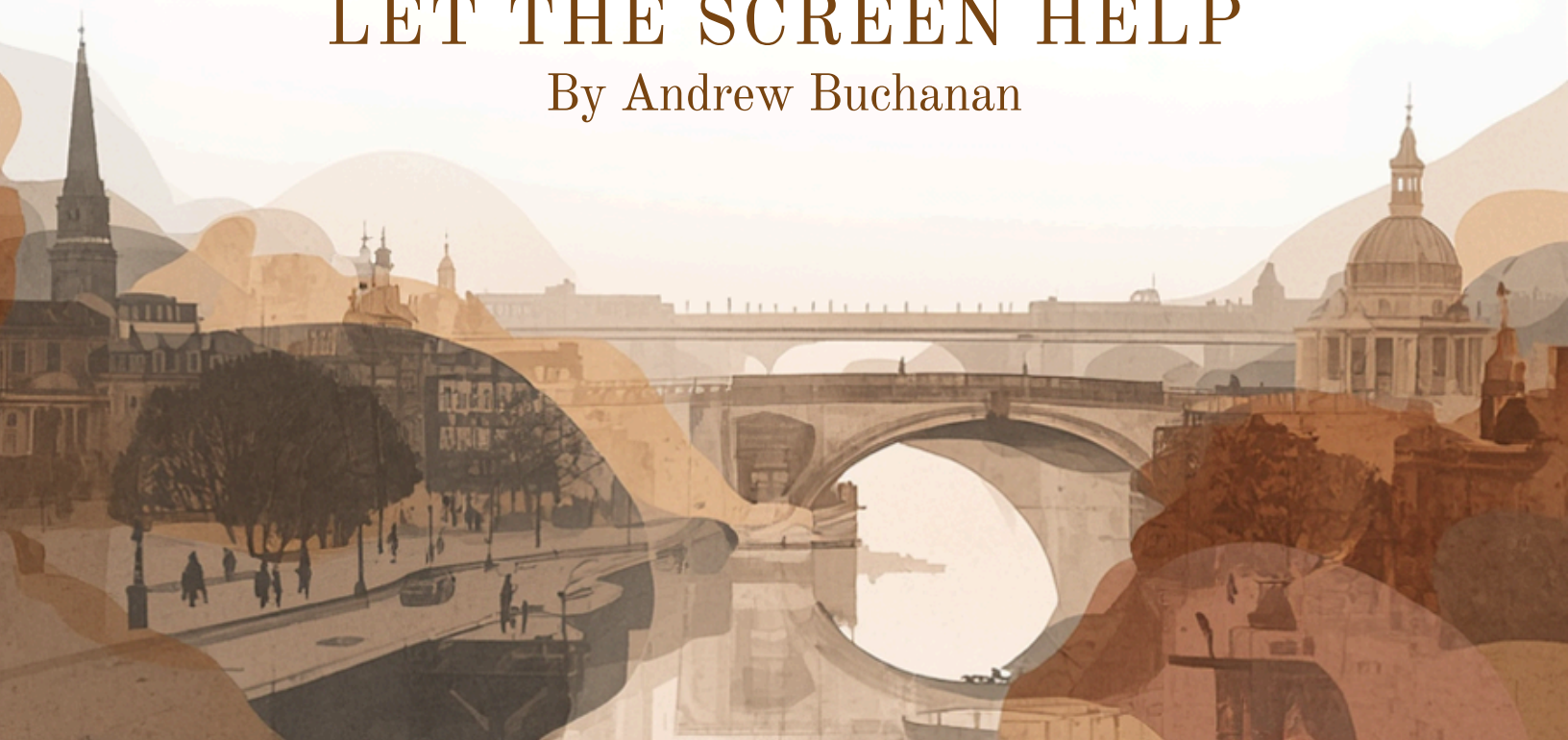




REHEARSAL FOR WAR

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

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.



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REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 1

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

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.





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

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.



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REHEARSAL FOR WAR – PART 2

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

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

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.



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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.