



REHEARSAL FOR WAR

LET THE SCREEN HELP

By Andrew Buchanan



BACKGROUND

Andrew Buchanan (1877–1958)

British Author, Social Commentator, and Early Media Critic

Andrew Buchanan was a British writer and journalist active in the early twentieth century, best known for his work; **Rehearsal for War**.

Writing in the shadow of escalating European tensions, Buchanan examined how societies are **psychologically prepared for conflict** long before the first shots are fired.

He was less concerned with battlefield tactics than with cultural conditioning — the ways rhetoric, public sentiment, nationalism, and emerging mass media systems **shape collective thought**.

Through speeches, newspapers, political framing, and repeated imagery, populations can be gradually **acclimated to hostility**.

His work stands as an early warning about the power of communication systems to **influence civic behavior** — a concern that feels strikingly contemporary in today's digitally mediated world.

Buchanan argued that war does not begin on the front lines; it begins **in the imagination of the public**.

His work stands as an early warning about the **power of communication systems to influence civic behavior** — a concern that feels strikingly contemporary in today's digitally mediated world.



READING OBJECTIVE

01

The objective of **Rehearsal for War: Let the Screen Help** is to help readers recognize that **media does not merely entertain** — it conditions.

The work invites us to examine how repeated images, narratives, and cultural messaging **shape public emotion**, normalize certain **behaviors**, and prepare societies for **collective action**, long **before** policy or conflict emerges.

It asks readers to slow down and **notice the rehearsal happening around them**.

02

At the same time, the text challenges us to **move beyond fear** and toward **intentional engagement**.

If screens can condition **division**, they can also cultivate **discernment, empathy, and responsibility**.

The goal for the reader is not withdrawal from media, but **awareness** — learning how to let the screen help rather than harm by **understanding its power** and choosing to engage it with **purpose**.





REHEARSAL FOR WAR

PART 1



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 1

I write these words in a **country at war**.

Whether peace will have broken out by the time they are in print makes no difference to what I have to say.

To-day, films lie coiled in tins, **unreleased**.

The industry lurks, **uncertain**, behind sandbags.

Some people tell me that the war will be over in a month; others, in three years.

Some want to fight to a bitter end.

Others are of military age. For me, there has been no **fundamental peace** since 1918.

Merely a cessation of hostilities.

And now the question, which looms larger than most others, is, has film been utilized to the **best advantage** since the Armistice?

Has it made a major contribution to **peace**?

Is it now being used in the best possible way under the worst possible circumstances?

“**No**” seems the word which answers all those questions.

I have always contended that Film is the **mightiest** influence in our midst - that it should have been **the ambassador** which brought peace to the world during the last twenty years - peace, as distinct from a period of apparent quiet during which **nationalistic hatred** was permitted, indeed encouraged to smelter and increase in **intensity** until it burst into flames.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 1 (CONTINUED)

The nations have rarely utilised Film to create **international friendship**.

Usually they have turned our reels insulating that they are, respectively, **superior** to their neighbours.

Since the last war, a generation has grown up which owes a great amount of its **reasoning power, or lack of it**, to the screen.

With few exceptions, the screen has not been allowed to exert its unique power for furthering **international understanding** which lifts it above the printed word and even above the broadcast message.

Film has achieved **material** success, but that is all, and progress, material progress uninfluenced by the spiritual factor, is **without ultimate value**.

Film has provided the third side of a pattern best described as an **Infernal Triangle**, composed of press, radio and screen - a network which casts its influence over the entire globe.

All nations have contributed to its creation - all use it **for their own ends** - all their ends are righteous - all their peoples **suffer**.

A vivid and tragic example of the **misuse** of the achievements of science.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR - PART 01

SUMMARY

Written during a time of global conflict, **Rehearsal for War** argues that film possessed the power to promote international understanding but largely failed to use it.

Instead of fostering peace after the last war, **cinema often reinforced nationalism and cultural superiority**, allowing hostility between nations to grow beneath a surface of quiet.

Because a generation's thinking has been shaped by the screen, the medium carries influence greater than print or radio. Yet film pursued material success **rather than moral purpose**.

Together with press and radio, it formed an “infernal triangle” of media capable of shaping global opinion—**often used in ways that ultimately harm humanity**.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR

PART 2



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 2

It may be contended that radio is mightier than film, and this thought gains ground when we remember that millions, in all nations, hear, simultaneously, the voices of their respective governments, which, with verbal bullets, penetrate into millions of minds, daily, nightly.

The policy of a nation may be right—it may be wrong, but one cannot escape from the invisible bombardment ceaselessly formulating it.

Yet, its invisibility renders it less effective than film, which is both seen and heard.

The power of radio lies in the fact that it enters one's home, whereas film confronts only those who seek it.

Nevertheless, the accessibility of cinemas in large numbers, together with the universal opinion that entertainment in film form is an essential factor in modern life, finally lifts the

screen above the loudspeaker, at least insofar as power of appeal is concerned.

For a long time Germany has been making films, both for internal and neutral nation release, projecting herself flatteringly, knowing the value of screen propaganda.

Her productions have been beautifully made. America, too, has, for years, been publicizing no less an object than America, which is consequently the best-known nation in the world.

Again, the Soviet film is a powerful example of how film can be utilized to project governmental policy. True, it has been used by Russia for internal consumption, but the lesson is there.

However, generally speaking, the outputs of the world have contributed toward nationalism rather than internationalism, in the non-political, human sense of the word.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 2 (CONTINUED)

Producers have been molding minds in no new, enlightened way, but in accordance with the traditional, accepted viewpoint which makes war inevitable.

But, one says, a commercial industry must watch the box office—must “give the public what it wants”—must amuse and not moralize.

Unfortunately, we have not learned how to cater for the public and at the same time save it from itself. We have played for safety, which, once again, turns out to be the most dangerous of all games.

That is why I deplore the fact that the screen has not been made to contribute toward a finer civilization.

It has been satisfied, the world over, to offer negative propaganda, which is commercially safe, instead of having the courage and the vision to present positive propaganda.

“Ah, come now, but it’s no use crying over spilled milk,” someone murmurs.

Surely today’s tragedy is due to the fact that we are all pretending we have never spilled any milk, yet we know we have spilled gallons of it.

Now it has turned sour, and we are hastening to remove the ugly stains, lest they reveal guilt for the chaos which surrounds us.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR - PART 02

SUMMARY

In this passage, the author compares the influence of radio and film as **tools for shaping public opinion**. Radio reaches millions of people simultaneously inside their homes, delivering government messages that act like **“verbal bullets,”** constantly **shaping national attitudes**.

Yet despite this invisible bombardment, film possesses a deeper persuasive power because it combines image and sound, making ideas more **emotionally compelling**.

While radio enters the home, cinema attracts large audiences who see and hear stories together, giving the screen a unique ability to **influence how people understand the world**.

Ultimately, the author criticizes the **global film industry** for prioritizing **commercial safety** over social responsibility. Producers often claim they must simply **entertain audiences and protect the box office**, but this cautious approach has prevented cinema from helping **build a more peaceful civilization**. By relying on safe, **negative narratives** rather than **courageous storytelling** that promotes understanding, the screen has failed to use its full power for good.

The tragedy, the author suggests, is not just past mistakes, but **society’s refusal to admit them**—even as the **consequences of those choices** continue to shape the world.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR

PART 3



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 3

Can film help to clarify the position, now, and in the future? Most certainly.

In the last war, the British industry lost its grip.

Now, we are sensibly determined to hold everything together—to be ready to assume, when hostilities cease—to make the film serve us to the best advantage.

How? There are three main methods: first, entertainment; second, news; third, propaganda.

The first two will look after themselves, given the right encouragement.

The third demands more than encouragement. It needs vision and action.

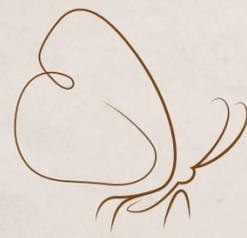
Prior to the present German regime, I worked in close cooperation with that nation and

secured numerous facilities for filming its life, the results being released throughout Great Britain.

I made similar arrangements with several other European countries and, for ten years, urged that Britain should project herself in the same manner throughout Europe, but without success.

I felt, and still feel, that fundamental peace can be secured not by armed threats, superior force, territorial expansion, nor by narrow nationalism, but by an ever-increasing understanding of the peoples by the peoples via the screen, which is the surest way of bringing one country before another.

This fact is doubly significant when one remembers that nations would be non-existent without their citizens.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR - PART 03

IN SUMMARY

In Part Three of *Rehearsal for War*, Andrew Buchanan argues that film has the power to clarify global understanding both in the present and in the future. Reflecting on the lessons of the First World War, he suggests that the British Empire failed to fully use film as a tool for communication and cultural connection across nations.

As tensions again rise in Europe, Buchanan urges governments and cultural institutions to prepare film as a strategic instrument that can serve society once hostilities end. He explains that cinema operates through three primary functions: entertainment, news, and propaganda. While entertainment and news will naturally develop with encouragement, propaganda—or what Buchanan implies as purposeful messaging—requires vision and deliberate action.

Drawing from his own experience working with European nations to film and share cultural life across borders, Buchanan recalls how he tried for years to persuade Britain to project its society abroad through film, believing that such exchanges could strengthen mutual understanding among nations.

Ultimately, Buchanan concludes that lasting peace cannot be secured through military force, territorial expansion, or narrow nationalism. Instead, he argues that peace depends on increasing understanding between peoples. Film, he believed, offered the fastest and most powerful way to present one nation to another, allowing citizens to see and understand one another directly.

Because nations exist only through their citizens, Buchanan believed that strengthening connections between people through the screen could become a powerful foundation for global cooperation and peace.



REHEARSAL FOR WAR

PART 4



REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 4

But, Europe apart, what of the British Empire—the greatest network of all, yet the most poorly represented on the screens of the world? Is not Chicago more familiar to British people than, say, Toronto or Melbourne?

Have we ever really seen life in Canada, heard the voices of South Africans, studied the beauties of India, or witnessed any pictorial tributes to the pioneer work in our colonies?

And, despite the growing success of recent British feature films in the Dominions, do the peoples of those vast countries know how Great Britain lives, what it looks like, and all the rest of it?

Surely the time is overdue for the establishing of business-like production centres in every Dominion, controlled by expert technicians, which shall create a ceaseless flow of short films (long ones too), in time for projection

not only in Britain but throughout the world.

Whilst we, in turn, make an equally continuous output which shall show the Dominions what Britain is really like.

A spasmodic outpour is not enough. The flow needs to be as steady as newsreel outlets, and as far-reaching.

Moreover, this great interchanging program should, I suggest, present the constructive side of life—should reveal man's great achievements in the cause of peace, so very different from the conventional picture of their misuse in the cause of war.

Let the nations of Europe see the Dominions come, and the Dominions learn of Europe.

Let Britain show her ramifications, which are for the general welfare of humanity, to humanity.



(CONTINUED)

REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 4

Let all these films crush the spirit of suspicion which is rampant everywhere, and above all let the screen do what it can do better than any other medium - prove to the peoples of each nation that fundamentally they are just like the peoples of all other nations.

Therein lies the answer to world stability and sanity, and the answer to those who control the destinies of countries who urge millions of citizens to destroy each other in a vain attempt to achieve national security.

Therefore, this is no time for the celluloid ambassador to receive its passport. Instead, it must make up for lost opportunities—now.

- Andrew Buchanan, Author



REHEARSAL FOR WAR - PART 04 IN SUMMARY

In this passage, the author compares the influence of radio and film as **tools** for shaping public opinion.

Radio reaches millions of people simultaneously inside their homes, delivering government messages that act like “**verbal bullets,**” constantly shaping national attitudes.

Yet despite this invisible **bombardment**, film possesses a deeper persuasive power because it **combines image and sound**, making ideas more **emotionally** compelling.

While radio enters the home, cinema attracts large audiences who see and hear stories together, giving the screen a **unique ability** to influence how people understand the world.

ANALYSIS

WHY ANDREW BUCHANAN'S CENTURY-OLD INSIGHT STILL MATTERS

WHEN YESTERDAY'S WARNING
SOUNDS LIKE TODAY'S HEADLINES



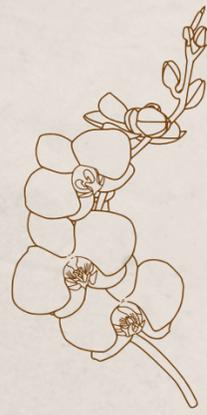
More than one hundred years ago, Andrew Buchanan was writing about screens — or rather, the early forms of **mediated influence** that were **reshaping public thought** in his time.

The technology was different. The pace was slower. The devices were not carried in pockets. But the central concern he raised feels uncannily familiar: how emerging media environments **shape the minds, emotions, and behaviors** of the public — especially the young.

Buchanan was not reacting to smartphones, social media algorithms, or 24-hour news cycles.

Yet he recognized something **foundational**: when a new communication medium becomes **dominant**, it does more than transmit information — it **reshapes** perception itself.

That insight **echoes loudly** today.



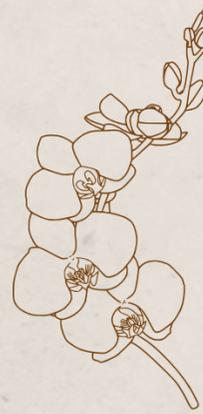
CONCLUSION: 01

Then: Concern About Influence

In Buchanan's era, rapid technological shifts were changing how people received information. There was anxiety about passive consumption, about suggestion, about how images and narratives might affect impressionable minds. Adults wondered whether youth were being shaped more by mediated experiences than by direct human relationships. Sound familiar?

Today, parents and educators worry about algorithmic feeds, curated identities, viral misinformation, and digital comparison culture. The tools are more sophisticated, but the tension is the same:

Who is shaping the imagination of the next generation?



CONCLUSION: 02

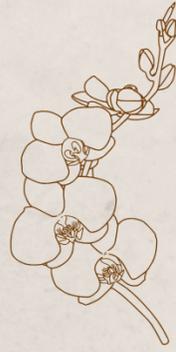
Then: Fear of Passivity

Buchanan's writing suggests a concern about unexamined exposure — about media shaping thought without resistance. That is strikingly relevant in today's scroll culture, where reaction often replaces reflection.

Modern media environments reward speed over depth. Emotion over nuance.

Visibility over truth. But the deeper issue is not the device. It is passivity.

When young people consume without questioning, absorb without analyzing, scroll without pausing — they are being shaped. Buchanan understood this dynamic long before push notifications existed.



CONCLUSION: 03

Then: The Opportunity for Guidance

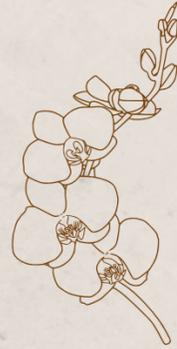
What makes Buchanan's article especially relevant is that it was not purely alarmist. It recognized that media could influence — but also implied that influence could be guided.

That is where his century-old wisdom intersects directly with today's film media literacy movement.

The problem is not that screens exist. The problem is that we have not built a cultural infrastructure strong enough to teach intentional engagement.

At People 4 People Productions, we frame this as narrative power. When young people learn how images are constructed, how stories are framed, and how persuasion operates, they shift from passive recipients to active interpreters.

And eventually — to creators.



CONCLUSION: 04

The Conditions Are Louder Now

The emotional stakes feel higher today. Research on mental health, anxiety, and digital overload reveals measurable consequences of constant mediated exposure.

Our media ecosystem is global, instantaneous, and monetized through attention extraction. Algorithms personalize influence at scale.

Yet beneath the noise, the core condition Buchanan described remains:

Media environments shape consciousness.

That truth has not aged.



CONCLUSION: 05

What Has Changed:

Speed

Scale

Algorithmic targeting

Ubiquity

What Hasn't Changed:

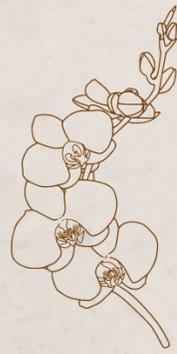
Human susceptibility to suggestion

Youth vulnerability to comparison

The power of repeated imagery

The need for adult guidance

If anything, Buchanan's early reflections now feel prophetic.
The concerns he raised have intensified — but so has our opportunity.



CONCLUSION: 06

The Modern Imperative: Teach Discernment

Buchanan wrote in an era when mass media was expanding.

We live in an era when mass media has become immersive.

That shift makes one thing clear:

Avoidance is not a strategy.

Withdrawal is not a solution.

Education is.

Media literacy is no longer optional enrichment — it is civic preparation.

It is mental health support. It is democratic infrastructure.

When People 4 People Productions teaches young people how to interpret images, question narratives, and construct their own stories responsibly, we answer Buchanan's century-old concern with a contemporary solution.



CONCLUSION: 07

The Enduring Question

More than one hundred years later, we are still asking:
How do we ensure that emerging media tools serve human development —
rather than undermine it?

That question is not historical. **It is urgent.**

And perhaps the greatest testament to Buchanan's relevance is this:

We are still living inside the condition he described.

The difference is that now, **we have the tools** — and the responsibility —
to respond intentionally.

FINAL THOUGHT

Film as a Bridge: How Cinema Can Build World Peace and Global Community

Film is one of the few languages that does not require translation to be felt. A close-up of a mother's face. A child running toward the ocean for the first time. A community gathering after loss. These images communicate emotion across borders, cultures, and political systems. Long before policy agreements are signed, human understanding is formed through story.

Throughout history, cinema has shaped global consciousness. Italian neorealism revealed the dignity of ordinary people after war. African and Latin American filmmakers documented liberation struggles from inside their communities. Documentary movements have exposed injustice while amplifying unheard voices. Film has the power not only to reflect society— but to rehumanize it.

The same medium that can divide can also **unite**.

Too often, media systems are **weaponized**. Narratives are framed to **exaggerate difference**. Images are selected to **reinforce fear**. **Algorithms** reward **outrage**.

In such an environment, citizens may come to see distant nations not as communities of people, but as **abstractions or threats**. When stories narrow, empathy shrinks.

But film can do the opposite.

A **thoughtfully crafted** film invites viewers into lived experience. It allows audiences to sit inside another culture's rhythms, humor, grief, and daily rituals.

When viewers recognize themselves in someone who speaks another language or lives on another continent, separation begins to dissolve. The "**other**" becomes human.

This is the **foundation** of global peace: **humanization**.

Imagine if **nations** intentionally invested in **collaborative storytelling** initiatives — youth filmmakers in Nairobi partnering with students in Detroit, rural communities in India exchanging short documentaries with classrooms in Brazil, refugee youth co-creating digital narratives with peers in Europe. Instead of exporting propaganda, countries could export perspective.

Film can become a **diplomatic bridge**. When citizens see one another beyond headlines, policy conversations shift. **Fear-driven narratives** lose power when countered by authentic, community-rooted stories. Cultural exchange through film fosters **curiosity** instead of **suspicion**. It creates a **shared emotional vocabulary**.

This does not mean ignoring conflict. On the contrary, film can responsibly document injustice while still affirming shared humanity. Peace is not the absence of tension; it is the **presence of understanding**.

The global community **already shares** a digital infrastructure. The question is how we use it. Will media ecosystems amplify division, or cultivate dialogue? Will they prioritize **spectacle, or understanding?**

Governments, educators, and cultural institutions have an opportunity to treat media not merely as entertainment, but as **civic infrastructure**. When film education teaches young people to analyze representation, question stereotypes, and create cross-cultural narratives, it builds a generation **less vulnerable to manipulation** and more capable of **empathy**.

Film for world peace is not **naïve optimism**. It is strategic **human development**. It encourages **perspective-taking**. It reduces dehumanization.

It creates **emotional literacy** across borders.
It provides space for **collaborative problem-solving**.

Global challenges — climate change, migration, economic inequality, technological ethics — **cannot be solved** within **isolated national narratives**. They require shared understanding. Film, when used intentionally, creates the **emotional groundwork** for that cooperation.

In a century defined by rapid communication and cultural interconnection, nations face a choice: **compete** through media influence or **collaborate** through media understanding.

The camera can be used to surveil, distort, and inflame.

Or it can be used to listen, reveal, and connect.

World peace begins **long before** treaties.

It begins when citizens see each other **clearly**.

Film offers that possibility — not as fantasy, but as practice.

When nations **commit to using media to connect** rather than divide, cinema becomes more than **art**.

It becomes diplomacy.

It becomes education.

It becomes **infrastructure** for a **shared future**.

