

"If you think that I do not feel that I have been in the business of conditioning the imagination of mankind, you're crazy. But then, every goddamn rabbi, every prophet and every priest before me has been in the business of conditioning the imagination of mankind. I derive my authority from Moses . . . I deny this miserable modern habit of to deride or to deny the right of the prophet or preacher. Masterminding is a valid activity of the human spirit and medicine men are worthy of their hire."

AN ANECDOTE AND A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF John Grierson

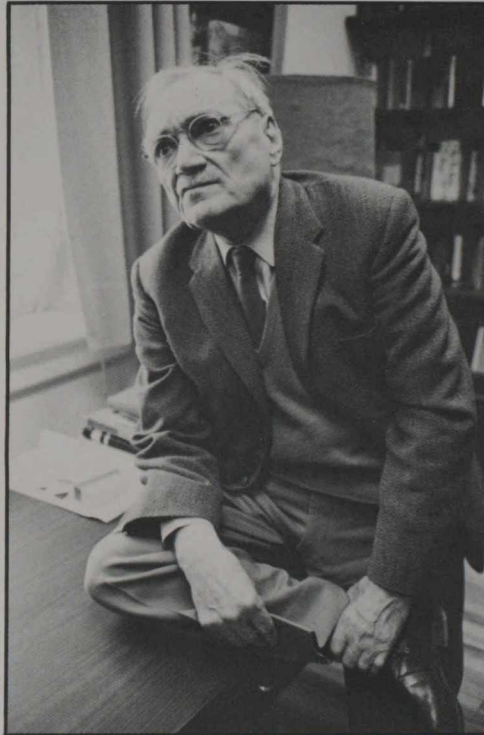
The most effective piece of anti-Nazi film propaganda in World War II seemed accidental — a captured Nazi newsreel showing Hitler doing a jig after the French had formally surrendered. It was a strange jig, one might say an insane jig or an obscene jig. Hitler childish and gleeful, jumping up and down in idiot delight.

It seems probable that Hitler never danced that jig — that John Grierson invented it by sophisticated manipulation, by taking the actual footage of Hitler walking and then speeding it up.

It is an interesting tale. If true it gives an interesting insight into the complex mind and motives of an evangelical genius. Grierson almost despised fiction — he and his films were concerned

from the beginning with reality. But he also despised cinema vérité.

He was born in Scotland in 1898. He went to the University of Glasgow and to the United States on a Rockefeller grant. In 1929 he made "Drifters" in England for the Empire Marketing Board. "Drifters" was the life of the herring fishermen in the North Sea. It was a new kind of film, a "documentary" as he called it, not unique — Robert Flaherty was making his own astounding films of isolated people — but with its own distinction. When austerity clipped the Empire Marketers, Grierson went to the General Post Office and made "Nightmail" and "Song of Ceylon." His reputation was now international, and as the Thirties were about to end and World War



II about to begin, Prime Minister Mackenzie King persuaded him to come to Canada and be the prime mover and the first Director of the National Film Board.

He remained until 1947 and he left his imperishable mark on Canada and on film making.

The quotations from the man, with this article, reveal a man of enormous ego and granite beliefs. He was an elitist. He did not suffer fools gladly. He was against the Establishment but hardly of the New Left.

And he has said, for example: "You may not tell lies to the public. Your duty to the public is more important than your duty to your wife and children not to say your

bloody conscience before God. You can tell private lies. That's o.k. That we do in fictional movies. But public lies may not be told."

But he did not believe that truth was a simple thing to tell; that one could simply point a camera and let it run.

"There is no such thing as truth until you've made it into a form. Truth is an interpretation, a perception. You've got moral laws to affect it, you've got social laws, you've got esthetic laws. What is truth isn't a nasty question at all — it's a question that forever is with you when you're a film maker. It's to make your truth as many-faceted and as deep, as various, as exciting, as possible that you are an artist."

Mr. Grierson died last February in Bath, England, at the age of seventy-three.