there are no closing credits). The presentation

151 There was no longer any need for anonymity; no legal action had been taken against Ivens; Catherine Duncan was no longer with the Australian National Film Board and had also left the country. It was an open secret that Ivens had directed the film, and after he had left Australia new prints appeared with changes to the opening graphics.
credit in both cases proposes the film as the work of a collective: presented by “the Waterfront Unions of Australia”, and made by “Australasia Production”. The first sequence of the film is introduced with the following narration:

Two countries in the Pacific linked by routes of trade and discovery are Australia and Indonesia. The war cut off their ocean contacts, but after the war one of the first ships to make the journey was the Esperance Bay. You may remember the newsreel back in 1945.

A newsreel narrator, deploying a slightly different tone than Peter Finch’s more intimate performance, a slightly deeper voice, a more authoritative articulation and a faster pace, takes over:

Fourteen thousand Indonesians leave Australia by the Esperance Bay for Java, with the government undertaking that they will not be landed at any port in Dutch hands. An official of the Australian government goes with them to see that the guarantee is carried out. Friends and sweethearts crowd the wharf to say goodbye. Before the ship sails, EV Elliott, representing the Combined Australian Trade Unions, speaks to the men.

The scenes we see here are a form of reportage—the actual Esperance Bay, actual friends and sweethearts, actual Indonesian deportees preparing for repatriation (Figures 5.1 to 5.8). The opening shot of the quoted ‘newsreel’, which is like a newsreel but is not a newsreel, is announced with a full screen graphic (Figure 5.4):

INDONESIANS LEAVE FOR HOMELAND.

152 Concealed behind the phrase “one of the first ships to make the journey” are those ships returning to Indonesia, bearing the apparatus of neo-Colonial rule; the ships that left without Joris Ivens and his crew.
Figures 5.1 – 5.8 (The first sequence)
The spectator is addressed by the image, the narrator and the
enunciation, or the ‘voice’ of the ‘newsreel’, as if we are watching a quoted text. However we are engaged with a slight of hand, a mock newsreel. There is an irony buried here too, perhaps signalled by the joyfully laughing Indonesians who arrive on the back of a truck with their luggage in the opening shots (Figure 5.5). These are the only shots in this sequence that could conceivably have been shot later as ‘dramatic reconstruction’. The other shots, until the sequence cuts to “EV Elliot... speaks to the men” are reportage, although the scene includes several staged shots (e.g. Figure 5.8). These staged shots illustrate the narration. In this way the ‘newsreel’ sustains its fiction, that is to say, the way the mock newsreel’s commentary relates to its illustrative image and delivers the ‘voice’ of the newsreel, as promised by the typeface and idiom of the supered graphic title.

However, such a newsreel ‘you may have seen’ was not made and would not have been made. None of Cinesound, Movietone nor the Department of Information would have offered their audiences such a benign spectacle of this particular victory of the Indonesian independence movement. The guarantee of landing only in Republican ports was achieved against the wishes of the Dutch. On the level of editorial, it is contrary to the entire mainstream treatment of the issues, particularly at this time. Had they wished to do so, a commercial newsreel story would have been very much like this, although perhaps without the close-ups (Figure 5.8), but the editorial would have been entirely at odds with this. The scene

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153 See Part One regarding Cinesound newsreel’s treatment of the Stirling Castle incident in early November 1945, made with secret collaboration with the NIGIS Film and Photo Unit through the intervention of Frederick Daniell.
is shot mute; whereas “EV Elliot... speaks to the men” is sync sound, this may have been shot some time later. It is one of only two scenes in the film with sync location sound: both are speeches to assemblies of workers constituted as international, united and celebrating victories, with prominently staged mixed ethnicities and skin colour (and all male).

The scene with E. V. Elliot (Seamen’s Union Federal Secretary), with Barry Smith (Seamen’s Union, NSW Branch Secretary) on his left and Jan Walandouw (President, Indonesian Independence Committee, Sydney) on his right, one of the prominent Indonesian ‘actuals’ in the film, is introduced by the ‘newsreel’ narrator, conjured as a scene from this mock newsreel. In the context of the controversial press reports that appeared in the couple of weeks before Ivens resigned his commission (November 21, 1945), the mock ‘newsreel’ is an ironic supplement.

A story that a film was being made had been published about three weeks after the Esperance Bay had left (the Melbourne Sun and Sydney Sun November 22), and this may have given rise to the timing of Ivens' inevitable resignation. This ‘newsreel’ sequence is already a supplement insofar as it constitutes an alternative opening sequence (it precedes the narration’s “let’s start at the beginning”); it is the first of two ‘beginnings’ and a riposte to the authority of mainstream media. Furthermore, at the same time it proposes another kind of newsreel at the level of editorial, it distinguishes the film itself as documentary, in contrast with the formal attributes of the newsreel. (As a textual strategy on the level of enunciation, it calls to mind the ‘News on the March’ sequence of Orson Welles' Citizen Kane, or the brilliant comic sequence in Curtis Levy’s The Matilda Candidate, in which Levy stumbles through
making a factual-style dramatic reconstruction as part of his mock campaign for the Senate.)

“You may remember the newsreel”! The suggestion that Australian newsreel cinemas may have exhibited a story ‘you may remember’, including speeches from E. V. Elliot and Jan Walandouw celebrating the gift of an Indonesian flag and joining together with the workers of the world in rousing declarations of *Merdeka!* is ludicrous. Although, in fact, the combined unions of the waterfront did donate a Republican flag made for the occasion to the departing Indonesians. Is this the actual presentation, or is it staged for the film? Or both? What is the mode of enunciation at this moment? The film is proposing a kind of parallel universe, and with a ‘straight face’; and this is not the only instance.

An immanent utopian dimension is central to the enunciation of the film, in parallel with its explicit politically partisan radicalism. It is a moment of ‘difference’ that supplements the otherwise apparently stable realism driving the film’s political affirmation. Another striking instance of this occurs in the scenes that follow immediately after. Having established the radical possibility of a newsreel advocating the popular legitimacy of Australian trade union support for an anti-colonial revolution against a wartime ally, the film “starting again at the beginning” has its narrator announce:

*On that October day, the Esperance Bay sailed from Australia for Indonesia. But the real story behind this journey is the story of ships that didn’t sail. Let’s start at the beginning.*

Now the narrator returns us to the ‘real story’ (as opposed to the mock story), and a new beginning, with another ironic reversal. The ship that has sailed, returning Indonesians to their homeland, is
contrasted with the “ships that didn’t sail”; this is the real story, we’re told, these are the ships that delivered; “...the ships that did not sail so a new nation could live” as the film’s closing line sums it up.

The ‘newsreel’ has depicted what is in fact repatriation, welcomed by Indonesians, but nonetheless acted out in keeping with the White Australia Policy. There was during this period (1945-6) a number of instances in which Indonesians were forcibly repatriated despite their marriage to Australian citizens. Australia’s Minister for Information Arthur Calwell was well known for his embarrassing, but sadly unexceptional racist proclivities. Indonesians writing their heartfelt thanks to supporters from repatriation ships also called on these supporters to work towards eliminating “the racial prejudice which exists in Australia” (Lingard 2008: 233, 240).

The film delineates a difference between its documentary enunciation and that of the newsreel, while using the idiom of the newsreel to ‘indoctrinate’ the spectator with the idea that the audience already knows something of the story. The ‘newsreel’ sequence presents its concrete reportage as in some way already understood, (“you may remember”) as mere ‘background’, but at the level of concept it does much more: it positions the spectator as ‘knowing’, and knowing in a certain way. These first four minutes of the film establish the ground from which a dramatic story can emerge.

**Indonesia Calling: Much the same in any language**
"... Let’s start at the beginning. Here in Australia we know the
Indonesians well. For years they’ve lived in our country as friends and
fellow townsmen. The women learned the names of our vegetables. And
mothers found that children were much the same in any language.”
(Figures 6.1 and 6.2)

These words, again the trope “we know”, accompany a series of
apparently observational exterior scenes, staged to depict
Indonesians engaging in mundane everyday life: alighting from a
tram, buying a newspaper, chatting in the street. The assumed
audience (“we”) is the Australian ‘man in the street’, progressive
and ‘tolerant’; the ‘woman in the street’ is an example, an
illustration. A notable thing about these first instances is their
peculiarly limited representation of women. Overall the film is
strikingly male dominated. The closing scene, proudly inclusive of
all three services (army, navy and air force) in its triumphant march
across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and emphasising a unity of
Indonesian, Indian, Chinese and Australians, has no women
included.

We see women at the Indonesian Club, celebrating and dancing
with Indonesians and their Australian supporters following the
proclamation of the Indonesian Republic. But when the men turn to
politics, a woman present in a three shot leaves the frame, taking
up an invitation to dance, thereby leaving room for Jan Walandouw
to join Barry Smith at a table with an artist who sketches out the
argument for independence on the paper tablecloth. However we
know from the work of Margaret George (1980), Jan Lingard
(2008), Charlotte Maramis (2006) and Heather Goodall (2008) that
women were present and effective as organisers and activists
throughout the course of these events. Moreover in making the film
itself, clearly Marion Michelle and Catherine Duncan were fully
creatively involved.
The sexism evident in these representations, to the absence of other possible imagery, signifies perhaps a failure of the utopian imagination on this front; a gap between experience and representation that can best be described perhaps as a ‘conceptual disconnect’ deployed in the service of producing a normative figuration of femininity. One is reminded of the old trope heard right through to the 1970s that the women's movement would have to wait until capitalism was overturned for the emancipation of sex and gender.

Figures 6.1 - 6.2 “Children... much the same in any language”

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154 As writer and director of the ANFB film for the Department of Immigration film, *This is the Life* (1947), cited in *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia*, Catherine Duncan figures a more complex depiction of agency and gender.
These scenes do however affirm a multiculturalism that is nothing short of utopian.\textsuperscript{155} It is true that the ‘people-to-people’ contacts between Indonesians and Australian citizens were often regarded as a welcome relief from the insular Anglo-Celtic dominant culture (Lingard 2008: 225-248; Maramis 2006; Hardjono and Warner 1995).

The familiarity of the idiom of the (mock) newsreel renders its radical editorial concept—international trade union solidarity with a revolutionary cause in our region as a cause Australians celebrate—unthreatening and normative. Similarly, just as they learnt the names of our vegetables, so “mothers found that children were much the same in any language.” In this sequence the spectre of difference manifests in language and culture is foreshadowed, and immediately domesticated, drawn back into a secure, familiar embrace as an Australian woman warmly welcomes an Indonesian mother and child (Figures 6.1 and 6.2).

The scenes are exteriors, shot amongst everyday actuality; the staging is neutralised as far as possible. That is to say, the figuration lacks drama, both in the actions that are depicted and the coverage deployed; we see mainly wide shots, flatly lit, the performances benign, the actions without narrative, individuals without ‘character’. In relation to the ‘newsreel scene’, these shots establishing the idea of ‘Indonesians welcome’ is almost ‘observational’ in its visual naturalism; it is ‘staged observation’.

\textsuperscript{155} Robert Hamilton and Laura Kotevska have developed this theme in their article for the Joris Ivens European Foundation arguing persuasively that the film anticipates an Australian multiculturalism in the context of the White Australia Policy (Hamilton and Kotevska 2005).
Indonesia Calling: A revolutionary movement

The next scene, a transition to a new sequence, begins a trajectory from realist naturalism to a heightened, stylised mode of realism. This transitional scene is situated appropriately enough on a moving ferry. Unlike the staging of figures in previous scenes, here the positioning of the figures in the frame, the shot’s mise-en-scene, the contemplative stillness of two men alone against the movement of the harbour behind them, produces an apt passage to the dramatic interiors that follow (Figure 7.1).

The staging evokes loss and yearning; the characters minds are elsewhere, they look out, each in their own thoughts. Their very stillness imbues them with character—feelings and desires with which we can identify. The harbour ferry on which they travel is analogous with their separation from home (as the figures are separated from one another), the journey of return they seek, and their desire for “independence”. Their presence in Sydney Harbour links with the editorial content of the previous scenes; they are here, welcome among us, but they have their own concerns. They are no longer purely illustration—they have ‘character’.

In this scene there is another ‘reality’ unfolding. A revolutionary moment is about to emerge. The men’s homesickness will soon be swept away by the dream of “independence”. And sure enough “independence” arrives, first in the form of a superimposed, animated graphic—the word “INDEPENDENCE” bursts through the clouds like the word of God—and later, in the next sequence, the word as voice through headphones in the distorted reception of a shortwave radio (so much, as it were, a 'second coming' of "independence") (Figure 7.2).
Through these establishing sequences we have moved from the familiar, the domestic, the regular world, to the gravity and drama of the revolutionary beginnings of a new history. The key point here is that the aesthetic form is also in transition. The ferry scene is a journey from observation to allegory; it is a fulcrum balancing cross-cultural ‘peace and friendship’ against the revolutionary imagination. While in a sense the figures (in these scenes following the ‘newsreel’) symbolise through their actions the editorial concepts alluded to in the narration, the figures we see on the ferry transform the aesthetic into another mode, one characterised not so much by the symbol, but more as allegory. Note the more dynamic posture and composition of the figures against their background (Figure 7.1).

As the revolutionary moment becomes available in the history depicted, so the aesthetic surface of the text shifts into figural tableau. Similarly, a shift occurs in the relationship between the text of the narration and the imagery, both as flow and as reinforcement/difference.\(^\text{156}\) The more illusive ‘poetic’ form in the relationship between spoken word and image begins to emerge more strongly as the dreams of the men on the ferry breaks through from desire into history.

Yet here in Australia it wasn’t just the river and the rice fields, the villages of their homeland they thought about, but something they didn’t have before the war, something they fought for with the allies—\textit{independence}.

\(^{156}\) There are four modes of relations between spoken word and image in \textit{Indonesia Calling}: the sync sequences, the mock ‘newsreel’, the illustrative and (for want of another word) ‘the poetic’.
The superimposed graphic zooming into the frame breaks the ‘spell’ of homesickness and unrequited desire, hitherto dividing the men from one another, and introduces interior scenes that take up the figural tableau more fully.

**Indonesia Calling:** The voice of the figural

*Allegory is not a playful illustrative technique, but a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and indeed, just as writing is.*

*Benjamin 1977, The Origin of German Tragic Drama: 162*
The voice of Indonesia calling. The Republic of Indonesia has been proclaimed. These are the salient points in the Republic’s democratic constitution: freedom of organisation, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

The figure in the foreground (Fig. 8.2) has passed the headphones to his colleague, then risen and moved forwards. Back lighting emphasises the centrality of the figure, its stillness against the excited activity behind; it carries a sense of the gravity of the announcement.
The following image is pure sensuality, ‘beauty’; the optimistic, handsome young man (in love with a nation), desire, a dream fulfilled (Figure 8.3).

Scenes with the shortwave radio occur twice in the film. This second appearance (Figures 9.1 to 9.3) initiates a sequence in which the trade union’s actions are stepped up “now the fight is really on…” Previously the tableau delivered a sense of the determination with which Indonesian activists would respond to the declaration of independence; here the emotional mood is quite different.

*Indonesia calling. Through a static of gunfire they heard the voice of their homeland asking them to keep up the fight, to hold up all Dutch ships carrying arms to be used against the new republic.*
While the narration delivers concrete editorial on the emergency ‘at home’, and specifies the nature of shipping to be ‘held up’, the figural tableau in matching shots—3-shot, 2-shot, single close up—from the same camera angle delivers a sense of isolation, anxiety, thoughtfulness, and the concern of the two men together (the notepad, but they are not writing) for the one man alone, and in exile (the cigarettes, but he is not smoking).
While apparently producing a one-to-one relationship between narration and image—an image illustrating a narration or a narration describing the scene depicted—the treatment of word and image throughout the film is more subtle and complex than it first appears. For example, in this scene the imagery emphasises thoughtful anxiety and urgent decision making, whereas the narration is full of action. The aesthetic form performed through the image is also varied. There is actuality observation, staged observation and dramatic reconstruction of events, through to this highly stylised realism of the shortwave ‘Indonesia calling’ interiors.

In its totality the enunciation of the work is radically disrupted and disruptive. The confident, bombastic enthusiasm of the sync sound speeches are structured like parenthesis across the film’s 23 minutes, opening within the ‘impossible newsreel’ as an introduction to the ‘Indonesians welcome’ scenes, and closing as a penultimate celebration, prefiguring the final allegorical march of all nations across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. They march triumphantly towards the future, and in celebration of the birth of “a new nation”.

These sync scenes and mass action scenes have an aesthetic consistency; they are affirmative: as ‘crowd scenes’ they perform the force of working class organisation, emphasising the leadership of strong men, solid and responsible (the uniforms of army, navy and air force in the front of the march). The scenes I have called figural tableau also have their own rich and different aesthetic. The theatricality of their staging evokes an allegorical reading that draws the spectator into reflection on the figures as emblematic of an historic resistance to colonial power—allegories evoking a tradition of the oppressed—but even more powerfully the spectator is drawn to the ‘fate' of these men, these 'actuals', whose images remain for us now courtesy of the moving image and its
'redemption of physical reality' (Kracauer 1960: 296-309; Koch 2000: 106-111). This material specificity arises primarily from the allegorical moment. *Indonesia Calling* makes its silent figures 'speak', as image, through gesture and *mise-en-scene*.

These images speak at once of their hermeneutic of emancipation—their utopian hopefulness grounded within the concrete historical situation they depict—while at the same time, today, these figures are deeply imbued with tragedy. It is impossible to watch these scenes, with their finely fashioned portraits and in the knowledge of the Indonesian coup of 1965-6, supported by American power and Australian acquiescence and silence, the Suharto regime to follow, the 800,000 “communists” murdered by militia and military, without an overwhelming sense of grief. The image evokes mourning for a yet-to-be realised hope in the past, and dark melancholia fixated in the injustice of its un-mastered forgetting.

The editorial and creative ‘independence’ of the film, aligned as it is in articulating the vision and needs of the Indonesian revolution, by sheer contingency meets many of the criteria set out for the cultural producer by Walter Benjamin in his 1934 essay ‘The Author as Producer’. In this polemical piece from another ‘moment of crisis’—not published during his lifetime—Benjamin advocates among other things that writers learn photography, as by these means the cultural producer might “overthrow another of the barriers... that fetter the production of intellectuals... the barrier between writing and image.” John Heartfield is Benjamin’s exemplarily instance.

Benjamin is keen to commend the pamphlet against the resolved literary work, emphasising the urgency after 1933 for intellectual work to contribute interventions that might do “organising” work. By this he meant not only pertinent and timely pedagogy and advocacy, but also a commitment to experiment, to organising materials and production processes in ways that “adapt” the apparatus and “interrupt” the spectator’s consumption. *Indonesia Calling* certainly does that.

The ‘newsreel’ is coherent and neat in its performance of 'factual' film, while its editorial performs a mode of immanent critique, announcing the legitimacy of another kind of newsreel— a ‘people’s history’ perhaps. These workers in male solidarity, gathering, meeting, striking, speechifying from platforms and marching in mass demonstrations, stage the optimism and strength of an international working class; they personify myths of the early 20th century inherited from the 19th. The informal, observatory scenes depict the ordinary in service of an agenda challenging fundamental taken-for-granted xenophobia of the conservative Australian post-war social world with a utopian vision of a progressive multiculturalism, but they still depict women in ‘traditional’ roles. Staged, silent tableaus, scenes aesthetically most distant from documentary actuality that feel like another film entirely, maintain the most striking historicity and emotional impact. In these various ways, *Indonesia Calling* in the totality of its form articulates its delinquent mode of production. In doing so, for some, it has ‘fallen from grace’ for a long time. However the film also has
pertinence and has become recognisable today in a number of territories: historical, cultural and political. Its ‘primary purpose’ (in the language of Renov) in preserving traces of a past moment of significance is recognised in the context of political and cultural histories in both Sydney and Jakarta (if not so much today in Amsterdam).

The Maritime Museum in Sydney anticipates building a story around the film in its new exhibition space currently under development; in Jakarta the film is the centrepiece of screenings celebrating August 17, the anniversary of Indonesia’s declaration of independence. These kinds of welcoming gestures can be read also as forms of accommodation, domesticating the radical moment of the film’s original appearance, recuperating its dissent into a new orthodoxy. Nonetheless, it survives in its 23 minutes serving multiple purposes.

The film’s delinquent form is broken down even further into fragments and reconstituted for contemporary purposes in Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia (2009). In this essayist re-versioning, the original film becomes emblematic of an oppositional imperative; the ‘revisit’ film seeks to conjure a tradition for film-on-the-left in Australia, calling on Indonesia Calling for something almost approaching a myth of origin. Ivens’ film is recalled 60 years after its first appearance as creative documentary in an ‘activist’ mode, and as such, a crucial memory at a moment when the tradition of documentary that is not newsreel, that is not journalism, that is not ‘factual entertainment’, and that is not ‘reality’ again finds itself in danger.
Conclusion: ‘Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’

While the structures of financing in Australia today favour factual television series and entertainment programs over documentary, this is not to say we inhabit a ‘post-documentary’ era. It is often tempting to think so, but as we have seen, the ‘crisis’ for the creative documentary is perennial; perhaps we could say, ‘It’s been all downhill since they sacked Professor Stout.’ Steve Thomas wrote an influential piece for Metro magazine in 2002 correctly declaring the parlous state of the ‘social documentary’ in Australia:

With the Australian independent one-hour documentary relegated to late-night viewing on ABC TV and replaced in prime time by ‘factual entertainment [...] we are starting to see the results of growing primacy in factual TV [...] in light of this trend, one might ask what kind of future there is [...] for locally produced documentaries which explore serious subjects in depth and concern themselves with critical reflection and social change (Thomas 2002: 152).

The documentary tradition in its diversity is not dead yet; pronouncements of its final demise are premature.\textsuperscript{158} Having said

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{158} Graham, T., ‘Who killed the documentary’ <tof.culture.org.au> September 3, 2012; or the edited version ‘Documentaries Slaughtered for Ratings Success’, The Australian, September 3, 2012.}
that, it is also important to acknowledge that filmmakers need to be increasingly agile in financing and producing strategies if they wish to make singular, authored, creative documentary. These works are less welcome today in the dominant machinery of distribution, broadcast television. This may not be new, but the dynamic in which resistance to a systemic tendency to conformism must be articulated is continually shifting. For example, it is symptomatic of the current climate that in 2012, ABC TV deleted the category ‘documentary’ from its staffing lexicon, replacing the previous ‘Head of Documentary’ position with a Head of Factual; the ABC’s People and Learning (i.e. previously Human Resources or the Personnel Department) no longer has use for the word ‘documentary’.

Defining ‘documentary’ and specifying its distinctiveness and difference from other forms of non-fiction or factual film, television and other media can be a troubling business. As discussed in Part Two, the task has fallen into the hands of Treasury.  

Scholarly innovation in the theoretical refiguring of ‘documentary’ may also be conscripted as this debate weaves between discourses of the academy, business and the courts. Arguments figuring the ‘broadening’ of documentary, to include factual forms that are already otherwise distinguished generically in scholarship, and in

institutional and professional practice as, for example, ‘specialist factual’, ‘nature’, ‘science’ and so on, not to mention the ‘infotainments’ mentioned above, can also posit ‘overturning an elite canon’ as a radical rhetorical gesture, as Docker’s argument did for television regulation in the 1990s. As we discuss in Parts One and Two, the ‘trade’ resisted the appearance of documentary as a category on similar grounds in Australia in the 1940s and 50s: it was derided as ‘elitist’. With the return of a ‘straw man’—a ‘Griersonian elite canon’ (Roscoe 2004, 288-295; Beattie 2010, 140-153) in the 21st century, scholars and filmmakers have a more complex discursive field to negotiate.

A scholarly community critically engaged with the policy implications of discursive research becomes ever more urgent as the centrality of the ‘logic of the market’ increasingly threatens to exclude other values and needs. Further research directed towards the creation of institutional forms that might link more closely the growing academic interest in documentary with its articulation as practice, and this with a critical engagement in policy development, could encourage more dynamic and productive relations between Australian documentary scholarship and documentary practice.

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160 In the early 1990s, cultural studies academic John Docker was brought forward in the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal to defend the deregulation of commercial broadcasting on the grounds that a ‘great divide’ between mass culture and ‘high’ culture had lately collapsed. It was argued that regulations requiring commercial broadcasters to deliver social benefits to their audiences as citizens—aside from the commercial imperatives of audiences as aggregates for advertisers—were therefore no longer defensible; the market was the beginning and the end determinant of value (Docker 1991; see also replies to Docker: Media Information Australia 59: 1991).
At the level of industry support there is the usual ambivalence and ambiguities; rhetoric does not necessarily align with practice. But the optimist can take heart in the fact that Screen Australia affirms its commitment to creatively ambitious documentary, and acknowledges that public broadcasting is inhibiting its development. Screen Australia retains the ‘Signature Fund’, not reliant on a broadcasting presale (and with an increased allocation in 2012 from $700,000 to $1.4M). In 2012 it announced a development program, the ‘Think Big Documentary Lab’, supporting more adventurous documentary.¹⁶¹ Screen Australia acknowledges these programs are in response to filmmakers’ organised advocacy (‘Open letter to the documentary sector from Fiona Cameron, Screen Australia’, ‘tof’, September 12, 2012).

My personal perspective favours “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will” (Gramsci¹⁶²) in this regard. As long as a full spectrum of independent documentary can maintain its legitimacy, and for the moment Cameron’s letter above is evidence that despite the relative modesty of the commitment, its legitimacy is acknowledged, there is some hope that new work can find support from Commonwealth agencies.

The turbulent field of technological change, shifting relations between the individual, communities and media, and the convergence and divergence that characterise the present moment

¹⁶¹ This program is modeled on the ‘Headlands’ documentary program initiated by Mitzi Goldman and Pat Fiske at AFTRS 2006-8. ‘Headlands’ was discontinued when Screen Australia declined to finance it, instead developing their own version in 2012.

¹⁶² In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci attributed this well-known epigram ‘pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will’ to Romain Rolland (Buttigeig, in Gramsci, 1992: 12).
are as much opportunities for new articulations of documentary as they are threats. The hegemony of television itself is in decline. In the meantime, agile filmmakers are finding ways to invest factual forms with works of creative documentary voice (for example, *The Man Who Jumped*, 2006; *Go Back Where You Came From*, 2011).

At the same time many filmmakers continue to choose the relative creative autonomy that working outside the mechanisms of State subsidy affords. The example of Ivens’ *Indonesia Calling* continues to remind us not to lose sight of the potential longevity, and impact, of a delinquent, activist documentary practice in collaboration with minority voices seeking an emancipated life. “Even the dead will not be safe [...]” without this remembrance.
AFTER INDONESIA CALLING

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* Financed with SDF; # Refused TV broadcast in Australia