

NATURE AND THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Ph.D. Thesis – Michael D. Clemens; McMaster University - History

**FRAMING NATURE AND NATION: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CINEMA OF
THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD, 1939-1974**

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

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Lay Abstract

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) was established and financed by the federal government to be the “eyes of Canada.” It is therefore a valuable site in which to examine, among other things, how the state defined the limits and uses of nature. While NFB discourses about the environment often mirrored state ideology, they also reflected alternative voices and perspectives. Filmmakers made documentaries within the NFB production system that challenged, questioned, or even ridiculed state ideology. In other words, nature was not only imagined as a national resource to be exploited and controlled through technology and science, it was also envisioned as something to be appreciated for its ecological diversity and its wildness.

Abstract

This project is about the visual ways people represent the nonhuman world, and the struggles over its meaning. It is the story of how the Canadian government used the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) to manufacture and sustain a national identity that was defined by its encounters with nature, and how those definitions morphed over time. The NFB was established in 1939 by the federal government. It was to be the eyes and ears of Canada, a way for Canadians to experience the nation. As a cultural institution supported by the state, the NFB is fertile ground for an examination of state discourses about nature. In particular, I analyze NFB films as vehicles for the Canadian government's long-running nation-building project. Between 1939 and 1974, NFB filmmakers aligned their representations of nature with the views of the government. They imagined nature as a unifying symbol of national identity and as an object to be surveyed, rationalized and exploited by government institutions. Utilitarian narratives about natural resources and wilderness management served other ideological motives too. Specifically, NFB films about nature in the postwar period privileged a high modern way of seeing the environment.

This project also seeks to discern instances of ideological conflict between filmmakers and official "environmental" viewpoints, where government strategies are questioned, ridiculed or reformulated in the films themselves. Although the NFB is a product of state policy as well as an interpreter of it, it was also actively involved in producing grass-roots narratives about the environment. The NFB's directive to "interpret Canada to Canadians" unwittingly created opportunities for independent filmmakers to

share their own visions of nature that often diverged from the state. This project therefore investigates moments where filmmakers used the camera as an apparatus of reflection to challenge and subvert state modes of thinking.

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Introduction

Cinema matters. The films we watch are ideologically productive texts that shape the way we interact with the physical world. Moving pictures of flora, fauna, and terrestrial places contribute to our affective and cognitive relationship with nature.¹ As the German film theorist Siegfried Kracaur once observed, cinema “has a definite bearing on the era into which it is born; that it meets our inmost needs precisely by exposing—for the first time, as it were—outer reality and thus deepening, in Gabriel Marcel's words, our relation to ‘this Earth which is our habitat.’”²

The questions, then, are this: how have humans used the movie camera to visualize the world in which they inhabit? How do these images influence our sense of place? Of time? Who is behind the camera directing our gaze? And what is their intent in projecting these powerful images? This dissertation is a historically and geographically specific attempt to answer these questions. In the following pages, I dissect the role cinema played in shaping, reinforcing, and destabilizing dominant attitudes about the environment in twentieth-century Canadian society. Rather than looking at the entire canon of Canadian filmmaking, however, I focus my investigation on the documentary films produced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), an agency established and

¹ Cinema helps shape our perception of place. This process of identification and meaning making is analogous to what Chinese-American geographer Yi Fu Tuan terms “topophilia.” See: Yi Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). The idea that films influence our relationship with the physical world is developed more comprehensively in *Adrian Ivakhiv, Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2013).

² Siegfried Kracaur, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), li.

funded by the federal government. I begin in 1939, with the foundation of the NFB, and end in 1974 amidst a period of budgetary retrenchment and political fragmentation.

Within these parameters, I chart how the National Film Board represented nature, and how it used the camera to define the limits, uses and meanings of the environment. I am also interested in the motivations behind these environmental discourses, and whether these representations changed or remained the same over time.

The National Film Board merits special consideration for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of the country's biggest producers and distributors of national cinema. The NFB has dominated the domestic film industry in Canada. Commercial filmmaking, by contrast, has had a less forceful impact in the Great White North.³ The National Film Board also warrants analysis because of its association with the federal government. The NFB is the author of an "official" cinema, guided by the principles and political whims of the state. The Board's existence as an institution of the federal government therefore has a certain bearing on the kinds of films it makes, including those about nature. Historically, the majority of NFB films about the environment were didactic, visual pamphlets created for the purpose of instructing the public on how to think and behave toward the natural world. For scholars interested in the development of the welfare state, this intercession in the daily routines Canadians may not be particularly surprising. The government has used a range of methods to intervene in the ecological relationships of Canadians throughout

³ See: Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

the twentieth century. Typically it was done through education or lawmaking.⁴

Sometimes, when standard methods were inadequate, the state used non-traditional approaches like filmmaking to consolidate the public's consensus. This is significant. Unlike other technologies of authority, cinema has the prodigious ability to shape hearts and minds. An investigation of the National Film Board can therefore provide a new perspective into the ways the government arbitrated Canadians' interactions with nature. Furthermore, it can help explain how state institutions defined nature and justified its managerial authority over the environment in the twentieth century.

There is another reason why the National Film Board is worth studying. Film, is never fixed. It is multivalent and open to interpretation - it has the revolutionary ability to "talk back." Filmmaking can be used to undermine existing power structures and destabilize normative views, including those about of the natural world. In the case of the NFB, an institution funded by and accountable to the federal government, these alternate discourses were generated from within. The government handed over the tools of political protest and story-telling to the general public through its own production and distribution channels. By examining the documentaries of the NFB, we can glean insight into how Canadian filmmakers used governmental forums (and money) to contest official definitions about nature. This dialectic between state ways of seeing and comparatively

⁴ For example, historian Mark McLaughlin has shown that the Canadian government used comic books to counteract the effects of the emerging environmental movement on economic growth. The narratives and images in these comic books supported state conservation initiatives. The hope was that this popular medium would shape audience subjectivities about nature. Mark McLaughlin, "Rise of the Eco-Comics: The State, Environmental Education and Canadian Comic Books, 1971-1975," in *Material Culture Review/Revue de la culture matérielle* no. 77 (2013).

radical non-mainstream perspectives is compelling and something I will highlight throughout this dissertation.

My project engages with a constellation of ideas and histories, but it is best understood within the context of a small but rapidly growing body of scholarship in environmental history. Since the publication of Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature* in 1999, a number of historians have looked at visual representations of nature in 19th and 20th century culture. Scholarship in this field usually focuses on inquiries into popular cinema and photography, what Mitman calls "the raw material from which wilderness as artifact has been forged."⁵ For the most part, environmental historians of visual culture discuss how images reinforce the Western myth that nature i.e. the non-human world is a place where people are not.⁶ While I take my inspiration from Mitman and other scholars such as Finis Dunaway and J. Keri Cronin, my examination of NFB cinema looks to expand on these ideas. Culture and ideology inform the way in which we imagine nature. These cultural constructions in turn shape our expectations of what nature ought to be. Rather than unpacking the ways popular commercial cinema reproduces normative (and often problematic) visions of the environment, this dissertation analyzes how the authorship of government institutions in non-fiction cinema inflects the ways in which nature is

⁵ Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

⁶ Arguably, the two most important texts in environmental history about the relationship between visual culture and nature are: Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* and Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). J. Keri Cronin, *Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology, and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

represented and understood.⁷ It is my hope that this inquiry will do two things: expose the historical links between the state and cultural constructions of nature; and show how even state-sponsored filmmaking can be used to critique fixed notions of nature.

The National Film Board and Nature

With the help of Scottish documentarian John Grierson, the Canadian federal government established the NFB in 1939 to be the “eyes of Canada.”⁸ Since then, the NFB has produced more than 13,000 documentaries, animated shorts, and feature films and won over 5000 awards. NFB cinema evolved overtime, accommodating new forms of visual technology and social climates. Nevertheless, its core mission, “to interpret Canada to Canadians and other nations,” remained constant.⁹ The word “interpret” is important here. The phrase, on the one hand, suggests that the National Film Board defined for Canadians what Canada looked like and what it ought to like in the years ahead. This nation-building objective was most explicit in the documentaries produced under the

⁷ Environmental historians are not the only ones, nor are they first, to discuss the ways visual culture imagines and interprets nature. Ecocritics have been discussing this very subject since the early 1990s. See: Pat Breerton, *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*, (Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2005). Since the early 1990s, ecocritics have explored the relationship between culture and nature. See: Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001); Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion, 2002); *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000); Cynthia Chris, *Watching Wildlife* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Sean Cubitt, *EcoMedia* (New York: Rodopi, 2005); *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, eds. C. Glotfelty, and H. Fromm, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.); Jhan Hochman, *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998); David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004); Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann, *Ecology and Popular Film* (Albany: Suny Press, 2009).

⁸ Grierson quoted in D.B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981), 30.

⁹ This wording is from the 1950s National Film Act. Quoted in, Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference, and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 79.

aegis of Grierson. After the commissioner's resignation in 1945, the Board continued to produce a state-authorized picture of national identity, albeit in ways that fit the times. By the 1950s, the NFB began experimenting with animation films and dramatic features that better represented Canada's multicultural population. It also established a Francophone production wing (1964), and began regionalizing its filmmaking activities in the 1970s in order to better represent local constituencies. Such aesthetic and institutional changes, however, did not distract the Board from its overarching mission of presenting Canada as a homogenous nation; a country united by its commitment towards the values of the welfare state. "Diversity," film scholar Christopher Gittings observes, "was ultimately still structured around the subsuming unity of the original nation-building project that Grierson saw the NFB forging."¹⁰ In other words, despite the NFB's apparent mindfulness of local voices, its films were nonetheless used to foster a sense of national identity, and to produce a citizenry in which individual conduct complied with national planning. As Zoe Druick demonstrates in *Projecting Canada*, the NFB was a form of "governmentality," a cultural technology used to manage populations and regulate citizenship.¹¹

As a state institution tasked with producing and distributing films that "interpreted Canada," the NFB is an intriguing window into governmental efforts to define the meaning and value of nature. Indeed, the first part of this dissertation analyzes NFB films about nature as pipelines for the Canadian government's ongoing nation-building project.

¹⁰ Gittings, 88 – 90.

¹¹ Zoe Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 3.

The National Film Board frequently propagated a state-authorized view of nature, which conflated progress with a healthy, abundant, and well-managed environment. Whether it was envisioning the land as an essential aspect of the national economy, or as a symbolic touchstone that reminded citizens of their rugged and industrious heritage, nature was an integral component of the Board's "official" characterization of nationhood in the twentieth century.

The slogan "to interpret Canada to Canadians and other nations" can be read in a completely different way. Interpretation also connotes complexity and variance. Subjectivity. NFB filmmakers "interpreted" Canada and its physical geography from different angles and vantage points. Instead of dutifully propagating state values, some filmmakers engaged with, and in some cases, contested mainstream definitions of nature and nation. Thus, the National Film Board can be studied as a site of exchange between the state and the public. The second part of my dissertation interrogates cases of ideological conflict between filmmakers and official governmental views. A closer inspection of individual films reveals that NFB filmmaking was not as linear (or compliant) as the Board's founders had hoped or predicted. State hegemony about the value of nature was questioned and disputed in NFB cinema despite the presence of governmental sponsors.

The Argument

Scholars generally agree that the National Film Board was an important tool of governance. One of the ways the NFB helped manage populations was by uniting citizens

under an official iconography of nationhood. An important feature of this state-authorized picture of Canada was nature. As historian Claire Campbell observes that a sense of belonging “requires visual and intellectual engagement with a place that we can see or imagine, and a story that we associate with it.”¹² From a governmental perspective, Film Board cinema was perfectly suited to this task of providing visual engagement with place. Emblematic depictions of the natural landscape in particular were used to cultivate a state-instituted version of what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.”¹³ According to the NFB, Canadians were defined by their relationship with the country’s immense and abundant geography.

Yoking the public to a national myth about Canadians’ ties to the land was not the only way the NFB supported the state’s nation-building objectives with respect to the environment. NFB filmmaking was also an effective means of conveying state policy and ideology with respect to the environment. In particular, NFB cinema promoted the governmental logic of high modernism, which James C. Scott defines as “a strong...muscle bound version of self confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of humans needs, the mastery of nature...and above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws.”¹⁴ National Film Board cinema in the 1950s and 1960s enthusiastically endorsed the state’s transformation of the physical environment, a

¹² Claire Campbell, “‘It was Canadian, Then Typically Canadian:’ Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 no. 1 (May, 2008), 8.

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Spread of Nationalism* (1983 reprint, New York: Verso, 1991).

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

process that was deemed essential for the development of postwar Canada.¹⁵

Government-sponsored films about wildlife management and natural resources in particular asserted that state experts and government men equipped with the latest technologies and degrees could control nature and maximize its efficiency.¹⁶

Consequently, NFB filmmakers overlooked traditional ways of interacting with nature, whether it was in the form of small-scale farming or subsistence hunting. These local practices were regarded as quaint or obsolete, and even antithetical to the progress of Canada as a modern liberal nation.

High modern discourses were further articulated in the visual schema of National Film Board filmmaking practices. To film like a state as the NFB did was to visualize geographic and social space “in an imperial and reductive way.”¹⁷ NFB filmmakers provided domestic and international viewers with a synoptic view of Canadian environments, “a way of seeing” closely associated with state power.¹⁸ To achieve this all-encompassing gaze, documentarians employed an assortment of cinematic techniques including wide-angle lenses, aerial footage, and disembodied narration that imposed order onto the footage. The camera panned, zoomed, and tracked its way through a range of

¹⁵ Canadian historians have used Scott’s concept of “seeing like a State” as an analytical tool in a variety of contexts. High modernism in particular has been used as a way to explain urban planning, agricultural reform, and the development of the North in Canada. It has also been a useful concept for environmental historians. The country’s postwar resource management and conservation strategies and the protection of wildlife and wilderness spaces have all been guided by the logic of high modernism to varying degrees. See: Tina Loo “High Modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at Seeing Like a State,” *Canadian Historical Review* 97, no. 1 (2016), 42.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that this high modernist tendency is apparent across ideological and national boundaries. For instance, high modernism and the role of the State is often associated with German forestry in the 18th century and the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 43.

¹⁸ Loo, “High Modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at Seeing Like a State,” 42.

geographies, providing an aggregate view of the physical (and potentially lucrative) properties of Canadian nature. This kind of framing mirrored the government's high modern vision of the land as discrete space; a selective view that suggested the earth could be rationalized and transformed.¹⁹

NFB documentaries also imitated the state's high modern efforts to simplify landscapes by condensing space and time. Through editing, filmmakers cut between images of a "traditional" past and a "modern" future in different regions of the country. In doing so, they created an abridged picture of Canadian geography. In films about the North, for example, documentarians juxtaposed a primitive landscape of "Eskimos," dogsleds, and igloos, and a modernized landscape characterized by airports, industrial development and the thrum of economic progress. The North was either imagined as a nostalgic landscape of the distant past, or a modern space, fully incorporated into mainstream Canada. Such binary categories made northern environments more legible, and more easily absorbed into narratives of progress and development.

The reductive view of landscape as modern or primitive in NFB cinema reflected the government's political and economic attitude toward far-away environs. Scholars have shown that the Canadian government repeatedly tried to impose order onto social and ecological spaces by defining them as static and fixed rather than fluid and historically contingent. The seemingly neutral and scientific language of documentary filmmaking buttressed these high-modern designations. In both government policy and NFB cinema, state authority and rational planning was assumed to be inevitable,

¹⁹Jeanne Haffner, *The View from Above: The Science of Social Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

necessary, and even preferable. The once impenetrable geography of places like the extreme North were quickly being converted into a fruitful and habitable landscape, at least that is what documentarians wanted audiences to believe.

And yet, NFB films did not always support state ways of seeing nature. We must account for the agency of individual filmmakers and their willingness to produce alternate visions of the natural world. I argue that many NFB filmmakers diverged from mainstream and official perspectives about nature. Certain filmmakers in the 1960s such as Larry Gosnell challenged the notion that humans could or should modify the environment en masse by showing how modern schemes to transform the environment resulted in polluted ecosystems. Other documentarians advocated for a non-instrumentalist appreciation of wildlife and wilderness spaces. Nature should not be exploited because this would destroy Canada's natural beauty, they argued. Bill Mason, Ernest Reid, and Christopher Chapman used their films to preach to Canadians the importance of protecting the country's last vestiges of wildness. Wilderness spaces were vital to the fabric of Canada because of their ecological diversity, and their national and spiritual significance. While their films did not always repudiate the directives of the government, environmental documentaries in this period introduced an alternative vision of nature that implicitly questioned the technocratic ambitions of modern Canada.

Several documentaries produced in the 1970s further challenged high modernity's design to simplify local environments. Unlike earlier documentaries about nature, which represented wilderness as a discrete unit to be exploited for economic gain, filmmakers like Boyce Richardson depicted humans as a keystone species. Certain communities such

as the James Bay Cree shaped, and were shaped by, the larger environment. This reciprocal relationship was founded on a complex understanding of nature and culture as dynamic forces that comingle. In addition to showing that humans could live harmoniously alongside nature instead of dominating it, Richardson also demonstrated how high modern projects destabilized traditional patterns of existence and exposed people to perilous ecological realities. *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974) and *Our Land is Our Life* (1974), both directed by Richardson, revealed that the industrial schemes of Quebec threatened these intricate webs of existence.

The environmental narratives of Bill Mason's *Cry of the Wild* (1972) or *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* did not mean that governmental perspectives disappeared, however. The state continued to participate in the activities of the National Film Board throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, many documentaries about nature were ambivalent about the role of the state in protecting the environment. They may have criticized modern civilization's desire to control nature, but in the same breath, they also argued that the state needs to manage nature in order to protect it. In many "environmental films," the government was promoted as a benevolent institution concerned with the welfare of the public and committed to conserving the country's resources through science and technology. In short, NFB films about nature were *negotiated* texts that jostled back and forth between high modern state attitudes and environmental points of view. As a historical text, cinema matters precisely because it is messy. While the government conceived nature to be a theme that united the public under an official banner of nationhood, its manifestation in NFB filmmaking was anything but cohesive.

Filmmakers agreed that nature was a vital aspect of Canadian life, but their definitions were wide-ranging and iconoclastic.

Culture and Nature

This dissertation engages with two separate historiographies: works that examine how nature has been considered in Canadian culture, and those that analyze the National Film Board. The latter generally falls into two sub-categories: hagiographies that celebrate the legacy of the Film Board as a producer and distributor of cinematic art, and texts that scrutinize the NFB's role in the formation of Canadian cultural policy. One cannot defend all flanks at once, so I will only tease out the threads within each historiography that relate to my overall argument.

A central tenet in Canadian historiography is that nature has shaped the contours of the nation. In the 1930s ur-texts penned by Harold Innis and Donald Creighton posited that “staple commodities” and geographic thruways such as the St. Lawrence River, influenced the economic and national development of the country.²⁰ The nation was abundant but its unique (and challenging) geography dictated, or in some cases, frustrated, settlement patterns and commercial networks. The thesis that geography determined the political and economic identity of Canada persisted into the 1970s. Echoing Innis and Creighton, literary critic Northrop Frye declared that Canada was

²⁰ Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (1930 reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Daniel Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence 1760-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937. See also: Daniel MacFarlane, *Negotiating a River: Canada, the US, and the Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

characterized by a “garrison mentality.”²¹ Frye argued that the “huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting” in which Canadians find themselves, inspires a “deep terror.”²² This mindset, in Frye’s estimation, has shaped the culture and values of the nation.

Many institutions, including the National Film Board, embraced the environmental determinism of Innis, Creighton, and Frye. For example, in the introduction to the National Film Board’s 1967 Centennial book, *Canada: A Year of the Land*, journalist Bruce Hutchinson opined that if one is to “learn the meaning of the nation, all its hopes and fears,” they must “look to the land and its secret cargo.”²³ For it is the land “not the statute books and legal contracts,” that holds the nation together.”²⁴ The proposition that Canada was shaped by geography was a valuable ontology for state institutions like the NFB. Not only did it help preserve an iconic (and unifying) picture of the country; it also served as an explanation for the origins and character of the nation.

In recent years, scholars have shifted away from the geographic determinism of Canadian history and instead examined how culture has informed societal (and national) ideas about the natural world. The nature that we see on television or on postcards is a cultural construction; it is historically contingent and its meaning (and appearance) is determined by human imagination and values.²⁵ Nature does not only exist as a product of

²¹ Northrop Frye, *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971).

²² *Ibid.* 29.

²³ National Film Board, *Canada: A Year of the Land*, Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1967) 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Informed by cultural critics like Hayden White, environmental historians have rigorously explored the links between culture and nature. William Cronon, the most prominent figure in the field, was one of the first to explore the discursive practices that shape people’s knowledge of the natural world. Cronon is interested in how society has told stories about nature. Nature is not some physical abstraction; it is

human values, of course. It is a physical fact, a “real place” that continues to thrive irrespective of the affairs of humankind. Nevertheless, as William Cronon notes, the revered status of certain landscapes and geographies is a product of human creation.²⁶ Consider Hutchinson’s introduction in *Canada: A Year of the Land*. The Vancouver journalist, like many Canadians, argued that the land was the primary force in shaping national identity. While for many readers this declaration may have appeared axiomatic, Hutchinson failed to recognize the ways in which ideas about nation and nature were culturally entwined. A jack pine does not literally contain within its cones an invisible force that binds Canadians to their homeland. Neither is there anything intrinsically “Canuck” about snow or ice. It is only through a complex system of signification and reproduction that a glacier floating aimlessly in the Arctic Sea symbolizes the nation. A more accurate, though far less memorable foreword might read: ‘if we are to learn the various meanings ascribed to Canada, a pretty good place to start is by looking at the country’s *representations* of the land.’ Culture is at the forefront of these descriptions and definitions of geography, guiding the artist’s brush strokes and the writer’s keystrokes.

animated by cultural desires, economics, and socio-political relationships. A historian must pay close attention to the stories people tell about nature. Only then can someone begin to understand the complex ways in which culture and nature mix. As Cronon wisely explains, if we “fail to reflect on the plots and scenes and tropes that undergird our histories, we run the risk of missing the human artifice that lies at the heart of even the most natural of narratives.” William Cronon “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992), 1367. See also: Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (London: Between the Lines, 1991). Wilson, a cultural critic, analyzes how nature and landscapes are culturally produced and imagined. Our relations with the rest of nature are mediated, he argues, by our ways of seeing, our technologies, and the contours of social life.

²⁶ Cronon, “Trouble With Wilderness.” For resources on the construction of landscapes see: *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* edited by Denis Cosgrove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Toronto: Random House, 1995). Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

One of the main functions of nature in Canadian culture is to help delineate what it means to be a citizen of this country. As historian Bruce Erickson notes in his analysis of the “canoe” in Canadian culture, representations of nature allow cultural producers to “rewrite historical encounters,” and “distort complicated relations,” in the service of nation-building.²⁷ Boosters and nationalists, writers and artists, promoted a certain vision of nature (typically as primeval wilderness) to be the preeminent symbol of national identity.

Arguably the most comprehensive text on the “culture of nature” in Canadian scholarship is John O’Brian and Peter White’s edited collection *Beyond Wilderness*.²⁸ Published in 2007, the contributors each identify the central myths of ‘nature’ and ‘nation’ embodied in the works of Canadian artists, writers, and thinkers. According to the essayists, the idea that the true origins and destiny of Canada is located in a mythic Arcadia *somewhere out there* has been a part of the discourse of nationhood since confederation. It was not until the Group of Seven came along, though, that nature became a widely accepted signifier for Canadian-ness. The Group of Seven, like other cultural progenitors in Canada (some of whom I mentioned earlier) were influenced by a 19th century brand of nationalism. Infused by Romantic ideas about primeval wilderness, this nationalism traced the genesis of the country back to its geography. Wild nature, they argued, was the primary shaper of the nation, both politically and culturally. The Group of Seven identified the essential wilderness landscapes of the country (i.e spaces that

²⁷ Bruce Erickson, *Canoe Nation: Nature, Race, and the Making of a Canadian Icon* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) xv.

²⁸ *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* ed. John O’Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007).

reminded Canadians of their wilderness past) in the Canadian Shield and in the North. Their paintings, which highlighted the ruggedness of the terrain and the sharpness of the northern atmosphere, affirmed that Canadians were a tenacious lot to have survived such hostile conditions.²⁹ Through the promotional efforts of southern and Ontarian institutions, the Group's renderings of wilderness became the dominant symbol of what Canada looked like.

The Group of Seven were not the only ones who constructed Canadian nature as empty wilderness to buttress a circumscribed i.e. nationalistic view of nationhood.³⁰ In "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration," Geographer Brian Osborne concludes that park administrators and government officials repeatedly transformed the geography into "patriotic topography."³¹ According to Osborne, Canadian landscapes from coast to coast are inflected with national rhetoric that transcends their physical contexts. Visitors who travel to sites delineated by the state as nationally significant bear witness to a wilderness environment that harkens back to the fur trade. The stewards of these state-sanctioned sites are conscious of the national importance of such wilderness vistas and do their best to satisfy tourist expectations by preserving the land as it might have appeared to early settlers. This particular idea is further developed in the work of historian Claire Campbell. Campbell observes that the process of selection and

²⁹ Marilyn McKay likewise argues that wilderness landscape paintings and their representations of nature were closely linked to nationalism throughout the 20th century. See Marilyn McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art 1500-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011).

³⁰ W.H. New was one of the first scholars to show how the construction of landscape in Canadian literature was informed by ideas of national identity. See: W.H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

³¹ Brian Osborne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33 no. 3 (2001), 52.

interpretation of natural landmarks is “critical to understanding how Canadians fashioned a recognizable and resilient historical identity for wilderness over the course of the twentieth century.”³² Since confederation, the wilderness of the gritty coureur du bois and the voyageur has existed as the preeminent symbol of nationhood. This conflation of a primeval wilderness and national identity is exemplified in its reconstruction of fur-trading sites at Rocky Mountain House, York Factory, Old Fort William.³³ Certain places within the Canadian Shield for example are selected as national landmarks because of their weathered features and their apparent connection to the fur trade. To preserve a nostalgic and aboriginal portrait of frontier wilderness, Administrators employed specific management techniques. Park officers built pathways that visitors could travel along and feel as though they were marching back into time, while other administrators ensured that the view of nature was wholly wild to sustain its “illusion of wilderness in the present.”³⁴ Of course, these bureaucratic efforts to preserve a vision of a nation in the making do not acknowledge the paradoxes of a human presence in supposedly pristine wilderness spaces, or the human labours to manage and preserve these sites.³⁵ Such self-consciousness would distract visitors from experiencing what they believed to be an image of 18th century wildness, an image charged with national significance and memory.

Historian J. Keri Cronin similarly examines the construction of wilderness in state-managed spaces. She argues that images of Jasper National Park emblazoned on post cards, guidebooks, and ‘how to’ manuals depict the Canadian Rockies as unspoiled

³² Campbell, “‘It was Canadian, Then Typically Canadian:’ Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites.” 6.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. 21.

³⁵ Ibid. 24.

wilderness. These pictures frequently excluded human beings from the landscape, or position them against the backdrop of an implacable forest or mountain range. Although photography appears to mirror physical reality, it actually reorders nature through a “visual logic, not an ecological one.”³⁶ The construction of wilderness spaces in national parks was shaped by tourist expectations about what a quintessentially Canadian landscape should like. As a result, “environmental actualities of a place” become concealed.³⁷

Environmental historians, eco-critics, and cultural geographers generally agree that these types of constructions of nature are historically, if not ethically problematic. Depictions (and descriptions) of uninhabited wilderness spaces are “deeply gendered and raced,” to quote Eva Mackey.³⁸ Landscapes that are constructed as empty and sublime, wild and primeval, unconsciously “define inclusion, exclusion, and belonging in the nation,” she writes.³⁹ Romantic depictions of wilderness spaces such as those described by Cronin willfully ignore the violent history of these places, which were seized from local indigenous peoples and then restructured as dominion land.⁴⁰ The contributors of *Rethinking the Great White North* concur. “Nature is an important resource in the articulation of Whiteness,” the editors of the collection write.⁴¹ Although the word

³⁶ Bruce Braun quoted in Cronin, 7.

³⁷ Cronin, 8.

³⁸ Eva Mackey, “‘Death by Landscape’: Race, Nature and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 20 no. 2 (July 2000), 126.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Bordo, “Jack Pine: Wilderness Sublime, or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27 no. 4 (Winter, 1992): 98-128.

⁴¹ *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada* ed. Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, Audrey Kobayashi (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011) 7.

“nature” evokes a sense of innocence, it is often used to maintain “all manner of oppressive social relations.”⁴²

Wilderness is typically constructed in ways that naturalize colonial power, but there are instances where marginalized groups challenge white, male, and urban perspectives.⁴³ In *Idea of the North*, for example Sherrill Grace explicates how Northern peoples such as the Inuit and Dené have re-inscribed their own interpretations onto the Arctic landscape. Constructions of the North as “home” counter hegemonic discourses that frame the landscape as “other,” passive, and something to be conquered by outsiders.⁴⁴ Historian Jocelyn Thorpe likewise shows how indigenous voices resisted colonial definitions of nature and wilderness. According to Thorpe, the Teme Augama-Anishnabai First Peoples’ conceptualized wilderness as n’Daki Menan (homeland). This view of the forest as home competed with white settler notions of pristine, uninhabited wilderness (it was then reconstituted as a place of raw timber and then later as a space for recreation). Although white attitudes about the landscape rendered Temagami as dominion territory, the Teme Augama-Anishnabai actively reasserted their claims over the forest by determining what parts of the forests tourists were able to experience.⁴⁵

The competing ways colonial institutions and traditional groups conceptualize nature is most salient in anthropologist Julie Cruikshank’s *Do Glaciers Listen? Local*

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The contributors of the edited book *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* specifically show how women have conceptualized nature. Fighting against the dominant discourses about the environment, women in Canadian history have viewed nature as a place for femininity, spirituality, and domesticity. *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* ed. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Sherrill Grace, *Canada and the Idea of the North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2001)

⁴⁵ Jocelyn Thorpe, *Temagami’s Tangled Wild: Race, Gender, and the Making of Canadian Nature* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination.⁴⁶ For the Tlingit and Athapaskan indigenous storytellers of the Pacific Northwest, glaciers were agents of change, whose activities shaped the physical and cultural environments through which they float. This kind of representation, argues Cruickshank, was markedly different from the words of early imperial explorers and scientists, who saw glaciers as inanimate. According to Cruickshank, the characterization of glaciers within the oral tradition of the Pacific Northwest's inhabitants was too complex, too intertwined in the lives of the Tlingit and Athapaskan to fit neatly into European taxonomy. The epistemological encounters of Europeans were, by contrast, defined by their struggles to impose a scientific order onto these fluid sheets of ice. Unlike the Tlingit and Athapaskan, 18th and 19th century European classifications of glaciers were rooted in an enlightened belief that humans and nature were two distinct categories. John Muir, for example, a proponent of pristine wilderness (sublime, but not sentient), claimed to have discovered pockets of undiscovered backcountry in present day Glacier Bay National Park.⁴⁷ Of course, his understanding of glaciers as pristine wilderness ignored the fact that it was the Tlingit who brought him there, and who believed that glaciers were agents of change. This kind of colonial interpretation of the land contributed to the erasure of indigenous peoples from their homeland, and encouraged the primacy of expert knowledge over oral tradition and local experience.

⁴⁶ Julie Cruickshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 154-155.

Culture influences human attitudes and perceptions about nature. This is especially striking in Canadian history. The challenge for historians is to acknowledge this reality and simultaneously account for how nature shapes human culture. We must follow Lawrence Buell's entreaty to "acknowledge that reported contacts with particular settings are intertextually, and intersocially constructed," while recognizing that "the non-built environment is one of the variables that influence culture, text, and personality."⁴⁸ The recognition that nature and culture are deeply entangled inspired a conference at the University of British Columbia in 2012. The historians attending the symposium discussed the value of the "culture of nature" as a historical model within the Canadian context. The "culture of nature" is without a doubt an important aspect of environmental history they conceded, but scholars must not lose sight of the dirt, rocks, and glacial shifts that shape culture. The scholars attending the conference thus sought to "complement, diverge from, and re-imagine previous work on the culture of nature in Canada."⁴⁹ They contributed papers that considered the agency of nature and human culture. Canadian scholars including Alan MacEachern, Liza Piper, Matthew Evenden, and Joy Parr have similarly recognized the importance of nature and culture as alternating historical factors in their stories about wildlife conservation, national parks, industrial megaprojects, and science.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 13.

⁴⁹ Matthew Evenden, "Beyond the Culture of Nature: Introduction," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 47, no. 3 (2013) 9. The papers from this conference were published in the *Journal of Canadian studies*

⁵⁰ Matthew Evenden, *Fish Vs. Power: An Environmental History of the Fraser River* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes:*

The most compelling work on how nature and culture interact with each other is Claire Campbell's study of the historical construction of the Georgian Bay landscape.⁵¹ In *Shaped by the West Wind*, Campbell argues that a confluence of ideas (indigenous, cartographic, utilitarian, romanticism, and recreation) contributed to the construction of Georgian Bay in Canadian culture. The formation of the Georgian Bay in the local and national imagination reveals much about Canadians expectations of wilderness, especially "its fundamentally anti-modern characters and its related assumptions about First Nations."⁵² However, the cultural ideas that people have foisted upon the archipelago of islands are only one part of a much larger and more complicated story. The challenging and obstreperous topography of the Shield frustrated the imagination and forced people to adjust their expectations of this jagged region. The patterns of development in Georgian Bay were fragmented and localized, boom and bust. Nature was not "malleable," writes Campbell. "It constantly challenged those who proposed making a fortune from it."⁵³ The region's tangle of pine, narrow crevices, and bald rocks made navigation difficult and industrial extraction nearly impossible. Anticipations of what the land could be used for changed over time as people realized that the Shield country of Georgian Bay could not be bent to their desires or whims.

There are interesting scholarly possibilities when it comes to examining the relationship between filmmaking and the physical environment. For instance, scholars

Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday 1953-2003 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009);

⁵¹ Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

⁵² Ibid. 98

⁵³ Ibid. 63.

might investigate the ecological impact of film production practices. They might also examine how nature – climate, difficult topography, bugs etc. - confounds the efforts of a filmmaker to record images and capture sound.⁵⁴ During my research I found several examples in which filmmakers had to yield to the demands of the environment in which they were filming. In *Films on Ice* Archivist Caroline Forcier Hollaway recalls an instance when NFB filmmaker, Roger Racine, nearly gave up recording in the Arctic because of the weather.⁵⁵ According to Racine a tripod was provided by the NFB so he could film a Canadian expedition in the North. He never used it. “At 70 degrees below zero, you don’t have time to set up a tripod. You just shoot!”⁵⁶ Racine realized that filming in such environmentally punishing conditions had its limitations. “Really, one must either build a snow house or put up a tent no matter if the meteorologist says the temperature is enough to kill a horse; but of course we aren’t horses and we will survive, but the amount of time left for this actual camera work is but a few minutes daily, e.g. when we are not moving. So, one morning after drinking your morning coffee, you leave your tent to take out your equipment and discover the most unbelievable site offered to the eyes of the human animal, and after rising to the compartment of your snowmobile and take out the old camera you discover that the snow, after blowing all night has infiltrated itself in the lens.”⁵⁷ The experience of Roger Racine illustrates the ways in which the environment vexes the capacity of the filmmaker to capture images and sounds.

⁵⁴ Nadia Bozak investigates this very relationship in *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights Camera, Natural Resources* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ Caroline Forcier Hollaway, “Exercise Musk-Ox: The Challenges of Filming a Military Expedition in Canada’s Arctic,” *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic* edited by Scott Mackenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 247.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Caroline Forcier Hollaway, 248.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Other scholars might examine how a filmmaker's encounter with the biophysical world unexpectedly shapes their knowledge of place, and by extension influences the films they produce. While these inquiries into the physicality of filmmaking are compelling, they are beyond the scope of my dissertation. I tend to emphasize the cultural construction of nature more than I do the "agency" of the actual environment. Documentary filmmaking is inherently subjective and its very purpose is to construct a picture of the external world. As a result, my discussion mostly centers on how cinematic images mediate, interpret, and represent Canadians' engagement with the physical world.

State and Nature

My dissertation engages with another thread in environmental history, which has to do with the relationship between the state and nature.⁵⁸ As I mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, the National Film Board was designed to clarify the ambitions of the state and to broadcast an official vision of the nation. The NFB's conceptualization of nature was equally bounded by political concerns and reflected the government's assessment of, and objective towards the non-human world. So what were the objectives of the Canadian state with respect to nature? For the majority of the twentieth century it was to rationalize, catalogue, and manage the exploitations of natural resources. The ecological ambitions of the state to govern nature and the population's relationship with it

⁵⁸ Historians such as George Warecki and Peter Gillis have shown how local interest groups encouraged the government to implement wildlife conservation policies and designate parkland in the early twentieth-century. See: George Warecki, *Protecting Ontario's Wilderness: A History of Changing Ideas and Preservation Politics, 1927-1973*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Peter Gillis, *Lost Initiatives: Canada's Forest Industries, Forest Politics, and Forest Conservation* (Toronto: Greenwood Press, 1986); Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada*, 2nd Ed. (Toronto: University Press, 1998).

has been discussed by a number of scholars. Arguably the most cited book on the topic of state and nature is Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire*, in which the eminent historian argues that a "modern capitalist state" was central to the development of the American West.⁵⁹ According to Worster, the U.S. federal government supported the conditions necessary for the accumulation of private wealth, including the transformation of nature. The state helped reshape the physical landscape by providing developers with the resources they needed to build a network of irrigated water systems.

Worster focuses on the United States government, but there are similar arguments to be made in the Canadian context. The federal and provincial governments have often remade nature in the interest of development and economic growth. Historian H.V. Nelles, for example, has shown how the nation's dependency on natural resources produced an interventionist state that encouraged the exploitation of the environment.⁶⁰ Nelles contends in *The Politics of Development* that the expansion of "New Ontario was a joint public and private venture, a provincial equivalent to the opening of the west."⁶¹ Despite its considerable ownership and regulation of natural resources, the province remained largely a "client" of business, Nelles observes.⁶² Provincial administrators in Ontario actively promoted industrial exploitation and provided entrepreneurs with discounted infrastructure works.

⁵⁹ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also: "Empire of Nature and the Nature of Empires," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 95, 4 (2014) 585-591.

⁶⁰ H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines, and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974); See also: Graeme Wynn, *Canada and Arctic North America* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2007); Melissa Clark-Jones, *A Staple State: Canadian Industrial Resources in Cold War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

⁶¹ Nelles. 109.

⁶² *Ibid.* 495.

Worster and Nelles believe that the state is primarily motivated by capitalist interests – dams, irrigated channels, and reservoirs were all created with the intention that they would help stimulate American entrepreneurship. But the objectives of the state are not always linked to capitalism; there are other contributing factors that influence the government's interactions with the natural world. In his examination of state-sponsored social reform projects, the anthropologist James Scott famously argues that the modern state endeavors to know its social and environmental domain comprehensively, not because it wants to encourage private investment, but because this knowledge can be used to improve the human condition.⁶³ Gathering enough data for complete understanding is an impossible task, though. The geographic and social environments within the state's domain are far too diverse and intricate. To make the complex spaces under its jurisdiction more intelligible and more importantly, easily exploitable, the government simplifies the landscape. It does this through a variety of mechanisms, including rational planning, science, and modern technology. The anthropologist writes:

The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation. Combined with similar observations, an overall, aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality is achieved, making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation.⁶⁴

But Scott sees a fundamental problem with this high modern ideology, which purports that science and technology can unilaterally advance human society. By definition, state simplifications disregard the ecological and social reality of local landscapes.

⁶³ Scott, 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 11.

Consequently, the schemes of the government undermine the heterogeneous relationship between people and place, and disrupt, and sometimes outright obliterate, traditional livelihoods.

The concept of “seeing like a state” is evident in twentieth-century Canadian history. In *States of Nature* Tina Loo contends that the federal government’s relationship with the environment mirrored the evolution of twentieth-century modernity.⁶⁵ More specifically, she argues that government conservation strategies were emblematic of the state’s resolute faith in science and technology to manage nature. Loo, however, complicates this top-down analysis. The history of wildlife management in Canada was also influenced by the variegated attitudes of local citizens, homespun naturalists, and concerned sportsmen. Although the state tried to simplify nature with technology, data, and legal designations, the nuances of local knowledge made this task difficult. Consequently, management underwent several shifts in Canadian history. Each shift in policy reflected the attempts by the state to simplify nature into easily defined boundaries and categories, but also took into account the provincial quirks and conditions of local populations.

In *Creating a Modern Countryside* James Murton also shows that state machinations have an impact on the natural world. According to Murton, the Canadian government’s transformation of the environment (both federally and provincially) was informed by the concept of new liberalism.⁶⁶ New liberals proclaimed that entire societies

⁶⁵ Tina Loo, *States of Nature* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2007). 6.

and communities should be afforded the opportunities and accessibilities previously granted to the individual. Moreover, the politico-economic logic of new liberalism asserted that the government should directly address the economic, social, and physical concerns of its constituents including the protection of the natural resources of the country.⁶⁷ Murton shows that this political ideology guided British Columbia policy toward settlement and land reclamation during the interwar period.⁶⁸ British Columbia government's interwar resettlement project "was an exercise in social and environmental reform," he writes.⁶⁹ The provincial government believed that to improve British Columbian society, they needed to reshape the land according to the laws of modern science, and with an understanding of the possibilities and limits of the environment. Murton concedes, however, that although new liberals wanted to manage nature better than their liberal predecessors, their desire was still characterized by an instrumentalist (or high modern) ideology, committed to controlling and improving the environment.⁷⁰

The aspirations of the federal government to recover nature for the betterment of society are clearly expressed in NFB cinema. Images of scientists and state planners are accompanied by depictions of large-scale mining operations and engineering feats in sponsored documentaries about the development of the West and the North. On a pedagogical level, the state via the National Film Board educated Canadians on how to

⁶⁷ New liberalism was an offshoot, or a modification of liberalism. Liberalism, as John Locke originally conceived it, dominated early Canadian political life. This philosophy, however, began to evolve. Canadian historian Ian McKay explains in his pioneering essay "The Liberal Order Framework," that liberalism, which was dedicated to providing equal opportunities for individuals, was replaced by a "new liberalism" that perceived the individual as a social being, part of a larger community. Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (2000) 620-23.

⁶⁸ Murton, 14.

⁶⁹ Murton, 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 16.

improve nature. The government viewed the cinematic apparatus - the lens, the medium's prodigious ability to manipulate space and time through editing- as a tool that molded audience subjectivities about the utility and constraints of nature. By financing individual documentaries, departments within the government could teach audiences about how to live good, productive lives. Like other agents of the welfare state, NFB filmmakers were cinematic ambassadors of the state, encouraging audiences to "look here," "pay attention to this story," "think about nature in this way." NFB filmmaking can therefore be interpreted as a new liberal practice, in which the welfare government used cinema to mediate in the relationship between society and the environment.

National Film Board

The other historiography this dissertation engages with is that of the National Film Board. One of the first attempts to chronicle the history of National Film Board was C. Rodney James *Film as National Art: NFB of Canada and the Film Board Idea* (1977). James examines the role of the NFB as a producer and distributor of government-authorized "information films," and evaluates their artistic and political value for citizens living in democratic nations. James also chronicles the people who worked at the Board, describing how each person shaped the legacy of the institution. He contends that the NFB succeeded because of the foresight of John Grierson, the founder and first commissioner of the Film Board. Despite financial pressures and governmental edicts, and competition from the private film sector, Grierson successfully established "better

international communication and understanding.”⁷¹ James further argues that Grierson’s design for the NFB “is an adaptable idea” and “a valuable asset to any democratic government” because it produces “a kind of public information that can not be produced by private enterprise.”⁷²

In 1981, D.B. Jones penned *Movies and Memoranda: an Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*. Like James, Jones investigates the apparent success of the Board as a distributor of educational and entertaining films. According to Jones, Grierson, whom he describes as a man of “moral focus and intellectual breadth,” gave the Board a clear and flexible vision for documentary cinema that would endure no matter the political climate.⁷³ Although filmmakers deviated from Grierson’s didacticism, his notion that non-fiction cinema was the “creative treatment of actuality” ensured that documentary filmmaking would remain relevant. Three years later, historian Gary Evans published *John Grierson and the National Film Board: the Politics of Wartime Propaganda*. Evans contends that the NFB was instrumental in communicating the total mobilization schemes of the government to the Canadian public.⁷⁴ The values of the Scottish commissioner and the government’s wartime strategy were a perfect marriage. Grierson was a staunch supporter of using cinema as a didactic tool for the government, and the Ministry of War, the NFB’s governing body, was eager to use the cinema as a tool for propaganda. Evans continued to chronicle the story of the NFB with his book *In*

⁷¹ C. Rodney James, *Film as National Art: NFB of Canada and the Film Board Idea* (New York: Anro Press, 1977), 670.

⁷² *Ibid.* 669.

⁷³ D.B. Jones, 1.

⁷⁴ Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: the Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). For more work on Grierson, see: Jack Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

*the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 – 1989.*⁷⁵ The monograph narrates the postwar resilience of the NFB. According to Evans, the National Film Board’s interpretation of its mandate “to interpret Canada” was elastic, bending in different ways to accommodate governmental demands and shifting social values.

In 1988, the first critique of John Grierson was published.⁷⁶ In *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend* Joyce Nelson challenges the standard view that Grierson was an idealistic advocate of progressive, non-fiction cinema. Nelson determines that although Grierson boasted about the moral superiority of state-sponsored cinema, the archival record suggests that he was in fact a “champion of emergent multinational capitalism.”⁷⁷ Nelson was not the only writer in this period to criticize Grierson or the NFB. Scholars such as Peter Morris and Kathryn Elder similarly challenged the celebratory portrayal of Grierson by unpacking his totalitarian views about propaganda and governance, which were expressed in the creation and legacy of the National Film Board.⁷⁸

Around the same time, Christopher E. Gittings’ wrote one of the most comprehensive studies of national cinema, of which the NFB plays a major role. In *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation*, Gittings unveils “the masquerades of the Canadian nation” by exposing the prejudices and fictions of

⁷⁵ Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 – 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

⁷⁶ Druick, 19.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Druick, *Projecting Canada*, 19.

⁷⁸ Kathryn Elder, “The Legacy of John Grierson,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21, no. 4 (1987): 152-161; Peter Morris, “Re-thinking Grierson: the ideology of John Grierson,” *Dialogue: Canadian and Quebec Cinema* 3 (1987): 21-56.

nationalist discourses in national cinema.⁷⁹ He avers that Canadian films were key texts in the ongoing construction of the Canadian nation. National cinema was an “instrument [of] colonial domination.”⁸⁰ It simultaneously legitimated state power and objectified “subjected peoples.”⁸¹ Gittings writes that Canadian ethnographic films about aboriginal, Japanese, and Chinese Canadians sated what he calls, the White-Anglo nation’s “vicious pleasure of consuming stereotypes of its cultural and racial Others.”⁸²

According to Christopher Gittings, the National Film Board was complicit in the production of federal discourses about nationhood. By way of the French philosopher Louis Althusser, he argues that the NFB was a “site where the state’s material practice of ideology is located.”⁸³ The Board was designed to “represent the nation and its conditions of production to Canadians and the world,” Gittings says.⁸⁴ This mandate resulted in a government-authorized view of what it meant to be Canadian. I am persuaded by Gittings’ analysis of the NFB. My research shows that the Film Board was a form of “technological nationalism,” which scholar Maurice Charland defines as the desire “to create a nation by enhancing communication.”⁸⁵ The federal government established the NFB to construct an image of the nation that buttressed its own progressive, homogenizing objectives. Through depictions of rote Canadian pastimes and mythological symbols, the NFB created a portrait of Canada, a depiction that was deeply woven with Anglo values and federalist ideologies.

⁷⁹ Gittings, 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. 4.

⁸² Ibid. 75.

⁸³ Ibid. 20.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Maurice Charland, “Technological Nationalism,” *XTheory* 10, no. 1-2 (1986): 198.

Gittings also discusses how nature was a common (and symbolically potent) theme in Canadian cinema. Among the very first cinematic images of Canada were shots of the country's baroque landscapes, including images of Niagara Falls and the Rockies.⁸⁶ Representations of Canadian nature were instrumental in the production of national identity at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Gittings, depictions of the country's abundant natural resources and beautiful wilderness spaces advertised a colonial discourse about the nation's "fertile, and passive terrain awaiting the cultivation or domination of the male British settler."⁸⁷ These early films established a visual template in Canadian cinema, in which nature was not just a backdrop but an essential feature of filmmaking. This motif is especially visible in NFB cinema. Gittings observes that depictions of natural resource extraction are directly linked to colonizing discourses about national progress. For example, in the documentary *Peoples of Canada*, the North is presented as an object of the White nation's colonizing gaze. Gittings argues that "aerial shots of the terrain, combined with shots of White engineers surveying the landscape and bulldozers clearing brush, rock, and soil for the construction of the Alaska Highway," underscore the South's mastery over the primitive North.⁸⁸ The film "invites readings of white internal colonialism" through its tropes of discovery and resource exploitation.⁸⁹ As the narrator of the film boasts, "here one of the world's richest known sources of radium and uranium, key to atomic energy has been uncovered. This is pioneer

⁸⁶ Gittings, 8.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 84.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

country still in the process of discovery and development.”⁹⁰ A shot of an Inuk standing in awe of the superior technology of the South emphasizes his “passivity in this new world order.”⁹¹ Gittings concludes that “the social and physical landscapes of the nation are brought together...by showing how white enterprise has harnessed Canada’s natural resources, industrialized, and carved out a viable and dynamic economy that exports Canadian resources globally.”⁹²

Art historian Carol Payne perceives a similar connection between NFB images of landscape and normative visions of nationhood. In “How Shall We Use These Gifts,” Payne inspects the work of the NFB’s still photography division.⁹³ She concludes that NFB photographs taken in the postwar period generally present the land as “an emblem of the nation,” and a “potential treasure trove of natural resources.”⁹⁴ Pictures of resource exploitation in particular endorsed a government-sanctioned project to develop the country, coast to coast. The abundance of the land in these pictures were evocative reminders to spectators that theirs was a land of abundant resources and picturesque geography. Such photographs also reaffirmed racial and cultural hierarchies about who possessed this abundant landscape. Pictures of primitive aboriginals endorsed governmental paternalism by suggesting that indigenous people did not have the wherewithal to exploit this lavish gift, and therefore needed to be assimilated into mainstream culture. Payne develops these ideas more fully in her book, *The Official*

⁹⁰ Quoted in Gittings, 84.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Carol Payne, “How Shall We Use These Gifts?” *Imaging the Land in the National Film Board’s Still Division*, in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* ed. John O’Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 160.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 153-154.

Picture. In it she explains that pictures of urban and rural landscapes were instrumental in constructing “a potent emblem of Canadian nationhood” throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁹⁵ Photographs of the agricultural hinterland, with its boundless fields of wheat, were presented as an “analogue of economic prosperity unleashed through Euro-Canadian technological expertise” while images of unspoiled wilderness printed in the centennial publication *Canada: A Year of the Land and Canada, du temps qui passé* contained a prelapsarian idea of primeval nature. In this last example, virginal nature was not celebrated for its resources, but because it was an enduring symbol of the origins of Canada. In this regard, the NFB affirmed and reinforced popular ideas about nature rather than challenging them.

In 2007 two book-length studies about the NFB were published. The first, Malek Khouri’s *Filming Politics: Communism and the Portrayal of the Working Class at the National Film Board of Canada, 1939 – 1946*, contends that the NFB films were radical works of the left. Wartime documentaries about agriculture and manufacturing jobs portrayed the Canadian working class as agents of social change.⁹⁶ Through their solidarity and hard work, labourers would create a more robust Canada in the postwar period. More pertinent to this thesis is Zoe Druick’s *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board*, which examines the NFB’s origins in social science and its utility as a technology of governance. Druick writes that NFB films were “privileged sites of production” that communicated “a way of seeing the

⁹⁵ Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013) 107.

⁹⁶ Malek Khouri, *Filming Politics: Communism and the Portrayal of the Working Class at the National Film Board of Canada, 1939 – 1946* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

nation” from a state perspective.⁹⁷ NFB documentarians supported the objectives of the welfare state by incorporating specific aesthetic and narrative strategies into their works. She terms this particular genre of filmmaking “government realism.” Government realism attempted to bond the country’s diverse populations by portraying “typical yet anonymous people and places” united under a benevolent welfare state.⁹⁸ Druick further argues that this “logic of bringing coherence to a divided polity” has persisted throughout the Board’s history.⁹⁹ Even instances of “oppositional filmmaking” in the 1960s and 1970s must be understood “in relation to a shift in government social policy towards new forms of citizenship.”¹⁰⁰

I concur with Druick’s postulation that the NFB was an important instrument of governance. With the expansion of the welfare state, the NFB became an essential technology for managing populations and defining their roles within the modern, liberal nation. Moreover, documentary filmmaking promoted the role of the government in administering the lives of citizens without seeming invasive. The Board promoted state objectives in a variety of formats including documentaries about multiculturalism, nationalism, education and so forth and in many ways, NFB filmmakers were complicit in the production of governmental discourses about the nation.

The National Film Board’s impact on Canadian subjectivities should not be overlooked. The films produced by the Board were immensely popular within Canada since its inception. Young children and teens were privy to NFB documentaries in

⁹⁷ Druick, *Projecting Canada*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 98.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 10.

schoolrooms across the country. (As Brian Low notes in *NFB Kids – Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board*, the NFB even created curriculum for schools to use along side the movies they presented in class.)¹⁰¹ Film Board movies were also available for public consumption in theaters, town halls, and through other state-sponsored venues such as film libraries and film councils. National Film Board cinema was promoted abroad as well. Canadian ambassadors used NFB films to exhibit Canada's political and economic culture to foreigners. Without question, the NFB was a key part of the symbolic environment of Canada and deeply ingrained in the educational objectives of the state.¹⁰² However, I also believe that the NFB was more than just a governmental project used to consolidate middle-class consensus. Cinema engenders multiple readings and meanings including those about the natural world. Eco-critic Scott MacDonald argues that even didactic filmmaking can cultivate a radical environmental sensibility.¹⁰³ Film Board documentaries were guided by state policy, but filmmakers did not always agree with these policies, nor did they always consent to the wishes of their government sponsors. The camera was a tool of subversion, used to challenge mainstream governmental perspectives. Nature, depending on who was behind the camera, was a place of ideological conflict, labour, sustenance, beauty, and memory.

¹⁰¹ Brian J. Low, *NFB Kids - Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939-1989* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2002)

¹⁰² Joan Sangster, *The Iconic North: Cultural Constructions of Aboriginal Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016) 142

¹⁰³ Scott McDonald, "The Eco-Cinema Experience," in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* ed. Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, Sean Cubitt (New York: Routledge, 2013), 17.

A Note on Documentary Filmmaking

Much of the NFB's evolution was guided by larger shifts in documentary cinema. In the classic John Grierson model of non-fiction filmmaking, reality was assumed to be knowable and the role of the filmmaker was to present that truth. How filmmakers presented that truth was relatively consistent. Most films in the 1930s through the 1950s followed an expository style of filmmaking, in which a voice-of-God narrator made sense of what was happening onscreen. The narration, usually provided by a sonorous and authoritative voice, imposed an intellectual order onto the images. Sometimes the images were filmed to fit the argument; other times, the images were stock footage cobbled together to support the thesis of the film, which had been already established. In both instances, the visual material images (along with facts, figures, expert testimonies etc.) buttressed the documentary's supposedly objective claims of factuality and truth.

This kind of technique was slowly replaced by observational cinema, known as *cinéma vérité* or "direct cinema." Early practitioners in the 1950s believed that they could be a "fly on the wall" and let the story unfold naturally without the provisions of a script. This was a far more effective way of getting at reality, filmmakers argued. Although advancements in filmmaking equipment allowed for a more intimate perspective, the assumption that filmmakers could observe without projecting their own beliefs was false. Cinema was never neutral. By the 1960s, a number of NFB filmmakers had embraced the techniques of observational cinema, but also claimed that it was impossible to be detached from what was happening onscreen. The filmmaker was a participant in the life of the subject. Furthermore, documentarians believed it was more truthful to disclose the

tensions between the nature of recording technologies and the director's personal sympathies. We can see this type of filmmaking most clearly in 1970s ethnographic cinema, which were self-reflexive and politically conscious unlike any works before. In contrast to earlier iterations of the ethnographic documentary, NFB filmmakers in the 1970s criticized tropes that framed their subject as the Other, and acknowledged their own prejudices and motivations in the film's narrative. In some instances, the means of production was handed over to the subject so they could better represent themselves and talk back to colonial hegemonies.

It is important, I think, to take a look at the history of documentary cinema and find a middle ground between the statement that non-fiction filmmaking is objective, and the assertion that it is completely fabricated and therefore makes no truth claims. Documentarians make an attempt at understanding and conveying truth. Although nothing is ever completely objective, they did use visual evidence and testimony to create a composite of what really happened. That being said, it is vital that we also recognize that filmmaking unconsciously produces meaning that reflects the filmmaker's bias as much as it depicts some external truth. Filmmaking is an ideological process. Although documentary filmmakers sometimes assert (and even believe) that cinematic technology captures unmediated reality, their images are shaped by a potpourri of cultural forces and aesthetic decisions.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, it is the production of meaning that makes NFB cinema an important historical text to study. For it is through these meanings that the National Film

¹⁰⁴ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (New York: Routledge Press, 1990). See also: Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric, and Social Construction* (London: Sage, 1996).

Board attempted to govern populations and shape audience behaviors. Documentaries are persuasive precisely because of their claims of neutrality i.e. the world really is this way because the camera does not lie. As Carol Payne explains, non-fiction imagery is one of the most effective means for communicating ideology because it “disguises subjective opinion as dispassionate facts.”¹⁰⁵ NFB documentaries, though they appeared aloof, were closely linked to governmental processes and institutional power. Under the façade of objectivity, the Board represented nature in ways that promoted the utilitarian and conservationist agenda of their government financiers. Even “environmental” filmmakers who diverged from the viewpoints of the state participated in what John Grierson called “the creative treatment of actuality.” Although their images and discourses challenged mainstream messages about nature, they too created a picture of reality from a certain ideological point of view.

What I have described here sounds untruthful, insidious even. I only mean to point out the fact that documentary cinema is inherently subjective and constructed, and that these formulations have a lot to do with power and ideology. As I mentioned earlier, however, documentaries are also important records of events and ideas. Documentarian Errol Morris calls non-fiction cinema as a “search for truth.” Perhaps it is more productive then to see documentary filmmaking as scholar Bill Nichol sees it: not as a simulacrum of reality, but rather as “an argument about the historical world.”¹⁰⁶ Under this rubric, we can say that NFB filmmakers made a case for the meaning, definition, and value of nature within their historical context. Some arguments were subtle and more

¹⁰⁵ Payne, 154.

¹⁰⁶ Nichols, 11.

nuanced, others were more forceful and strident; they all made evidence-based inferences about the reality of the planet.

Methodology and Sources

The films I have selected for analysis span from 1939 to 1974, and represent the range of NFB approaches to visualizing nature during that period. The documentaries are exemplary in that they clearly demonstrate the different kinds of representations of nature prominent in NFB cinema. A few of the films I discuss are lesser known. The majority, however, are popular works, beloved by critics and Canadian audiences alike. I analyze these documentaries in two general ways. First, I examine them as a corpus of films spread out over three and a half decades. From this broad perspective, it becomes clear that there are noticeable thematic and visual continuities in NFB environmental cinema, but that change is also evident. For example, in the wartime documentary, *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943), Evelyn Cherry argues that the prairies are vital to Canada. In order to protect this vital resource, she encourages farmers to adopt state-sponsored agricultural methods. This film compares with Ernest Reid's *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963), which was produced twenty years later. In the film, Reid claims that nature is inherently valuable because of its wild beauty and ecological diversity. According to Reid, national parks are vital to the safeguarding of the country's last remaining wilderness areas. The language of instrumentalism has vanished, while the core theme of state management persists. National parks, like the prairies, need to be conserved by government institutions through science and statutes. The two films clearly exhibit a state way of seeing nature, a

perspective influenced by high modernism and the objectives of the welfare state.

However, they also quite obviously have different emphases.

How do we account for these similarities and differences? One way is to examine the aesthetic and narrative tropes embedded in these films within their social, economic and political circumstances. The discourses in NFB films changed (or remained) depending on the larger historical context. Cherry's *Windbreaks on the Prairies*, which promoted state conservation strategies, was produced during the Second World War, when natural resources were considered to be an essential part of the war effort. Alternatively, *The Enduring Wilderness* was made in the early 1960s, a period in which environmental consciousness, and in particular, wilderness preservation, was starting to gain traction. Their narratives and images reflected these historical realities.

The second way that I analyze NFB films is by “zooming in” and investigating each documentary in detail. My aim is to identify the discourses and definitions about nature in the particulars of plot, image, and production history. How and why is nature being represented? What factor do institutional structures have on the content of an individual documentary? Whose voice is being represented in these films? This type of thick reading unmask the discourses of the state and also reveals instances of ideological conflict between filmmaker and the government. For instance, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1972), a Challenge for Change documentary about the hunting traditions of the James Bay Cree, was made in direct response to the province of Quebec's hydroelectric project. The sympathetic portrayal of Cree hunting life in the film was a visual counterpoint to the high modern schemes of the province, which deemed the James Bay wilderness to be

empty and underutilized space. Although the Cree authorized the film, the voice of the director of the film, Boyce Richardson, also appears in the documentary. Richardson was hired by the NFB to make a film about indigenous peoples and modern society.

Richardson, who had spent time with the Cree as a journalist, used the film to advocate for the ecological wisdom of the Cree and expose the cultural effrontery of state projects like La Grande.

The Outline

The dissertation is organized around four chapters. They develop chronologically but are also structured around different themes – utilitarianism, landscape, environmentalism, and indigeneity. Together, they discern how the National Film Board represented Canadian nature, and why.

The first chapter argues that NFB depictions in the 1940s and 1950s supported the instrumental reasoning of the federal government. The Board was established in 1939 just as Canada became entangled in the Second World War. The Canadian military and their allies required a steady supply of natural resources to fight abroad. Developed as part of the government's propaganda machine, the NFB dutifully produced documentaries that supported the state's wartime resource policy. By encouraging spectators to maximize productivity and conserve natural resources, the federal government taught Canadians to see the environment in utilitarian terms.

Adopting James Scott's notion of "seeing like a state," I further argue that these utilitarian documentaries were characterized by their high modernism. Wartime and

postwar documentaries argued that nature needed to be transformed in order for the country to progress. To achieve this modern Garden of Eden, Canadian agriculturists were encouraged to apply state-sponsored husbandry techniques. Only then would the land flourish.

Representations of the land (and sea) were a key part of the NFB's nation-building efforts in the postwar period. Chapter 1 shows that that discourses about nature's utility connected audiences to the nationalist goals of the state. Chapter 2 zooms in on the National Film Board's use of cinematic landscapes, and unpacks their symbolic meaning. Specifically, I focus my investigation on the Canadian North, one of Canada's most popular icons of nationhood. I argue that NFB filmmakers represented the North in three ways: as a wilderness sublime, as an exotic "Other," and as a modern landscape. Together these depictions promoted a Southern and federal vision of the northern frontier, in which attitudes about race, nature, and identity were deeply inscribed. Documentaries that portrayed the landscape as a sublime and empty wilderness reaffirmed the long-standing white and Anglo belief that the strength of the country originated from its inhospitable geography. NFB films that framed the North as an exotic landscape inhabited by primitives also promoted a colonial vision of northern spaces. In addition to satisfying audience curiosities about the exotic and bizarre, orientalist depictions of the Inuit implicitly condoned the state's policy to modernize and develop the North. The Eskimo were quickly disappearing and the only way to protect them from the vagaries of Arctic environment was to provide them with modern tools and know-how to live in extreme places. The modernization of the North was exhibited in other documentaries about the

North. Films about Arctic exploration and science also promoted the transformation of the landscape into an economic heartland. These films were united in their efforts to imagine the North as a state-defined and managed space, replete with natural resources, and fully integrated into the thrum of modern society.

Chapter 2 also makes a theoretical argument about NFB filmmaking practices. Adapting Bruno Latour's concept of "centres of calculation," I posit that the film camera was an important technology of state authority in the North. In their efforts to document the landscape, NFB filmmakers visualized hitherto unexplored regions and charted their economic potential. The images they captured were brought back to the metropole and used to justify the annexation of northern spaces into the national political economy.

Chapter 3 shifts focus and examines the discontinuities in NFB documentaries about nature. Influenced by the environmental movement and new ideas about non-fiction cinema, filmmakers began critiquing government perspectives. Documentaries such as Larry Gosnell's *Poison, Pests and People* (1960) disputed the state's technocratic stratagems. Gosnell showed audiences that nature was complex and fragile, and that unnatural interventions within the environment lead to unintended consequences. Other films, however, were more ambivalent about the role of the state in protecting the natural world. Bill Mason's documentary *Death of a Legend* questioned the idea that nature should be controlled, but it also catered to the whims of the film's governmental sponsor, the Canadian Wildlife Service. The competing discourses of 'wildness' and 'management' in Mason's documentaries suggest that although environmental narratives

were becoming more prevalent, the meaning of nature was still negotiated in NFB cinema.

Chapter 4 continues to examine alternative representations of nature in NFB films. In particular, I look at the production of Boyce Richardson's *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974). Richardson's documentary, which was produced under the Challenge for Change program, highlighted the conflict between dominant white culture of high modernism (embodied by the James Bay hydroelectric project), and the Cree's traditional hunting practices. I argue that *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* challenged Quebec's technocratic and nationalistic discourse about the landscape, and replaced it with a vision of human and non-human relationships. Unlike most ethnographic documentaries produced by the National Film Board, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* privileged the ecological worldview of its indigenous subjects and scrutinized the exploitive habits of the state. Significantly, the James Bay Cree were just as important in the making of the documentary as Boyce Richardson or his cinematographer, Tony Ianzelo. This film, I argue, was also important because it made an extra-filmic impact on the Cree's ecological relationships. I end the dissertation with this chapter because Richardson's documentary encapsulates how much had changed since 1939, when the NFB was first established. It also marks an important moment in Film Board history in which documentary filmmakers became more willing to examine the idea that the environment was a site of inequality and pain, and more conscious of non-fiction cinema's reflexive ability to function as a tool of protest against fixed notions about nature, nation, and identity.

Chapter 1

Filming like a State: Nature, Nation, and Early NFB Cinema

On September 14th 1943, committee members from the National Film Board gathered at their headquarters in Ottawa to discuss a film production request from the Department of Agriculture. That summer, at a rural circuit conference in Winnipeg, the government branch lobbied the NFB to make a series of films about “the relationship of the soil to plant, animal, and human life.”¹ The Department of Agriculture was an important sponsor with deep pockets. Accordingly, the Board resolved to create a production unit that was devoted to exploring the “urgent phases of Canadian agriculture.”² During the meeting, the committee drafted a letter to Minister of Agriculture, James Gardiner, which outlined a plan for the unit. The NFB proposed to make a series of films about “rural health and sanitation, care of livestock, weed eradication, animal and plant diseases, farm electrification, horticulture, and farm beautification.”³ The NFB’s pitch satisfied Gardiner and the Department of Agriculture, but it still had to pass muster with the Ministry of National War. Concerned that the governing body would reject the project on grounds of irrelevancy, the NFB explained that the documentaries were “of great importance to the war effort and to post-war

¹ National Film Board Archives (NFBA), NFB minutes, 1943 September 14, p.3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 4.

planning.”⁴ This was acceptable to the Ministry of National War, and thus the Agricultural Production Unit (APU) was born.

The creation of the APU in 1943 signaled the arrival of an important trend in NFB filmmaking: the acknowledgement that the environment was a vital aspect of Canadian life and public education. In the early years of the National Film Board, when funding was limited and staff members were few, depictions of nature were generally staid and unimaginative. They towed the party line. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that members of the NFB responded to the Departments of Agriculture’s request by producing documentaries about the practical concerns of farming. The decision mollified one of the NFB’s biggest sponsors who wrote the cheques that kept the lights on and the cameras rolling. The APU’s mandate to “promote a direct facing of the present and future problems of Canadian agriculture” also satisfied the federal government’s objective for the Board, which was to educate the Canadian public on matters of national interest and planning.⁵ This attentiveness to governmental objectives was common in NFB cinema. Most films about nature in the 1940s and 1950s reflected state policy, especially its utilitarian concerns pertaining to the management of natural resources. Wartime documentaries, for example, promoted the government’s total mobilization strategy to maximize timber, coal, and agricultural output because of their usefulness to the Allies’ military strategy.

NFB documentarians continued to support the government’s natural resource policy after the Second World War by presenting farming landscapes as a symbol of the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

country's economic prosperity. Filmmakers Stanley Jackson, Stuart Legg, and APU producer Evelyn Cherry imagined the vast heartland of Canada as the key to postwar reconstruction and economic vitality. According to these filmmakers, it was imperative that Canadians incorporate modern agricultural techniques and technologies recommended by governmental experts. If farmers did not approach nature with scientific knowledge and expertise, agriculturists would risk ecological collapse, and worse, economic ruin. "Canadians must... cooperate with the government, for it is that which ensures there will be sufficient resources in the future," the narrator for Cherry's *Water for Prairies* (1950) warned, summarizing the instrumentalist ethos of the government.⁶

NFB documentaries about the exploitation and management reflected a high modern way of seeing nature. Confidence in science and technology as a way to improve nature was salient in films about agriculture, forestry, and wildlife protection. A farmer tilling the land; a government officer calculating the circumference of a conifer; a wind passing through wheat sprayed with pesticides were prominent features in postwar documentaries about the environment. Depictions of rationalized landscapes and powerful resource extraction technologies documented the state's full-scale transformation of the country's geography in postwar Canada.

Filming like a state

The government actively used NFB non-fiction cinema to educate the public on matters relating to the exploitation of the natural environment. To understand the close

⁶ *Water for Prairies*, produced by Lawrence Cherry, NFB, 1950.

relationship between the National Film Board and state-authorized visions of nature, it is essential that we look at the origins of the NFB. From the very beginning, Film Board production priorities were inexorably bound to the state's political agendas. Film scholar Michael Dorland notes that parliamentary decisions, funding preferences, and institutional MOs such as "combating American cultural colonialism," or "bringing coherence to a divided polity" dictated the kinds of documentaries the NFB made.⁷ Indeed, the creation of the NFB itself was an act of the Federal Government. Under the liberal government of Mackenzie King, the NFB absorbed the Motion Picture Bureau and began producing and distributing movies that "helped Canadians everywhere understand the problems and way of life of Canadians in other parts of the country."⁸ For the government, the most pressing concerns were that of the Second World War. Consequently, the NFB was required to produce films and newsreel footage that boosted domestic morale and galvanized public support for the government's military strategies.⁹ The *Canada Carries On* and *World in Action* series were both created by the NFB as a way to broadcast relevant and timely information about the global conflict to the general public.¹⁰ Non-military documentaries were also subsumed into a larger matrix of

⁷ Michael Dorland, *So Close to the States: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 86; Zoe Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 11.

⁸ Canada, *An Act to Create a National Film Board, in Statutes of Canada*, 2 George VI, Ch. 20 (Ottawa: Joseph Oscar Patenaude, 1939).

⁹ The connection between Mackenzie King's total mobilization strategy and the NFB's production priorities was formalized in October 1941 when an order-in-council designated the Minister of National War Services as the overseer of the NFB.

¹⁰ One must be careful not to overemphasize the role of the Second World War in shaping NFB decisions. As the archival record suggests, the question of national unity was integral to the NFB's formation. The National Film Act of 1939 charged the government film commissioner with "the making and distribution of national films designed to help Canadians in all parts of Canada to understand the ways of living and the problems of Canadians in other parts." But as D.B. Jones explains, "It was the essence of this notion of

government wartime propaganda.¹¹ The Agriculture Production Unit, for example, was tasked with making films that helped “build and maintain the morale of rural Canada” whose population was “increasingly important to the war effort.”¹²

Governmental policy was not the only factor shaping the production priorities of the National Film Board in the 1940s. NFB founder, John Grierson, was equally instrumental in determining the kinds of images and narratives the NFB manufactured.¹³ Grierson, who had transplanted to Canada from Britain in 1938, saw non-fiction filmmaking as a vital technology of liberal democracy.¹⁴ Before his tenure with the NFB, Grierson oversaw the creation of Britain’s Empire Marketing Board (EMB). As the director of EMB, Grierson blended social scientific techniques with modernist film techniques to promote a celebratory picture of democratic life in England. For Grierson, there was no better way to show audiences the diversity of the British Empire than with a film camera.¹⁵ “There are subjects aplenty in the progress of industry, the story of

wholeness that a seemingly infinite variety of films and activities, given the proper orientation, were relevant to the wartime effort.” D.B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981), 25.

¹¹ In his essay, “The Documentary Idea,” John Grierson clarified that NFB pictures were concerned with the relationship between “local strategies and larger world ones,” and the “national and international management of industrial, economic and human forces.” John Grierson, “The Documentary Idea,” in *The Complete Photographer* 4, 92 (1942), 83

¹² NFBA, NFB minutes, 1943 September 14, p.4.

¹³ For more background on Grierson see: Allan Lovell, *The Documentary Film Movement: John Grierson* (1972); James Beveridge, *John Grierson: Film Master* (1978); Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (1984); Peter Morris, “Backwards to the Future: John Grierson’s Film Policy for Canada,” (1986) and “Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson (1987); Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye* (1987); Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement 1926-1946* (1989); Jack C Ellis, *John Grierson: Life and Contributions, and Influence* (2000); Zoe Druick “The Battle for Authenticity: Perspectives on John Grierson and the National Film Board” (2002).

¹⁴ Druick, *Projecting Canada*, 72. According to Druick, Grierson was heavily influenced by the social theories of Walter Lippman and his book *Public Opinion* which blamed the erosion of democracy on the fact that the political and social complexities of contemporary society made it difficult for the public to respond to issues vital to the maintenance of democratic society.

¹⁵ Grierson’s one and only film, *Drifters* (1929), was about the herring industry in Britain’s North Sea.

invention, the pioneering and developing of new lands and the exploration of lost ones, the widening horizons of commerce, the complexities of manufacture, and the range of communications: indeed in all the steam and smoke, dazzle and speed, of the world at hand, and all the strangeness and sweep of affairs more distant,” Grierson wrote in 1927.¹⁶

While Grierson believed that filmmaking could advertise the vibrancy of life in the Empire, he also believed that non-fiction filmmaking could be used by political elites to instill the general public with democratic values.¹⁷ After he was appointed the first public relations officer of the General Post Office in 1933, Grierson began to pontificate about cinema’s capacity to align audience subjectivities with the goals of the state. In a surprisingly blunt assessment of the medium’s potential for governmental propaganda, Grierson explained that documentary cinema was a “hammer” that could “mold and pattern men’s actions.”¹⁸

The Scotsman’s ardent belief that documentary cinema could be used to govern populations was expressed in the creation of the National Film Board.¹⁹ Under the direction of the Liberal government, John Grierson used the NFB to teach audiences what they “needed to know...if they were going to do their best by Canada and themselves.”²⁰ Grierson’s agenda dictated both the modus operandi of the NFB and its filmmaking

¹⁶ Quoted in Jamie Sexton, “Grierson’s Machine, “Drifters,” The Documentary Film Movement and the Negotiation of Modernity,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 11 No 1 (Spring, 2002). 46.

¹⁷ Grierson loathed art that was introverted, personal, and disconnected from what he called the “objective rhythms of daily life.” (Sexton, 46.)

¹⁸ Quoted in Jones, 42. Grierson also called documentary cinema the “greatest mobilization of the public’s imagination since the churches lost their grip.” Quoted in Goetz, 61.

¹⁹ Grierson, “A Film Policy for Canada,” *Canadian Affairs*, I (June, 1944) 3-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

aesthetics. The commissioner demanded his filmmakers limit personal stylistic flourishes and produce films that communicated government messages in the simplest way possible. As one contemporary critic put it, Grierson's films were "direct to the point of vulgarity."²¹ No doubt, the film commissioner took this as a compliment. Grierson liked to boast to his British colleagues that NFB documentaries were a stark contrast to the indignant moralism and patriotism of other war films of the period.²² Regardless of what his critics thought, Grierson established a distinctive style of filmmaking that was immediately recognizable: in NFB documentaries there was no ambiguity to who was speaking on behalf of Canada; the NFB was the official voice of the government.²³ It existed to interpret the country, and in particular, the government, to ordinary Canadians.

Wartime Documentaries and Canada's Natural Resources

NFB wartime films about natural resources were unambiguously propaganda texts that supported the environmental policy of the state and Grierson's own vision for a productive citizenry. They addressed a specific problem (resource shortages), explained the root cause of the issue (human mismanagement, natural catastrophes), and provided curative solutions (hard work, government intervention, and science). The documentaries warned that exhausting the country's surplus of timber, wheat, and precious minerals

²¹ British filmmaker and critic Edgar Antsey quoted in Jones, 42.

²² William Goetz, "Canadian Wartime Documentary: Canada Carries On and the World In Action," *Cinema Journal* 16, no. 2 (1977), 65.

²³ Although Grierson wanted his films to appear impartial, there was a considerable amount of filmic prestidigitation occurring in the films he produced. To broadcast government views clearly, NFB directors abstracted images and sounds from specific places, and assembled them into particular sequences. Short films and newsreels about the Second World War frequently utilized Eisensteinian editing techniques such as jump cuts and baroque movie scores to give the film an emotional subtext.

would spell disaster for Canada, especially during wartime. These commodities were not only valuable as raw materials that could be used in the manufacturing of military wares; they were sources of domestic revenue.

The first film to promote state policy on natural resources was *Timber Front* (1940), a documentary about the Canadian forestry industry directed by Captain Frank C. Badgley and sponsored by the Lands, Parks, and Forests Branch.²⁴ The narrator explains, “natural resources are critical to the war effort.” Wheat from the prairies and minerals from Canada’s mining district are harvested and transported to Britain to be used during the war. These are important in the “struggle against the enemy,” but it is Canada’s forests that are “the most vital resources.”²⁵ Not only are wood planks and pulp products used in the frontlines of Europe, they are also important to the progress of Canada after the war. A title card explains that as wood products play a more central role in the daily lives of Canadians, the public is becoming “more conscious of their country’s forest resources.” They are “owners of 800 million acres of forest land,” 1/3rd of the country’s geography. While the amount of timber is vast, the narrator laments that the number of raw resource is quickly dwindling. Lumbering has stripped the virgin forests bare, the he informs. If left unmanaged, this once plentiful resource could disappear forever.

In typical propaganda fashion, *Timber Front* is characterized by a sense of urgency. The film explains that timber scarcity was a national problem with dire consequences. Timber through mismanagement was an “economic issue,” that limited the

²⁴ *Timber Front*, produced by Stanley Hawes and Frank Badgley, NFB, 1940.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

ability of the country to help its allies, the narrator explains.²⁶ To emphasize the severity of the situation, Badgley repeatedly pans over denuded landscapes of stumps and mud. How did a once abundant nation get to this point? The film argues that it was loggers who were at fault. Timber men in the twentieth-century “left a trail of scars - deserted mills, and houses, wasted logs and stumps.” In the wake of the “slash and the waste,” devastating forest fires erupted. The narrator laments that “over 46 million dollars were lost” due to these uncontrolled blazes.²⁷ The camera moves through a grim wasteland. “The public’s timber lost!” the narrator exclaims.²⁸

There was some truth to this melodramatic assessment of the country’s timber supply. Advanced machinery, increased manpower, and what the film characterizes as the “cut and get out” mentality of the forestry industry, significantly reduced the timber supplies of Canada in the early twentieth century. Concerns about the health of Canadian forests reached a crescendo in the interwar years. Despite local attempts to conserve forests, observers noted glumly that loggers still preferred bigger short-term yields to long-term sustainability.²⁹ The economic problems associated with lumber shortage were particularly acute during the Second World War. According to a report by the Lands, Parks, and Forests Branch, tree loss due to forest fires in 1938 was “considerably above

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For resources on Canadian forestry conservation see: Bruce Hodgins and Jamie Benidickson, *The Temagami Experience: Recreation, Resources and Aboriginal Rights in the Northern Ontario Wilderness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); R. Peter Gillis and Thomas Roach, *Lost Initiatives: Canada’s Forest Industries, Forest Policy, and Forest Conservation* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

the average of the last ten years.”³⁰ To reverse this disturbing trend, the government encouraged foresters to conserve their resources and not wantonly destroy the great forests of the country. State officials recommended through a series of royal commissions, and provincial and federal reports, that the forests of Canada must be “handled as a crop and not as a mine.”³¹



Fig. 1.1: A still from *Timber Front* (1940), directed by Frank Badgley

Timber Front likewise argues that government intervention was necessary to protect Canadian forests. By employing modern science and silviculture methods, the state could save this economic resource from misuse. *Timber Front* uses nostalgia to petition audiences to embrace the conservation practices proposed by the government. It was “a necessary expenditure,” the narrator says. Early in the film, Badgley edits together

³⁰ Canada, Lands, Parks and Forests Branch, *Report for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1939* (Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1939), 138. <http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pubwarehouse/pdfs/30918.pdf>

³¹ Graeme Wynn, *North America and Arctic: An Environmental History* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clío, 2007) 323.

grainy footage of lumberjacks clearing the virginal forests of Canada. “So into the woods plunged the logger, the real North American pioneer, with a capacity for hard work ... unsurpassed in history,” the narrator remarks.³² An old lumberjack from the pioneering days describes the romanticism of logging in the Canadian wilderness in the nineteenth-century. It was not a job for the faint of heart, but it was rewarding work, and manly too. Logging has long been a part of Canada’s history. For the country’s timber industry to continue to thrive, it was vital that the methods and philosophy of resource exploitation change. The days of the solitary barkskin are long gone; their gung ho methods of cutting down forests are not tenable in this modern era. New technologies and larger forestry companies have made the exploitation of timber easier and far more efficient. As a result, loggers needed to be more careful with how they extracted this national resource, and consider the long-term ramifications of wastefulness. To ensure that there is a steady production of timber resources in the future, government intervention is required. Equipped with scientific knowledge and rational planning, the government and the timber industry can work together to manage this national treasure and preserve an important aspect of Canada’s heritage.

Interestingly, the pro-government tone of management and expertise in *Timber Front* was not what Badgley had intended for the film. In the first draft of the documentary script, the filmmaker castigated the logging industry for being “wasteful,” “irresponsible,” and “ruinous,” as well as the government for being “lax” and “slow to

³² *Timber Front* (1940)

adjust.”³³ Predictably, the denunciation of government policy unnerved the financial sponsor of the film. The Lands, Parks, and Forests Branch wanted a documentary that encouraged the public to support the government’s rational policy, not a jeremiad against the state’s apparent mismanagement of a national resource. After reading the script, Director of Lands, Roy A. Gibson complained to John Grierson that Badgley’s documentary was too negative.³⁴ He explained to the film commissioner that forest fires were as devastating as the clear-cut methods of the forest industry.³⁵ Gibson reminded Grierson that his superiors wanted a film that promoted the work of the Branch in mitigating the issues of economic waste. Grierson assured Gibson that the final version of *Timber Front* would do a better job of advertising the work of the Dominion Forest Service. Accordingly, *Timber Front* describes Canadian foresters as an “industrial army mobilized on the home front,” fighting to protect the country’s “most valuable resources.”³⁶ Furthermore, it optimistically reassures audiences that state officers were working with the timber industry to “put forests back together.”³⁷ This demonstrates rather clearly the ways in which individual filmmakers were beholden to the whims of government sponsors. Each film produced during wartime had to serve a greater national purpose. In typical Griersonian fashion *Timber Front* was tailored in ways that promoted the government’s benevolent presence in the resource industry.

On a more abstract level, the documentary’s effusive praise of technology and science as a way to maintain the productivity of Canadian forests mirrors the high modern

³³ NFBA, *Timber Front*, script by Frank Badgley, 1939.

³⁴ NFBA, *Timber Front* file, R.A. Gibson to John Grierson, February 25, 1940.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ NFBA, *Timber Front* file, John Grierson to Don Cameron, June 21, 1940.

³⁷ *Timber Front*, 1940.

ideology of the state. According to the film, “planes equipped with automatic cameras” record every timber stand within its line of sight.³⁸ “The aircraft” with “propeller and cameras clicking” can do the job in a “fraction of time,” the narrator boasts.³⁹

Furthermore, the film celebrates the modern forester, who is a “mathematician in an office.” He employs trigonometry to determine the economic value of trees from the “height of their shadow.”⁴⁰ The narrator also describes the forestry service as a “highly trained” institution, where experts are equipped with modern technologies to manage nature. The forests of Canada can be “an immense asset to the future” if they are managed “scientifically and in a farsighted manner,” Chief of the Dominion Forests Donald Roy Cameron lectures to his class of eager foresters in one of the final scenes of the documentary.⁴¹ When timber companies start to implement these scientific measures into their operations, then the log drive will represent “not a slaughter, but a carefully managed harvest.” There will be no “scarred and desolate hillsides.” Instead, the forests will remain a “reserve of beauty, a shelter for wildlife, and a great reservoir of timber sufficient for needs of the entire world.”

Timber Front was the first of several documentaries to link Canadian natural resources to the utilitarian wartime policies (and ideologies) of the federal government.⁴²

Subsequent NFB documentaries about natural resources were less concerned about

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The NFB also produced a number of non-military films during this period, which included topics on farming (*Food as it Might Be*), coal mining (*Getting out the Coal*), forest conservation, (*Trees for Tomorrow*), weed control (*Just Weeds*), and natural history (*Mites and Monsters*). While these films were explicitly non-militaristic, they were still part of the wartime propaganda machine, which demanded that Canadians protect the country’s natural resources.

conservation but continued to promulgate the important role natural resource industries played in the war effort. In *Coal Face, Canada* (1944), director Robert Edmonds shows audiences how fossilized carbon was used in the manufacturing of “high explosive bombs,” and in the propulsion of navy ships carrying armaments and troops across the Atlantic.⁴³ The film connects this “vital resource” to the labour of everyday Canadians who work in the mines. The docudrama follows army veteran Bruce Adams, who has been recently discharged from military service. Dolefully, the veteran returns to Nova Scotia to work in the coalmines like his father before him. “Once a miner, always a miner,” he accepts drearily as he chips away at the coalface in a dark, anonymous shaft.⁴⁴ At first, Adams is pessimistic. Mining feels meaningless in comparison to his time spent fighting on the frontlines in Europe. Over the course of the film though, Adams learns to appreciate the value of his work. He learns that as a miner he helps supply the Canadian army with coal, which is necessary for the development of weapons and medical supplies.⁴⁵ His work in the mines, in other words, is important.

The National Film Board also produced a number of wartime propaganda films about the importance of farming during the Second World War. As Malek Khouri notes in *Filming Politics: Communism and the Portrayal of the Working Class at the NFB*, wartime films about agriculture argued that allied victory was predicated on the

⁴³ NFBA, Coal Face Canada file, “Moving Picture: Coal Production in Canada,” n.d.

⁴⁴ *Coal Face Canada*, produced by Robert Edmonds, NFB, 1944.

⁴⁵ *The Strategy of Metals* (1941) and *Battle for Oil* (1942) similarly showed how the exploitation of raw materials helped Canada fight overseas. *Strategy of Metals*, produced by Stuart Legg, NFB, 1941; *Battle for Oil*, produced by Stuart Spottiswoode, NFB, 1942.

wherewithal of modern farmers to cultivate healthy crops every harvest.⁴⁶ The idea that farming was essential to military success was first examined in Stuart Legg's *Food - Weapons of Conquest* (1941). Narrated in the stentorian voice of Lorne Greene, the newsreel depicts Canadian farmers helping to meet the "real food needs of fellow men."⁴⁷ Food harvested in the prairies nourishes the members of the Canadian military and those of other Allied nations who are suffering from food crises. Stanley Jackson's *Hands for the Harvest* (1943), a short documentary produced for the Agricultural Production Unit, similarly contends that Canadian farmers were essential to the success of the war effort. The documentary encourages farmers "of all ages" to "persevere" and feed the men fighting overseas.⁴⁸

Other wartime documentaries about agriculture were targeted less at resource industries and more at the individual. Branches of the federal government, including the Department of Agriculture, used non-fiction filmmaking as a way to get individual farmers to comply with their conservation strategies. For many farmers trying to eke out a living in the 1940s, World War 2 posed a number of challenges that limited their ability to produce a healthy surplus of produce including labour and equipment shortages. The government instituted a number of wage control measures to help ameliorate some of these concerns and NFB was the perfect channel to broadcast its objectives and to teach farmers how to work within these state imposed limitations. In *According to Need* (1944), a documentary directed by Dallas Jones, the narrator justifies that the federal

⁴⁶ Malek Khouri, *Filming Politics: Communism and the Portrayal of the Working Class at the National Film Board of Canada, 1939 – 1946* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007) 170.

⁴⁷ *Hands for the Harvest*, Produced by James Beveridge, NFB, 1943

⁴⁸ Ibid.

government's proposal to regulate the price of commodities and services in both the farming and manufacturing industries will have long-term benefits for farmers who are struggling to get by.⁴⁹ Although wage and price controls mean that farmers will have to tighten their belt, these measures will ultimately protect the agriculturalist's livelihood.

The film begins by explaining that farmers need dependable equipment to harvest their crops on time. Farm machinery, however, is expensive and time-consuming to replace. Additionally, manufacturing plants that replace tractor parts were preoccupied with fashioning weapons of war, and thus unable to fulfill the requests of the farmers for timely service. (One can imagine farmers in the audience nodding in agreement with the film's depiction of this well-known agricultural conundrum.) The documentary then explains that the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) has resolved the dilemma by establishing a system that regulates the production needs of Canadian farmers.

To ensure that farmers embraced the government's wage and price controls, the Department of Agriculture instructed Jones to use reenactments and stage actors. The department frequently used drama and stage actors because they thought it better illustrated the logic of their policy to farmers. The fictionalized sequence in *According to Need* personalizes the abstract concept of scarcity and price-controls. In one scene, a farmer, dressed in grease-stained overalls, informs an employee at a manufacturing plant that he is unable to cultivate his crops because something on his tractor is broken. The farmer complains that he had sent the damaged part to the plant "months ago," but has not

⁴⁹ NFBA, *According to Need* file, "Information Sheet," November, 1944.

received the replacement piece yet.⁵⁰ The farmer is angry; he needs the part so he can continue to provide “food for the allied armies...food for the liberated people of Europe...food for civilians here at home who are working harder and eating more than ever before.”⁵¹ A nation-wide food shortage may very well occur if that “part can’t be replaced by morning,” the farmer declares melodramatically.⁵²

Unfortunately, as the narrator of the film reminds, it is difficult to get replacement parts when manufacturers are occupied with supplying militaristic appurtenances. The worker shrugs his shoulders at the farmer’s predicament. “That’s a lot to expect. That’s a molded part...practically made by hand...foundry help is scarce too. And many of those parts would require many such men...Men, materials, and machines needed for that part are also needed for war. Perhaps one of those essentials has gone into munitions. Don’t count too much on getting your part this morning. War production comes first,” he explains.⁵³ The conflict between the two intensifies. “But food production is war production,” the farmer rebuts.⁵⁴ “Isn’t anyone making sure of the machinery that makes food production possible?”⁵⁵ Before the situation between the farmer and worker escalates further, a government man from the Selective Service Committee saunters in with a solution. He turns to the farmer, and says: “This year the production of farm implements and parts is going to be limited to exactly what we farmers need and no more, and by needs the government means exactly the equipment we can’t possibly get along

⁵⁰ *According to Need*, 1944.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

without.”⁵⁶ In this new system, a farmer must give an inventory to Wartime Prices and Trade Board, who then assess the most basic agrarian necessities. The government is committed to examining “every last pound of metal and man-hour to see what it would take to meet farmer’s needs,” which is meant to mollify the irritated farmer.⁵⁷ The Selective Service man then turns to the worker and explains that the government has implemented price ceilings on machinery. He cannot charge farmers more just because the farmer requires the parts immediately. The government establishes quotas with manufacturers who “produce according to need,” the federal employee clarifies.

The worker responds gruffly, “I have heard damn near enough about these ceilings. Seems to me it’s just another way of you guys keeping the wages down.” The man from the Selective Service Committee reprimands the worker for his selfishness. “Now look here. If we give you more money, through subsidies, to compensate for the ceiling, than we will have to give it to everyone else. Then our costs will go up and we will have to charge the farmer more,” he argues.⁵⁸ The worker does not understand. “Ok. Ok. You’ve got to charge him more. What’s the problem with that?”⁵⁹ Patiently the officer from Selective Service describes how without ceilings, “everybody else will be raising wages and prices.”⁶⁰ In other words, the farmer would have to charge the farmer and the rest of Canada more for their food. At that moment in the film, both the farmer and worker nod. They understand that they are both making sacrifices to help, not just each other, but also the entire country. “The need of one is recognized as the problem of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

all, and local affairs that have been transformed by the urgency of war into national matters, are being dealt with on a national scale,” the narrator of the film remarks.⁶¹

According to Need was part of a larger series of films about resource conservation produced by the Wartime Information Board (WIB). In a memorandum to the National Film Board and the Treasury Office, the WIB supplied a list of other films that it wanted produced including *Mrs. Consumer Goes Shopping*, *Money on the Farm*, and *According to Need*.⁶² In each documentary, the government utilized dramatic reenactments to communicate the legitimacy of its intervention in the lives of agriculturalists. For John Grierson, this type of filmmaking was ideally suited to educate the public about government measures in the agricultural sector. In a letter to Donald Gordon, Chairman of WBTB, the commissioner explained that films like *According to Need* “stimulate greater public effort toward stabilization rather than merely to encourage continued support for stability already achieved.”⁶³ It was not just the natural resource industry that needed to comply with government fiat; individual farmers needed to submit to state conservation strategies and national planning.

Despite their use of reenactments, sponsored documentaries were criticized by contemporary film critics as crude propaganda; moving pictures that were little more than federally sponsored commercials used to drum up public support for the domestic and international schemes of the country during the Second World War. They were not wrong in their assessments. John Grierson himself had stated that his goal in making

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² NFBA, *According to Need* file, “Memorandum to the National Film Board,” October 13, 1944.

⁶³ NFBA, *According to Need* file, John Grierson to Donald Gordon, Chairman of Wartime Prices and Trade Board, May 29, 1944.

documentaries was to unite the Canadian population under the banner of “total war.” Films such as *Timber Front*, *Coal Face Canada*, and *According to Need* used different filmmaking techniques, including dramatic reenactments to communicate government discourses about the importance of managing the country’s resources during wartime.

NFB documentarians continued to propagate an official (and utilitarian) vision of nature and nation after the Second World War albeit with different rhetorical strategies. NFB films about resources in the postwar period depicted the Canadian landscape as plentiful and abundant. “It would be a poor information service...which kept harping on war to the exclusion of everything else,” Grierson explained in a CBC interview. “War films, yes, but more films, too, about the everyday things of life, the values, the ideals which make life worth living.”⁶⁴ While pictures about Canada’s natural plenitude did not contain the overwrought jingoism that characterized many of the NFB’s wartime films, they still endorsed the state held belief that the exploitation of this abundant geography was critical to the future of the country. Natural abundance was a gift, but only if it was used wisely. Farmers driving tractors across seemingly limitless acres of wheat, and state engineers building dams that harness the potential energy latent in fast flowing rivers linked the development of Canada’s natural wealth with national progress. In Stanley Jackson’s *Battle for the Harvests* (1942), a film which was distributed into the late 1940s, the narrator proclaims that Canadian farmers were establishing “new standards of health for the postwar period.”⁶⁵ Despite budget cuts and equipment deficiencies farmers laid “the foundation of a nation permanently strong of body and will,” by harvesting the

⁶⁴ John Grierson, *CBC* radiobroadcast, November 30, 1940.

⁶⁵ *Battle of the Harvests*, produced by Stanley Jackson, NFB, 1942.

country's lavish resources.⁶⁶ Canada is a place “where the blessings of food, health and space are the right of every man,” the narrator rhapsodizes.⁶⁷ Maintaining this natural bounty was the key to postwar reconstruction and ultimately national progress. The use of natural landscapes as a symbol of development and national prosperity was further evident in postwar documentaries such as *Red Runs the Fraser* (1949), and *Land in Trust* (1949). These films were paeans both to the country's bountiful geography and the government's conservation schemes that allowed Canadians to exploit this wealth.. Images of golden wheat fields, bustling timber yards, schools of salmon and industrial mining operations extolled the idea that Canada was, in the words of the narrator of *Land in Trust*, a “New land of promise!”⁶⁸

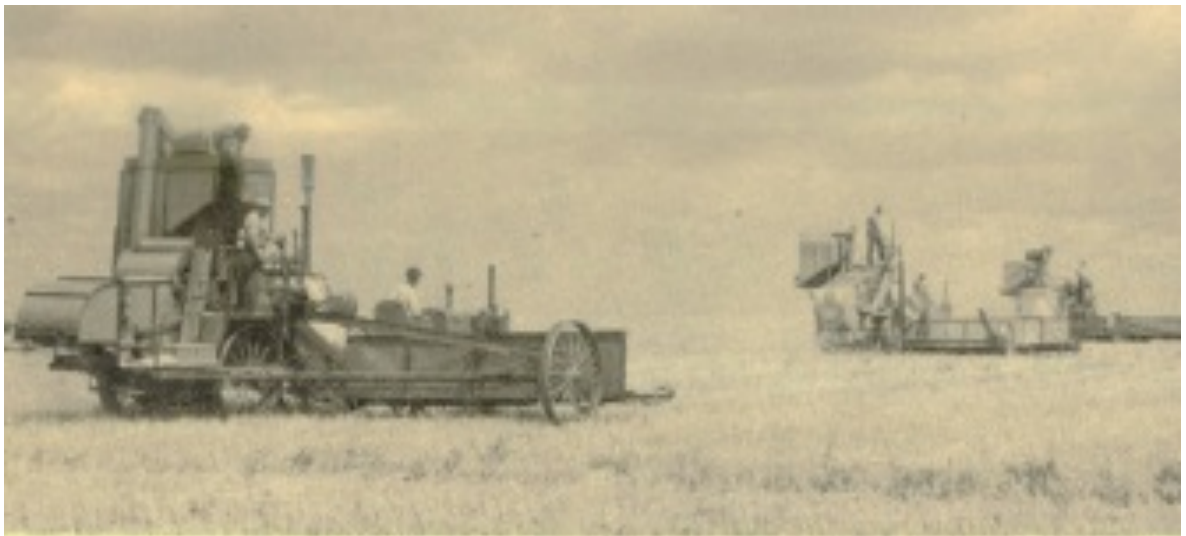


Fig 1.2: A still from *Battle of the Harvests* (1942), directed by Stanley Jackson

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Land in Trust*, produced by Lawrence Cherry and Evelyn Cherry, NFB, 1949

NFB Agricultural Documentaries and Postwar Reconstruction

During wartime, the National Film Board operated smoothly and without much consternation from the government.⁶⁹ It had a clear purpose (to galvanize public support, boost Canadian morale, and provide audiences with timely information on global events), and a leader with an unwavering vision of how the Board ought to run. Towards the end of the war, however, the NFB began to flounder. The Board's utility was ambiguous yet it was somehow spending more money than it ever had before. To clarify its role to the government in the postwar period, John Grierson announced a new production system in which twelve specialized units would make movies that "provided a supplementary system of national education."⁷⁰ During this time, the NFB was transferred from the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Supply, which remained the Film Board's governing body until 1948.⁷¹ Reorganizing the NFB's production system helped it transition from being a producer of wartime films to an agency committed to making pedagogical documentaries. The Board's newfound objective was nearly derailed, however, when the Conservative Party insinuated that Grierson was using the Film Board to support communist agenda. There was no doubt that Grierson's creative staff tended to lean left, but when Soviet spy, Igor Gouzenko defected and turned over a pile of documents that exposed a number of conspirators working in government (including John Grierson's secretary, Freda Linton) people began to wonder about the commissioner's

⁶⁹Jones, 45. For a good history of the NFB during wartime see also: Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984).

⁷⁰ John Grierson, "A Film Policy for Canada," *Canadian Affairs*, I (June 15, 1944) 3-15.

⁷¹ In 1949, the NFB was once again reassigned, this time to the Ministry of Resources and Development. Unsurprisingly, the NFB's governing bodies impacted the types of documentaries that it produced.

loyalties.⁷² Although the assertions of the Conservatives were unfounded, the Federal government questioned Grierson. The commissioner was not charged but the accusations against him weakened his stature in parliament, and by extension, the political dependability of the NFB. Grierson finally resigned in 1945.

The NFB was at a crossroads. How would it maintain its function as the “eyes of Canada”? It was through Grierson’s policy of producing educational films that the NFB gained a new life. The first politician to publicly defend the usefulness of the NFB was MP Roy Theodore Graham, who acknowledged in a parliamentary address that the Board was an essential interlocutor for the state. Graham was “alarmed” at the “chasm that separated people’s minds from the activities of the government.” He contended that the National Film Board was one of the few agencies that “interpret[ed] government to the people and help them to be fully informed of the details of different regulations and laws that affect them in their daily lives.”⁷³ With renewed intensity, Film Board productions in the late 1940s and 1950s began shifting their efforts to making non-fiction works that instructed the public on how to be democratic citizens of the emerging welfare state. Films about social security, immigration, and employment supported the welfare state initiatives of the government by explaining how state programs ensured equality and a better quality of life. Documentaries about the environment similarly communicated the political and ecological imagination of the welfare state, asseverating that the government was assisting agrarians in their pursuits.

⁷² Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 – 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 7.

⁷³ Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, July 14, 1944, 4904.

One of the key figures to promote this governmental vision was Evelyn Cherry, the head producer of the Agricultural Production Unit. In her documentaries about farming and forestry, Cherry argued that managing natural resources was essential to the economic stability of Canada. This could only be achieved, she claimed, if farmers applied state-authorized conservation methods.

Evelyn Spice Cherry was born in 1906 near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, a middle-sized town tucked away in the southeast corner of the province. Most of the townsfolk in Yorkton were immigrant farmers who had settled there in the 1880s. As a child, Cherry watched her neighbors farm the adjacent lots, toiling against drought, weeds, and hungry pests.⁷⁴ In the spring of 1929, Cherry graduated from the University of Missouri with a degree in journalism, and returned to Saskatchewan to work as a journalist for the *Regina Leader Post*. Two years later, Cherry left the prairies for England to become a documentary filmmaker for the General Post Office (GPO), where she worked alongside John Grierson.⁷⁵

Cherry eventually went back to Canada and became an independent filmmaker with her husband Lawrence Cherry. In 1940, she produced two short documentaries for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool: *By Their Own Strength*, which traces the history of wheat farming in the west, and *New Horizons*, a silent depiction of immigrant farmers and their struggle to make a living in the prairies. The films were seen by only a handful of

⁷⁴ Cherry commented on the unlikeliness of her career as a filmmaker. “Saskatchewan, which is in the heart of the great plains region – the region known for having been deprived of industry since the beginning of the history of Canada... is probably the least likely place for filmmakers to survive,” Cherry recalled. Olga Denisko, “Working in the Private Film industry,” *Interlock* 4-5 (1976.), 15.

⁷⁵ In England, Cherry learned the ins and outs of filmmaking from Grierson, Basil Wright, Arthur Elton, and Stuart Legg. As one observer noted, she could dismantle and repair movie cameras “as well as any mechanic.” *Free Press Weekly Prairie Farmer*, May 22, 1946.

individuals, farmers mostly, but they were remarkable works of non-fiction cinema, especially *New Horizons*. Without relying on narration, *New Horizons* recreated the story of environmental change in the Canadian West. Cherry visualized the ways ecological catastrophes impacted human settlement, and how centralized organizations helped indigent farmers overcome drought and poor crop yields.

In 1941, Grierson hired the young filmmaker to work for him at the National Film Board. Under the tutelage of the commissioner, Cherry wrote, directed, and produced a number of films about the relationship between ordinary folk (usually farmers) and the environment. Like Grierson, Cherry saw cinema as a tool for education. In her estimation, documentary filming helped everyday farmers' cultivate a better, more productive relationship with the land. "I have only seen cinema for what it can do to cause more excitement in education, to be inspired, to inspire, to inspire people to greater efforts to make the country a better place," she explained in an interview.⁷⁶

After writing and producing two films for the World in Action series, *The Main Dish* (1943) and *Coupon Value* (1943), Grierson asked Cherry to take charge of the Agricultural Production Unit. In her new role, Cherry focused on developing films that "reveal[ed] the unique problems confronting farmers in the modern world."⁷⁷ With the help of the Department of Agriculture, the filmmaker from rural Saskatchewan encouraged agrarians coast to coast to embrace governmental solutions. Ironically, Cherry was not concerned about regionalism despite her close relationship with farmers in

⁷⁶ Denisko 20. For more perspective on Cherry's career with the NFB, see also: Olga Denisko, "Pot Pourri," *NFB newsletter* (Summer, 1975).

⁷⁷ NFBA, NFB minutes, 1943 September 14, 3.

Saskatchewan and her familiarity with local environmental conditions. According to Cherry, farmers from across the country needed to adopt state agricultural methods in order to produce better crops and become more profitable. If they did this, farmers would become the country's backbone during postwar reconstruction, providing the nation with nourishment and a steady source of revenue via exports.



Fig. 1.3: Evelyn Cherry on the set of an Agricultural Production Unit film (1944)⁷⁸

Cherry's first documentary with the Agricultural Production Unit, *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943), examined the problem of soil sterility, an issue that was especially germane for farmers toiling in the 1940s. Canadian agriculturalists in the West had been hit hard during the Great Depression and had not fully recovered from its devastating

⁷⁸ NFBA, "photograph of Evelyn Cherry," n.d

effects. Not only were they confronted with a sharp drop in commodity prices, but they also faced ecological calamities such as droughts, soil erosion, and infertile land that destroyed their crops. At first, farmers could not sell their products. Then they were unable to grow them.

Cherry wanted to produce a film that helped farmers in the West recover from this ecological travesty. In order to do this, Cherry realized that she needed to explain the origins of the calamity. Most commentators during the Depression assumed that drought and soil erosion was just bad luck, or a result of hellish weather. Cherry had a different view. In *Windbreaks on the Prairies*, Cherry claims that the desiccation of the prairies had a human origin. Overzealous farmers and their steel plows laid waste to the environment.⁷⁹ In their misguided efforts to transform the western prairies into an agricultural hinterland, farmers destroyed the landscape's buffer against wind and periodic drought. Soon the soil became infertile and therefore useless. In the documentary, Cherry urges farmers to change their reckless practices and adopt cultivation habits that incorporated state expertise and "rational planning."⁸⁰

The idea for the film was first conceived in 1939 when the General Counsel for the North-West Grain Dealers Association, L.W. Brockington, asked the NFB if it would make a movie about Canadian agriculture in the west.⁸¹ Grierson was not interested in making the film at the time, but he recommended that Brockington hire Evelyn Cherry,

⁷⁹ In *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Finis Dunaway shows how Pare Lorentz film *Plow that Broke the Plains* (1937) was a powerful jeremiad against the ecological mismanagement of farmers in the dirty thirties. Although there is no mention of Lorentz's work in the archives, the American filmmaker appears to be a major influence on Cherry's films.

⁸⁰ *Windbreaks on the Prairies*, produced by Evelyn Cherry, 1943

⁸¹ NFBA, *Windbreaks on the Prairie* file, L.W. Brockington to John Grierson, n.d.

who was working as an independent filmmaker. The film commissioner assured Brockington that she was “far and away the best director we have in Canada.”⁸² For some reason, the North-West Grainer Dealers Association did not pursue the project. A few months later Grierson revisited the project. The commissioner believed that such a film would “be of maximum service to agricultural education officials” and revived the documentary idea.⁸³ In 1941, Grierson hired Cherry to oversee the production of the film.

Windbreaks on the Prairies opens with an idyllic montage of farmers harvesting grain. As the montage continues, the narrator of the film, Thomas Tweed, waxes nostalgic about Canada at the turn of the century. “On wheat, the west was built; on wheat, the east flourished,” Tweed eulogizes.⁸⁴ Overtime, however, as cultivating technology improved and farmers adopted more efficient ways to clear land, the landscape’s rich soil became exposed to harsh wind and relentless sun. The result: aridity. Cherry cuts to a series of images of dust whirling across cracked soil and through abandoned shanties. Because of their recklessness, Canadian farmers were vulnerable to the full wrath of nature. Powerful winds and rising temperatures decimated the once fertile West, the narrator exclaims. The once fallow land was essentially dead.

⁸² NFBA, *Windbreaks on the Prairies* file, John Grierson to L.W. Brockington, November 1, 1939.

⁸³ NFBA, *Windbreaks on the Prairies* file, John Grierson to J.F. Wright, September 20, 1940.

⁸⁴ *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943).



Fig. 1.4: still from *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943), directed by Evelyn Cherry

The documentary then shifts its tone and provides a curative solution to this ecological catastrophe. Farmers may have unintentionally destroyed the land, but they could restore it with the help of the government. The documentary explains how state scientists and agricultural experts “help nature correct some of the man-made mistakes of the past.”⁸⁵ For example, federal government employees help Western farmers recover their land by digging dams and irrigation channels under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act. The Department of Agriculture’s experimental arboreal station at Indian Head, Saskatchewan also assists farmers by supplying them with trees to plant. The trees create a barrier against windbreaks and thus protect the rich topsoil from eroding. “The government station is an inspiration to many farm people,” the narrator says.⁸⁶

Windbreaks on the Prairies pro-government message was praised by a number of people within the government. Allan Beaven, an officer of the Canadian Forestry

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Association, thought that Cherry's documentary would educate farmers who were "trying to get back on their feet." In a letter to John Grierson, he explained "At no time in the past has the need been greater for Western farm stability and improvement in farm living conditions, so the advent of such a film will indeed be timely. It will play a big part in our educational campaign, and will be shown to around 65,000 prairie people each year and as it takes us some five years to cover every point on the plains, over 300,000 people will have the opportunity of seeing it during this period on the tree planting lecture car."⁸⁷

Cherry continued to make promote the government's intercession in the lives of Canadian agriculturists under the aegis of the Agricultural Production Unit. In *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* (1945), for example, Cherry instructed farmers to adopt modern husbandry techniques and business strategies developed by the Department of Agriculture.⁸⁸ The short documentary assures farmers from both Western Canada and Eastern Canada that their plots would become more profitable if they "studied the information put out by both provincial and dominion Departments of Agriculture."⁸⁹ *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* was concurrent with other government sponsored farming initiatives including the Agricultural Prices Support Board and the Farm Improvement Loans Act, both of which were established in 1944. In fact, Cherry's documentary was an adaptation of a comprehensive government study authored by H.R. Hare, an agricultural economist working for the Dominion Department of Labor. A year before the film was released Hare had published a short article called "Little Chats on Farm Management" for

⁸⁷ NFBA, Windbreaks on the Prairies file, Allan Beaven to John Grierson, Oct 16th 1940.

⁸⁸ NFBA, Five Steps to Better Farm Living file, "Condense Guide for Film utilization," n.d.

⁸⁹ NFBA, Five Steps to Better Farm Living file, "Fact Sheet," n.d.

the Economics Division of the Dominion Department of Agriculture. In the article, Hare observed that Canadian farmers across the country made financial decisions that “resulted in the accumulation of indebtedness.”⁹⁰ Hare argued that this “failure” occurred because the farmer did not grasp basic economic principles, and was prejudiced against modern agricultural methods.”⁹¹ “For farm operators, the old mental plan must be superseded by one more carefully thought out and written,” Hare concluded.⁹²

Hare’s technocratic solution paralleled Cherry’s own ideas about agricultural modernization. Like Hare’s “Little Chats,” *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* contends that Canadian farmers can avoid loan defaults and pitiable crop yields if they improve their capital investments, use victory bonds, and replace outdated farming machinery. The idea of using modern equipment was particularly important if farmers wanted to boost productivity. Extended shots of petroleum-powered tractors plowing acres of wheat underscore the economic value of modernization. For Cherry, the tractor was an important visual motif that reflected the central theme of the documentary: the transformation of the agrarian landscape into a productive and modern space that supports the food needs of the entire country. “The tractor is symbolic...of freedom from drudgery, symbolic of plenty, and symbolic of a happy life,” Cherry explained. “It can be used to free man instead of enslave him.”⁹³ The depiction of the tractor as an icon of agricultural modernization and more abstractly, national progress, was apt. As Hare observes in “Little Chats,” advancements in farm machinery had a tremendous effect on

⁹⁰ H.R. Hare, *Little Chats on Farm Management* (Ottawa: Economics Division – Marketing Service, Dominion Department of Agriculture, 1943), 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 4.

⁹² *Ibid.* 22.

⁹³ NFBA, *Five Steps to Better Living* file, Evelyn Cherry to “Sol,” September 16, 1944.

farming in Canada in the twentieth century. And no other piece of equipment shaped the Canadian agricultural landscape more than the tractor. The powerful machine could quickly convert a farmer's acreage into profit, and it allowed agriculturists to devote more time to planting and growing new crops.



Fig. 1.5: A farmer plows his field in Cherry's *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943)

Five Steps to Better Farm Living was a departure from Cherry's earlier, more creative films about rural life in the West. Cherry admitted that sometimes she felt constrained by the Department of Agriculture's desire for "educational and not sociological films."⁹⁴ Although the aesthetic opportunities within the APU were limited, Cherry was committed to making didactic films that supported the mandate of the National Film Board. She believed that government-sponsored documentary filmmaking was the best ways to help improve the lives of rural Canadians across the country. "The

⁹⁴ NFBA, *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* file, Cherry letter, July 9, 1944.

work I was doing was valuable and precious in helping to strengthen unity across the land,” she remarked in a 1975 interview about her career as a filmmaker.⁹⁵

Cherry’s used specific creative and aesthetic strategies to communicate her pro-governmental ideas. One of the ways she “strengthen[ed] unity across the land,” was by representing Canadian farmers as a homogenous population.⁹⁶ Although Cherry was from the West, her films, with the exception of *Windbreaks on the Prairies* perhaps, were primarily about agriculturists across the country. As Cherry explained it, “nameless archetypes,” and “everyday people” enabled audiences from different parts of Canada to identify with the scenarios she was depicting onscreen.⁹⁷ In *Five Steps to Better Farm Living*, for example, Cherry went to farms in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, where she searched for “unexceptional” farmers. She eventually cast a planter from Alberta, whose farm was “very typical.”⁹⁸ Cherry explained in a letter to her cinematographer that “the farmer is about 40 to 50, an intelligent man with character in his face” and his wife is a “nice looking woman, tall and well built with an attractive smile and nice eyes.” Their children were equally unremarkable too. “The son is almost nineteen, a tall boy...who intends to stay on the farm and is intelligent,” and the daughter was “17 or 18, tall and pretty, and she can really cook.”⁹⁹ Cherry believed that it was vital to use “nice looking” and “attractive” subjects that embodied a picture of the ordinary farmer. The pleasant but nondescript features of the subjects made it easier for audiences to empathize with their agricultural plight regardless if they were from Saskatchewan or

⁹⁵ Olga Denisko, “Pot Pourri,” *NFB newsletter* (Summer, 1975), 11.

⁹⁶ Druick 63.

⁹⁷ NFBA, *Five Steps to Better Living* file, Evelyn Cherry to “Sol,” September 16, 1944.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Quebec. Although it is difficult to gauge the reception of these films, it seems that spectators attending screenings at local film forums, or on the NFB's rural circuit, identified with the characters in APU films.¹⁰⁰ For example, *Land in Trust* (1949), a film about the challenges of soil erosion, for example "received very positive comment."¹⁰¹ F.F. Morwick, a professor in the Soils Department at the University of Guelph admired the "timely and important presentation of a national topic," while reviewers in New Brunswick appreciated the film's presentation of an ordinary father and his son working together on the family farm.¹⁰²

In addition to presenting her subjects as "ordinary" and "universal," Cherry also used locations that were ambiguous and non-descript. The farming landscapes in *New Horizons* (1943), *Windbreaks on the Prairies*, *Five Steps to Better Farm Living*, *Soil for Tomorrow* (1945), and *Farm Electrification* (1946) were conspicuously absent of distinguishing features or landmarks. For the most part, these films also exclude

¹⁰⁰ The NFB's distribution strategy was fundamental tool in fostering national unity and in inculcating a way of seeing nature. Between 1942 and 1946, the NFB ran citizenship film forums in rural schools, churches, community centers, and at factories. Projectionists, known as field men, drove around the country with film equipment and electric generators. After the war, the itinerant field operatives were replaced with newly formed local film councils, which promoted the production, distribution, and use of informational visual material for the general welfare of its constituents. Donald Buchanen, an art historian and founder of the National Film Society of Canada observed in 1946 that audiences "turn out in crowds for the showings." Rural circuits and film councils were "a gadfly to social discussion" and helped rural populations "feel connected" to the rest of the country. Donald Buchanen, "The Projection of Canada" *University of Toronto Quarterly* (April, 1944). 1. The majority of Evelyn Cherry's documentaries were circulated through local film councils and the NFB's rural circuit platform, a model for non-theatrical film distribution, adapted from the British imperial practice of "mobile cinema." This distribution strategy further promoted state efforts to rationalize Canadian agricultural landscapes. The distribution model allowed the government to directly monitor public reception and, when necessary, elaborate on the state's efforts to intervene in the lives of farmers. In agricultural film forums, government officers from the Department of Agriculture regularly facilitated conversations about the importance of the electrification of farms and the adoption of modern husbandry strategies. In other words, it was not just the message that was significant; it was also the medium itself that helped augment the state's authority over the landscape.

¹⁰¹ NFBA, *Land in Trust* file, Evelyn Cherry to Roger Morin, March 4, 1950.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

references to specific towns or cities. The use of nonspecific backgrounds in APU documentaries was intentional. Cherry wanted her ideas to be understandable to farmers across the country, not just people from Alberta or Nova Scotia. In order to do that she needed to have her films take place on a farm that could be in New Brunswick just as easily as it could be in Saskatchewan.¹⁰³ Using her camera, Cherry limned the diversity of regionalization, subsuming everything into an ecologically reductive “national” farming landscape that did not account for variations in soil quality, climate, or an individual farm’s distance from market. By concealing references to individual places, Cherry made it seem like the ecological problems of the Canadian farmer were universal. More importantly, it made the state’s technocratic solutions she proposed in her documentaries as comprehensive. Farm electrification, soil rehabilitation, and investment strategies could be applied countrywide. Cherry’s use of stereotypes was consistent with the nation-building objectives of the National Film Board. Under John Grierson, the NFB presented Canada as essentially homogenous – people with diverse ethnic backgrounds transmuted into a generalized population that share common values and goals.

Cherry’s representation of the Canadian agricultural landscape as a standardized, national space, altered by science, technology, and state-management strategies, also embodied the high modern ideology of the government. As James Scott observes, the principle strategy of modern governments is to reduce the meaning of each region so it can be easily approximated and managed. By constructing typologies and obscuring specific references to place, the documentaries of Evelyn Cherry and the APU presented

¹⁰³ In this sense Cherry falls into a category of people whom Wendell Berry described as “absentee regionalists.” Wendell Berry, *Imagination in Place* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010) 8.

the agricultural landscape as a space whose sole purpose is to produce food and generate wealth.

Science and Agricultural Improvement

There was a striking thematic continuity in nature documentaries produced from 1939 to 1949. *Timber Front*, *Windbreaks on the Prairies*, *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* each represented nature from a state-centered perspective in which the environment was understood as something to be controlled and managed by government expertise. This vision of nature continued into the middle part of the century. In the 1950s, the Film Board documentaries perpetuated the technocratic belief that nature could be manipulated to serve the needs of man (and the nation) through the discipline of state-sponsored science.¹⁰⁴ Films such as the Department of National Health and Welfare (DNHW)'s *Let's Look at Water* (1947) shows scientists purifying contaminated rivers in both rural and urban communities. Other documentaries like *Trees are a Crop* (1950), *Look to the Forest* (1950), *The World At Your Feet* (1953), and *Chemical Conquest* (1956) contend that laboratory research and the formulation of chemical pesticides are essential for healthy and productive agricultural activities. Equipped with scientific knowledge and technologies developed by "experts," the Canadian farmer could ensure long-term agricultural success.

The NFB's confidence in the miracles of agricultural science in the 1950s paralleled the Canadian government's own "blind faith in science's ability to solve the

¹⁰⁴ *Let's Look at Water*, produced by Harold Randall, NFB, 1947

world's problems," to borrow historian Clinton Evans' phrase.¹⁰⁵ Agricultural science was conceived by the state as a powerful tool that could transform the postwar Canadian environment into a veritable breadbasket of staple commodities. The Department of Agriculture in particular contended that scientific solutions were essential in helping ordinary farmers overcome problems of inefficiency and waste.

NFB films about agricultural science were directly linked to the state's welfare mandate to help improve the lives of farmers through scientific education, research, and pesticides. One of the most vocal proponents of State-sponsored science was Larry Gosnell, a graduate of the University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College (OAC). In his first film, *The World at Your Feet* (1953), the narrator explains "there is a world within a world in the earth at our feet, a world of living things where the surge of life wrought by nature's silent magic brings forth the fruit that sustains our life."¹⁰⁶ In order to unlock the full potential of this "silent magic," Canadian farmers needed to be taught the "intimate and sympathetic knowledge of the ways of nature." Only then could they "reap its continuing abundance."¹⁰⁷ According to Gosnell, *The World at Your Feet* was intended to help farmers understand how healthy soils maintain the "harmonious balance" of photosynthesis and germination in plants.¹⁰⁸ Gosnell believed that farmers who comprehended "the world beneath their feet" would be able to work with nature and therefore maximize the efficiency of the land.

¹⁰⁵ Clinton Evans, *War on Weeds in the Prairie West: An Environmental History* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002), 160.

¹⁰⁶ *The World At Your Feet*, produced by Michael Spencer, NFB, 1953.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *The World At Your Feet*, 1953.

In the documentary, Gosnell presents the earth as a thriving community of biological organisms, whose processes help make the soil rich and fertile. Using highly magnified cameras in a process he termed “cinphotomicrography,” he takes audiences on “an intimate tour of the circulatory systems of root hairs and leaves, and into the mysteries of the microscopic world in the soil where millions of minute living things scurry continuously.”¹⁰⁹ The film goes on to explain that the tiny organisms flitting across the screen help decompose organic matter. This process helps the soil maintain a healthy supply of calcium, magnesium, and potassium. The soil is now primed to support life, including the seeds planted by the farmer. To illustrate this fact, Gosnell uses time-lapse photography of roots shooting up through the fertile earth and growing to full maturity in the matter of seconds.

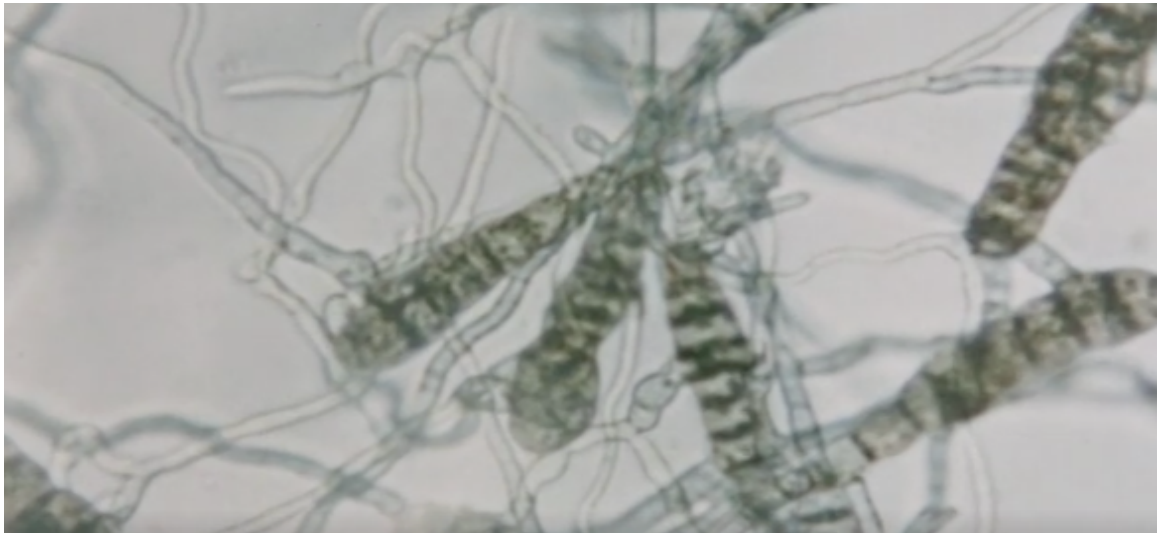


Fig. 1.6. still from *Chemical Conquest* (1956), directed by Larry Gosnell

¹⁰⁹ NFBA, The World At Your Feet file, “Background Information,” May 1953.

Like Cherry's documentaries, Gosnell's *The World at Your Feet* was produced as part of a larger governmental effort to modernize farmer's agricultural habits. The documentary was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, which had a vested interest in educating the layperson about soil science in the 1950s. The involvement by the Department of Agriculture was not confined just to sponsorship, however, it also participated in the production and distribution of the film. Dr. P.O Ripley, Chief of Field Husbandry Division, and Experimental Farms Service advised Gosnell on the set of the movie, making sure that the documentary aligned with the scientific opinions of the Department of Agriculture. After the movie was completed, the department actively promoted the film to the Canadian public. In a memo to his staff, Deputy Minister James Gordon Taggart explained that every employee "must see and promote the film" because it "tells a story that should be told as widely as possible...the story of organic soil, of soil care and structure and how man by knowing and co-operating with the laws of nature, can make soil produce abundantly."¹¹⁰ He also urged his employees to help distributors and theatre managers promote the film by handing out pamphlets.¹¹¹

Gosnell's next documentary, *Chemical Conquest* (1956), elaborated on the ideas first presented in *The World at Your Feet*, namely the value of state sponsored science in improving Canadian husbandry.¹¹² In this film, Gosnell suggests that good farming begins in a laboratory under a microscope. According to the narrator of the film, the most important developments in horticulture occur at chemical labs like the Department of

¹¹⁰ NFBA, *The World At Your Feet* file, "memo," June 8, 1953.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Chemical Conquest*, produced by Michael Spencer, NFB, 1956.

Agriculture's Science Service Laboratory at the University of Western in Ontario. In these state-funded laboratories scientists devise newer and more effective pesticides to help combat the scourge of insects, disease, and weeds, which threaten crops across the country.¹¹³

Gosnell first became interested in the subject of pesticides when he read a *Fortune* article entitled "Farming's Chemical Age." In the article, chemical engineer Eric Hodgins asserted that chemicals were more important to the "future of American agriculture than the shift from horses and mules to tractor power."¹¹⁴ Hodgins argued that farming technology allowed farmers to produce and harvest crops on an unprecedented scale. Yet there was a price to pay for this efficiency: adopting modern techniques and intensifying crop production created the perfect environment for pests.¹¹⁵ Hodgins' claimed that pesticides allowed farmers to maintain monoculture crops by eradicating pests. As a result, a farmer could harvest greater yields per acre, decrease his man-hours, and cut in production costs.

Gosnell was intrigued by Hodgins' thesis. Insects and fungi were menaces that needed to be exterminated. In the same way wartime propaganda vilified the Germans and Japanese as sub-human "insects," Gosnell demonizes pests as "foreign invaders" bent

¹¹³ The Science Service's mission at Western was to "investigate the ecological effects of the use of agricultural chemicals other than fertilizers, with the purpose of ensuring that the widespread or continued use of chemicals... will not have harmful consequences on soil fertility, and crop quality." K.W. Neatby, "Science Service Laboratory" in *Agricultural Institute Review* (July: 1951) 3.

¹¹⁴ NFBA, Chemical Conquest file, "Research Summary," n.d. 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

on destroying Canadian domestic productivity in the documentary.¹¹⁶ The narrator describes the battle against unwelcome weeds and insects as a “war” against “invaders.”¹¹⁷ Ominous music plays as a fat worm munches on a tobacco leaf in what the narrator describes as an “an orgy of leaf feasting.”¹¹⁸ Using voice-of-God narration in a style reminiscent of *Canada in Action* newsreels, Gosnell’s film urges farmers to take back their crops from these killer pests. Armed with chemicals like 2, 4-D, which are described as weapons that “shift the balance back in the farmer’s favour,” farmers can reclaim their soil.¹¹⁹ The film’s confidence in scientific solutions to “fix nature” reflects a high modern way of thinking about agriculture and the environment. As the narrator says, “nature to be commanded must be obeyed, and to be obeyed, she must be understood.” Once farmers understood the environment, they will be able to “work closer harmony with those natural forces which provide him with his sustenance.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ This type of language was common. For a historical explanation as to why, see: Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from WWI to Silent Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁷ *Chemical Conquest*, 1956

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1.7: still from *Chemical Conquest* (1956)

Although *Chemical Conquest* boasts about the proficiency of science and chemical compounds to overcome farming problems, an examination of the production history of the documentary reveals that Larry Gosnell was more ambivalent about the country's reliance on pesticides as a cure-all. According to Gosnell, the issues farmers were faced with (soil erosion, pestilence etc) were complications that they themselves had created. "Nature hasn't made any special arrangement to take the ways of man into account," he wrote for the film.¹²¹ Like Hodgins, Gosnell believed that the agricultural sector's shift towards specialized mono crops disrupted "the inherent balance in nature." But Gosnell was unconvinced that pesticides would restore the balance of nature. For one, scientists had not adequately solved the problem of insect immunity. Although DDT, which was made available commercially in 1945, was successful at first, insects

¹²¹ NFBA, Chemical Conquest file, "Draft Outline Chemical film," n.d.

eventually developed a resistance.¹²² Gosnell also suggested that pesticides like DDT actually killed organisms that were vital to the health of local ecosystems. Science had yet to create a pesticide that left bees and butterflies unharmed, the filmmaker lamented in his notes for the film.¹²³

Gosnell was also concerned about the nature of research and development in Canada, which he described as a “complex and expensive race.”¹²⁴ While he supported the chemical industry’s efforts to solve the troubles of the farmer, he was skeptical of the rapidity with which it introduced new pesticides to the public. “Little is known of the mechanism of their action,” Gosnell admitted.¹²⁵ The problem was that chemical companies were releasing potent compounds whose “mode of actions is not fully understood,” Gosnell wrote. “As long as the federal laws with respect to toxicity, effectiveness, residual character are complied with, no one will stop the distribution of a given chemical.”¹²⁶

Chemical Conquest only makes a passing reference to some of Gosnell’s concerns likely because it did not want to antagonize the sponsor of the documentary, the Department of Agriculture. The narrator warns that “with the application of pesticides to insects, soil and plants, we are bringing some of the most powerful chemicals produced by modern technology in contact with biological forces which we do not fully understand. The results could well be disastrous.” He quickly assures the viewer, however, that state-funded research is working hard to learn about the affects of pesticides. Although the

¹²² NFBA, Chemical Conquest file, “Research Summary,” n.d. 9-11.

¹²³ Ibid. 10.

¹²⁴ NFBA, Chemical Conquest file, “Draft Outline Chemical film,” n.d. 1.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 2,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

documentary does not explore this issue any further, Gosnell's ambivalence demonstrated the gap that sometimes existed between individual views and state narratives. Not every filmmaker uniformly supported State ways of seeing, or high modernist solutions to agricultural problems. As we will see in Chapter 3, Gosnell would eventually challenge the hegemony of high modernism agricultural solutions in Canadian agriculture more directly by examining the "problems relating to hazards to human health arising from pesticide residues on food products."¹²⁷

Conclusion

The National Film Board was tasked with creating a vision of Canada. In this cultural tableau of nation building, the NFB imagined the land as a productive and state-managed space, essential to the country's economic future. The NFB's representation of nature mirrored the high modern values of the government.¹²⁸ At the behest of their sponsors, filmmakers presented a homogenized vision of the Canadian landscape, in which the value of nature was measured in terms of carrying capacity and acreage. Through its state-sponsored narratives, NFB documentaries also asserted that rational planning, scientific expertise, and technological advancement were necessary for the proper utilization of these resources.

In the early 1940s, NFB wartime films claimed that natural resources were essential for allied victory. As such, they needed to be conserved and monitored by state institutions. Film Board documentaries produced during the Second World War also

¹²⁷ *Poison, Pests, and People*, produced by Don Mulholland, 1960.

¹²⁸ Scott, 4.

suggested that Canada's abundance of resources would sustain the nation during reconstruction. Depictions of healthy crops, ripe fruit, and robust forest stands affirmed the nation-building myth that the country was fat with raw commodities, and that this plentitude would stimulate economic growth. NFB filmmakers continued to perpetuate state discourses about the environment in the postwar period. Documentarians Evelyn Cherry and Larry Gosnell focused on the role of the government in the lives of individual Canadian farmers. They instructed farmers to modernize their farming equipment, purchase (because one believes in) chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and to incorporate state-sponsored recommendations into their agricultural practices.

NFB documentaries about agriculture not only paralleled the larger political belief in the infallibility of modern science to overcome natural and unnatural disturbances, they themselves introduced a high modern way of seeing nature. Narrative devices such as those practiced by Cherry simplified agricultural spaces into a homogenous and national landscape. Other filmmakers, such as Larry Gosnell, developed new technologies to make the landscape more comprehensible. Gosnell's cinephotomicrography allowed the filmmaker to show audiences a more discrete perspective of the natural world. The camera went below the soil to discover a substratum of microbes and chemical reactions. The shift from iconic farming landscapes to the invisible world of soil in many ways extended Cherry's picture of the universal farm to its logical conclusion: the Canadian environment was fundamentally the same above and below the earth.

Chapter 2

Idea(s) of the North: Landscape Imagery and the Construction of Northern Spaces

“Never ask the explorer, still shrouded in distant solitudes, to tell his fondest memories. You would not understand, perhaps, if he said: ‘It’s the wind blowing through the valley, the moon perched between two spruce trees, the waterfall hissing, the gurgle of the brook, the shrill cry of the hawk to the cliff above its nest, the nostalgic singing of the finch, the lapping of the wave on the boat, the small Eskimo who smiled at his mother in the hood of the anorak, the find of a pebble on the beach that tells the story of the land or, on the slope, a plant that nobody has ever seen, an insignificant, unnamed grass which adds a link to human knowledge.’ These are great adventures.”¹ Jacques Rousseau in “Toundra,” 1950.

“There would be nothing distinctive in Canadian culture at all, if there were not some feeling for the immense searching distance, with the lines of communication extended to the absolute limit, which is a primary geographical fact about Canada and has no real counterpart elsewhere.”² Northrop Frye in *Bush Garden*, 1971.

“As far as the Arctic is concerned, how many of you here knew the pioneers in Western Canada? I saw the early days here. Here in Winnipeg in 1909, when the vast movement was taking place into the Western plains, they had imagination. There is a new imagination now. The Arctic. We intend to carry out the legislative programme of Arctic research, to develop Arctic routes, to develop those vast hidden resources the last few years have revealed. Plans to improve the St. Lawrence and the Hudson Bay route. Plans to increase self-government in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. We can see one or two provinces there.” Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, “A New Vision,” 1958.

“I’ve been intrigued for quite a long time ... by that incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga country. I’ve read about it, written about it occasionally, and even pulled my parka once and gone there. [Yet] I’ve remained of necessity an outsider, and the north has remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about sometimes, and in the end, avoid.” Glenn Gould, *Idea of the North*, 1967

Introduction

Representations of the land (and sea) were an integral aspect of the NFB’s “official” picture of the nation. As we saw in Chapter 1, narratives about natural resources and agriculture were subsumed into a larger welfare state discourse about conservation, postwar strength, and economic development. NFB filmmakers blurred geographic

¹ Jacques Rousseau, “Toundra,” *Extrait de Liaison*, Janvier (1950), 34.

² Northrop Frye, *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), 10.

difference and local specificity to create a picture of nature that was consistent with the government's high modern and utilitarian definition of a rationalized geography. This chapter continues to chart the different ways the Film Board visualized the Canadian nature through the prism of the state. Unlike the previous chapter, however, I am less concerned with the content of NFB documentaries than I am in their depictions of natural landscapes. Film scholar Martin Lefebvre explains why this particular line of inquiry is valuable. According to Lefebvre, cinematic landscapes "connect films both to the world and to the various traditions and reasons for representing it."³ In other words, the background in movies are more than just a setting on which the narrative unfolds; they are texts bursting with meaning and, if we pay attention, reveal how society thinks about the natural world, or how a government may want its citizens to think.⁴ By disentangling the tropes and motifs that recur in Film Board depictions of the land, which themselves were ideologically informed, we can ascertain how this state institution constructed landscape, and therefore how it helped to constitute the relationship between nature and nation.

I have elected to limit my investigation of Canadian landscapes in this chapter to representations of the North. The hope is that by unpacking the NFB's construction of this particular geography we can more broadly understand some of the mechanics and

³ Martin Lefebvre, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Film* ed. Martin Lefebvre, (London: Routledge, 2006), xxviii. For a wider discussion on cinematic landscapes see: Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, and Nature* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2013); *Cinema and Landscape*, ed. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect, 2010); *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns*, ed. Deborah Carmichael (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006; *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* ed. John Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2011); David Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema from Wilderness to Wasteland* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁴ Landscapes can convey a movie's theme and establish a sense of time, atmosphere, and place. They also punctuate the narrative and manipulate our spatial consciousness.

motivations behind cinematic representations of the environment in NFB cinema more generally. The North warrants special consideration because, as Sherrill Grace reminds in *Canada and the Idea of the North*, it is one of the country's "most long-lived nationalist markers."⁵ In short, the North epitomizes the ways in which space is transformed from physical fact into topography of meaning and importance.

North, of course, is relative. Although geographers and government surveyors have all staked their reputations on where North begins and ends, it is ultimately a landscape of "shifting boundaries," to quote Margaret Atwood, or what Barry Lopez calls a "landscape of the mind."⁶ The region has been used arbitrarily to describe the territory above Georgian Bay, all the way up to the polar landscapes of the Arctic Circle.

Regardless of its physical coordinates, the North has played an essential role in defining Canadian nationhood. Politicians, both federal and provincial, past and present, have used the landscape as a symbol of Canadian-ness. In literary and artistic circles, the idea of the North has been a source of creative inspiration.⁷ After the Second World War, the North

⁵ Sherrill Grace, *Canada and the Idea of the North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), 51.

⁶ Why this cartographically imprecise definition? Because the location of North in Canadian culture is fluid, constantly changing. Margaret Atwood calls this the North's "shifting boundaries." She writes: "until you get to the North Pole, 'North,' being a direction, is relative."

⁷ For a good, albeit dated historiography on the Canadian North see: Bruce Hodgins and Shelagh Grant, "The Canadian North: Trends in Recent Historiography" in *Acadiensis* vol. XVI, no. 1 (Autumn: 1986), 173-188. Historical writing on Canada's North published before 1960 were usually imperial or colonial histories that described the exploration of alien environments. In 1966 Carl Berger published his famous article "The True North, Strong and Free" in *Nationalism in Canada* ed. Peter Russell (Toronto, 1966) 3-26. Berger's essay focuses on the North's impact on the national psyche since the time of Confederation. Four years later, W.L. Morton lamented that the North had still not been fully "integrated into the historiography of Canada." W.L. Morton, "The 'North' in Canadian Historiography," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, ser. IV, vol. VIII (1970), pp. 31-40. Then came Morris Zaslow's monumental *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1890-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), a book that "changed the state of northern historiography." Zaslow's book looked at the ways in which the development of the North was integrated into the evolution of the Canadian nation. After Zaslow's book, more historians began to engage with the question of the North. Kenneth Coates argues in *Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest Territories* (Toronto, James Lorimer and Co. 1985) that the attitude of the Canadian government

became especially important. The North was given a political value; not just a cultural one. In the late 1940s, the Canadian state began asserting its dominion over northern spaces more intensely. Not only was Canadian sovereignty at stake in the North, the region was viewed by the federal government as the country's last economic frontier. Accordingly, the state argued that it was necessary to occupy the North so it could to protect the valuable resources buried beneath its icy surface. Northern administrators in the postwar period also sought to intervene in the lives of the indigenous people who lived there.

It is no surprise then that the National Film Board, the “eyes of Canada,” was also preoccupied with the North. The question is, what *kind* of ‘North’ did NFB filmmakers depict and why? The National Film Board’s depictions of the North provided an ideological framing of the landscape but it did so under the guise of objectivity. Expository filmmaking in particular was assumed to be an unalloyed presentation of reality.⁸ With its observational techniques, expert testimony, and authoritative voice-of-God narration, many spectators would have assumed that what they were seeing on film was impartial, an apolitical presentation of geographic fact.⁹ Cinema, however, is not neutral, nor is it objective. The different visions of North captured by NFB filmmakers

towards its two territories was tantamount to negligent colonialism. Shelagh D. Grant’s *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); Kenneth Coates and William Morrison’s *Interpreting Canada’s North: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989) Sherrill E. Grace’s *Canada and the Idea of North* (2001) have complicated, questioned, and critiqued Northern historiography in a variety of ways. For more resources on the history of the Canadian North see: Janice Cavell and Jeff Noakes published *Acts of Occupation: Canada and Arctic Sovereignty 1918-1925* (Seattle: University Washington Press, 2010).

⁸ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 32.

⁹ Peter Stevens, *Brink of Reality: New Canadian Documentary and Film and Video* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010) 30.

consciously and unconsciously supported longstanding power relations associated with this landscape. Specifically, I argue that NFB documentarians represented the North in three general ways: as a wilderness sublime, as an exotic ‘Other,’ and as a modern resource space governed by the state.¹⁰ Though these representations appear contradictory (images of a desolate North seemingly controvert later depictions of a developed hinterland) they jointly expressed an aesthetic vision of the landscape that was Southern and more importantly, federal in nature.¹¹ Documentaries that constructed the North as a sublime and empty wilderness, for instance, reaffirmed the white, Anglo myth that Canadian identity was connected to a mythic terra incognita. NFB films that imagined the North as an exotic landscape inhabited by aboriginals likewise perpetuated a colonial vision of the country’s northern landscape as primitive. Illustrations of a backwards people living on the fringe not only excited the Southern imagination about the atavistic, they also tacitly supported the federal government’s administrative control over the Inuit. Lastly, documentaries about northern science and industrial development presented the polar landscape as an economic frontier that required state intervention.

Building off this last point, I further argue that the NFB was an important technology of state authority in northern spaces. With its prodigious ability to capture images and sounds, the camera helped the government accumulate valuable information about the geological and biological features of the landscape. This contention extends the work of Peter Geller. In *Northern Exposures*, Geller demonstrates how the “image-

¹⁰ While this chapter is organized somewhat chronologically and the argument offers a sense of development over time, there was a significant amount of overlap, omission, and disagreement in the NFB’s depictions of the North.

¹¹ As Sherrill Grace reminds, familiar descriptions of the North’s barrenness, mysteriousness, emptiness abundance etc. “tend to serve southern interests.” Grace, 16.

making activities” of southern institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century rendered the North visible, and thus, comprehensible to southern institutions, particularly the federal government.¹² Photographs and grainy footage were an important part of state’s mission “to approach the North in a rational and efficient manner,” explains Geller.¹³ Once the region was made legible, the government had the knowledge (and therefore the power) to administer northern spaces more effectively.¹⁴ NFB documentaries were a protraction of this cartographic and political desire to rationalize the North and its denizens. Through their cinematic images and narratives, they produced a creative, scientific, political, and anthropological record of the North. The rigorous and systematic documentation of the North in NFB cinema made the landscape intelligible to southern eyes and therefore appropriable.

Idea(s) of the North

In a popular essay written in 1936, Stephen Leacock mused that the “vast unknown country of the North, reaching ... to the polar seas, supplies a peculiar mental background” in Canadian culture.¹⁵ For the author and humorist, North was more than points on a map, or a geography lesson on tree lines, eskers, and permafrost; it was also a place of dreams, myths, and desires.¹⁶ Leacock’s description of a landscape of the mind

¹² Peter Geller, *Northern Exposures: Photographing and Filming The Canadian North, 1920 -45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ In fact Geller contends that photography and filmmaking were a “visual counterpart to the northern affairs program records.” (24).

¹⁵ Leacock quoted in Grace, 14.

¹⁶ The best contemplation on the meaning of the North is Glenn Gould’s 1967 CBC radio documentary, *The Idea of North*. In the introduction to the broadcast, the pianist explained that he was seduced by the

anticipated the theories of contemporary geographers and writers who would argue that places are historically and socially contingent.¹⁷ Geographer Louis Hamelin, for example, asserted in *Canadian Nordicity* that in the North, “mental structures constitute the most powerful determinants of the region.” Ideas about nordicity “surpass that of the most easily identifiable physical realities such as freezing.”¹⁸ Author Adam Gopnik similarly observes that the North “is potentially lethal and potently labile;” it can be reformed, re-imagined, and projected in ways that you can see specters of mad-trappers, God’s divinity, or the Nation, where there is only snow and ice.¹⁹

The various “mental structures” Canadians have assembled in the North are complex indeed. Pierre Berton once astutely observed that the North is as “elusive as the wolf howling just beyond the rim of the hills.”²⁰ In other words, its definitions and meanings are numerous and difficult to pin down. While the idea of the North is multifaceted, there are a few enduring myths about the landscape from a southern perspective that demand closer inspection. One of the most popular beliefs about the North is that it is an empty and sublime wilderness, or as Shelagh Grant puts it, “a forbidding place inhabited by wild beasts, yet majestic in its grandeur.”²¹ The first people

“incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga country.” It was this interest that made him seek out those who had been North. For a good analysis on Gould’s ideas of North, see: Anyssa Neumann, “Ideas of North: Glenn Gould and the Aesthetic of the Sublime,” *voiceXchange*, 5 No. 1 (Fall, 2001): 35-46.

¹⁷ On the construction of the North see Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 31. Renée Hulan, *Northern Experience and Myths of Canadian Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); David Heinemann, “Latitude Rising: Historical Continuity in Canadian Nordicity,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, 2 (Fall 1993): 134-39; John Moss, “The Cartography of Dreams,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, 2 (Fall 1993): 140-58.

¹⁸ Louis-Edmond Hamelin, *Canadian Nordicity: It’s Your North Too* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1979), 17.

¹⁹ Adam Gopnik, *Winter: Five Windows on the Season* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2011), 16.

²⁰ Pierre Berton, *The Mysterious North* (Virginia: McClelland and Stewart, 1956)

²¹ Shelagh Grant suggests that the “North is a core myth” in Canadian culture. Grant, “Myths of North in Canadian Ethos” in *The Northern Review*, No. 3, 4 (Summer/Winter), 16.

to imagine the landscape as *terra incognita* were European explorers. When these bold travelers first anchored down in the cold waters off present-day Ellesmere Island they imported, among other things, a puritanical fear of the Unknown.²² For the men of the sea, ice shelves, broken and splintered by wind and wave, were signs that the landscape was deadly indeed. Who knew what kind of demons lurked in the melancholy shadows of a midnight sun? “The land that God gave to Cain,” Jacques Cartier called it. The idea of a wild and malevolent North endured on through the nineteenth century. The mysterious fate of John Franklin’s expedition (1845-48) and rumours of cannibalism, insanity, and icebergs that reduced mighty bulkheads to mere splinters terrified and excited the Victorian imagination. Without a doubt the North was a terrifying world of death and despair.²³

While newspapermen and penny dreadful writers regaled their audiences with frightening tales of shipwrecks and hypothermia, a group of nineteenth century artists proffered a new perspective of the Arctic landscape. For painters Frederick William Beechey, Caspar David Friedrich, and Edwin Landseer, the North was a sublime wilderness. The white expanse of the Arctic and its unfathomably large glaciers were heady reminders of the eternity of nature and the transitoriness of man. Images of an Arctic sublime resurfaced in Canadian culture less than a century later.²⁴ In 1930, Group

²² See Peter Mancall’s “The Raw and the Cold: Five English Sailors in Sixteenth Century Nunavut” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol 70 No. 1 (January 2013), for a lurid account of early Arctic encounters.

²³ See *Russell Potter, Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007); Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture, 1818-1860* (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2008).

²⁴ The term “Arctic sublime” was first coined by Chauncey Loomis in “The Arctic Sublime,” in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, eds. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). For more information on the maligned North, see: Margaret Atwood, *Strange*

of Seven painter Lawren Harris boarded the *SS Beothic* and travelled to the Arctic on a government-sponsored expedition. During his two-month tour of the Far North, Harris bore witness to the same haunting and unearthly landscape that captured the imagination of Victorian painters. And like his artistic forbearers, Harris was moved by the magnificent hyperborean landscape. For the artist, the anemic shorelines and isolated peaks of the polar landscape were evocative aides-mémoires of the eternity of nature and the inconsequence of humanity. “No man can roam...the Canadian North without it affecting him,” Harris wrote several years before the expedition, when he was still painting the prehistoric contours of the Shield. The “coolness” and “clarity” of the landscape, the “feel of the soil,” and the “rhythms of its hills,” melts mankind’s “personal barriers, intensifies his awareness, and projects his vision through appearances to an underlying hidden reality,” he remarked.²⁵

Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1995). According to Frye, the North’s features – long winters, barren rock, boreal forests – stood out the most in the Canadian imagination, both in writing and art.

²⁵ Lawren Harris, “Revelation of Art in Canada,” *Canadian Theosophist* 7 no. 5 (July 1926), 86. According to Peter Davidson, the northern wilderness was a place of “*askesis* and self-knowledge.” Peter Davidson, *The Idea of the North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 11.



Fig. 2.1. *Icebergs, Davis Strait*, 1930 by Lawren Harris

Harris tried to capture the spiritual ecstasy of the North with his paintbrush. In doing so, he produced some of the most iconic images of the North ever put to canvas. Harris was not alone in his fixation of the North, however. His Group of Seven colleagues were similarly captivated by the austere landscape of the near North, in the wilderness of northern Ontario and Quebec. In an effort to convey the potency of the landscape, the group of artists depopulated and essentialized the North with broad strokes of the brush and rich colours. Together, he Group of Seven established “a new aesthetic” which expressed the “spirituality and essential Canadian-ness of untouched northern landscapes.”²⁶ Urban critics and middle class consumers commended the Group of Seven

²⁶ Davidson 194

for their northern iconography, which “grew and flowered from the land.”²⁷ There was nothing essentially Canadian about their image of North, obviously. It was only through the financial support of southern institutions like the National Gallery of Canada, that the Group of Seven’s painterly illuminations became widely accepted as the preeminent symbol of the landscape, and more abstractly, Canadian identity.²⁸

NFB and Northern Wilderness Landscapes

One of the most popular and powerful symbols in western culture is that of natural landscapes. Although the meaning and significance of landscape varies from place to place, region to region, it is frequently used as an emblem of national identity. Nationhood, writes Simon Schama, would be less defined if it were not for the “mystique of a particular landscape tradition: mapped, elaborated, and enriched as homeland.”²⁹ This was especially true in Canada.³⁰ Since confederation, nationalists and political ideologues have used images of natural landscapes to promote national identity.³¹ By appealing to the country’s geography, boosters, statesmen, and writers made an argument

²⁷ Quoted in Christine Sowiak, “Contemporary Canadian Art: Locating Identity,” *A Passion for Identity Canadian Studies of the 21st Century* (Scarborough, On: Nelson Thomas Learning, 2001), 256.

²⁸ Lynda Jessup, “The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or ‘The More Things Change...’” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, 1 (Spring 2002):144-79.

²⁹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995) 15.

³⁰ John O’Brian, “Wild Art History,” *Beyond Wilderness* ed. John O’Brian and Peter White (*Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* ed. John O’Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 21.

³¹ For example, in an address to the Montreal Literary Club in March 1869, the lawyer and nationalist R.G. Haliburton argued that Canada was defined by its harsh climate and challenging topography. One only needed to “glance at map of the continent,” to understand that this was “a northern country inhabited by a northern race...” he pronounced. R.G. Haliburton, “The Men of the North and Their Place in History: A Lecture delivered before the Montreal Literary Club,” March 31st, Montreal: John Lovell 1869. See also: George R. Parkin, *Imperial Federalism: The Problem of National Unity* (London, 1892) George R. Parkin argued that Canada’s national identity was formed in a “northern climate” that excluded “weaker races which would not fit in with ‘Anglo Saxon institutions.’” Canada’s climate enabled “progress,” a “democratic spirit” and a “high and powerful form of civilization.”

for Canada's exceptional qualities and cultural distinctiveness. Landscape, as I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, is never objective or pure, however. It represents the natural through the looking glass of culture and technology, emphasizing certain attributes while omitting less desirable ones. This construction was evident in the works of the National Film Board, whose very mission was to foster national unity. Cinematic renderings of landscape were manufactured in ways that helped cultivate the idea that Canada, from coast to coast, was defined by a rugged and potent geography. NFB filmmakers reordered the physical environment – the prairies, the forests of British Columbia, and the North into a place of national significance.

The construction of the North an icon of national identity appeared very early on in Film Board cinema. NFB film commissioner Arthur Irwin proclaimed in *Macleans* magazine that Canadians were “molded by a stern and difficult land.”³² Like the Group of Seven NFB filmmakers often constructed North as a pure and primitive landscape, whose inhospitable topography was emblematic of Canada's hardnosed and gritty origins. The first film to frame the North in this way was *Canadian Landscape* (1941), a short documentary about the Group of Seven painter A.Y. Jackson. Directed by Frank R. Crawley, the film renders the North (albeit the near North of northern Ontario and Quebec) as a “vast and unsentimental land” marked by “harsh ribs of rock,” “jagged spruce,” and “spongy muskeg.”³³ The documentary repeatedly pans over knotted bushes and twisted brambles that cling to the side of Precambrian rock. In the background of the shot, a thick coniferous forest looms menacingly in the distance. This is a world that

³² Arthur Irwin, “What it Means to be Canadian,” *Macleans* 1 Feb, 1950.

³³ *Canadian Landscape*, produced by Radford Crawley, NFB 1941.

audacious frontiersmen and women had to contend with in order to gain a permanent foothold. While other portions of Canada's geography had been tamed, the Northern wilderness was an enduring testament to the power of geography. It remained a dangerous and uncultivated space, at least according to Radford Crawley and other nationalists.

Through the seeming objectivity of the documentary camera, these images of a wild and uncivilized North appear to be genuine records. This is an illusion, however. "Cinema is never pure vision," reminds film scholar Graeme Harper, "it is a coproduction between material practices and human imagination."³⁴ Crawley used the film camera and its contrivances to visualize the North as a temporally and spatially distinct environment. He did this in several ways, including staging his subjects and his camera to create a picture of desolateness. For example, in a sequence near the beginning of the film, Crawley sets his camera upon the ledge of a cliff. Instead of framing the shot to include Jackson and his easel, however, the filmmaker positions the lens of the camera over the shoulder of the artist. In a documentary about a famous painter, this directorial decision is curious indeed. The subject of the film is not present in the frame whatsoever. What is happening here? By excluding Jackson from the screen, Crawley provides spectators with an unobstructed view of the immense and seemingly vacant North. The perspective encourages the viewer to contemplate what geographer Bruce Braun refers to as the "yawning gap between culture and nature, city and country, modernity and its pre-modern antecedents"³⁵ If Crawley had placed Jackson in the foreground of the shot, the viewer

³⁴ Harper and Rayner, 23.

³⁵ Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 129.

would have been distracted from the awesomeness of the untamed landscape; they would be reminded that humans travel through this supposedly wild environment and sometimes even stop to paint it! The aesthetic choice to present the North as a devoid of culture is commonplace throughout *Canadian Landscapes*. All signs of civilization are conveniently cut by the edge of the camera or the film editor's scissors. In the same way that Jackson "clears away the bric-a-brac" to get at "nature's basic design," Crawley used a combination of medium and technique to eliminate the ecological and cultural effects of modernization in the North to construct an idealized picture of northern wilderness.³⁶

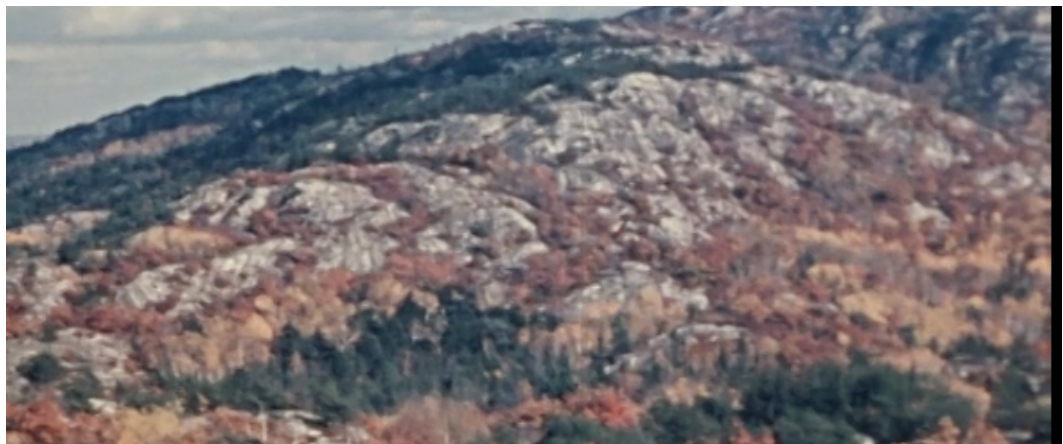


Fig. 2.2 still from *Canadian Landscape* (1941) by Radford Crawley

The construction of the North as empty wilderness meant that certain aspects of the terrain were erased from the documentary record. Crawley's images of northern Ontario and Quebec conspicuously ignore the social and ecological realities of this

³⁶ *Canadian Landscape* (1941).

region, especially the presence of indigenous peoples.³⁷ As W.J.T Mitchell argues, romantic depictions of “wilderness” tend to be characterized by their “amnesia and erasure.” They are designed to “bury the past,” and to “veil history with natural beauty.”³⁸ Scholar Jonathan Bordo similarly argues that such depictions of wilderness (and nationalist) landscape disguise the contradictions and inequalities buried beneath its soil. “The symbolic staging of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community of the nation-state,” writes Bordo, “Exalts a picture that testifies to...the wilderness sublime...while simultaneously legitimating...terrain violently seized, dispossessed of its indigenous inhabitants, and reconstituted as territory.”³⁹ To suggest that the land was uninhabited “buries the past,” and deletes the history of violence that occurred within these spaces from the historical record. In northern Quebec and Ontario, where Crawley shot most of *Canadian Landscapes*, local indigenous populations were forcibly removed from their homeland. The filmmaker’s depiction of the near North as a pristine wilderness also overlooks the anthropocentric changes that transpired there. Pulp industries, mining companies, dam operators, and eventually cottagers altered the environment in profound and permanent ways.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (reprint 1994 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 262.

See also:

³⁹ Jonathan Bordo, “Jack Pine: Wilderness Sublime, or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27 no. 4 (Winter, 1992): 98-128.



Fig. 2.3. *Arctic*, 1931 by A.Y. Jackson. Note the similarity in perspective between Crawley's cinematography (Fig. 2.1) and Jackson's landscape painting of the North.

So why did Crawley depict the North as an uninhabited and sublime wilderness and ignore the region's sobering history of colonialism? Firstly, Crawley was operating within a certain aesthetic and ideological paradigm. The landscape iconography in the film consciously mirrors the landscape paintings of his subject, A.Y. Jackson. Jackson, like his Group of Seven colleagues, was fascinated with isolated environments and untrammelled spaces. Crawley wanted to render Jackson's landscape paintings three dimensionally so audiences could appreciate the similarities and differences between the external world and the world that Jackson put to canvas. Crawley's stunning images of the Canadian Shield, filmed in 16mm kodochrome and shot with wide-angle lenses, intentionally replicate the sublime works of Jackson. According to Crawley's biographer, Barbara Wade Rose, the filmmaker's use of protracted shots of rocks, trees, and rivers were a conscious attempt to emulate the Group of Seven's presentation of Canadian

wilderness.⁴⁰ His visual style was “unhurried and at home,” observed Rose, “much in the way a painting by the Group of Seven might dwell on the Canadian Shield.”⁴¹

But more deeply than that, Crawley’s filmic choices were motivated by a nationalist (and Anglo) desire to recreate a long-standing symbol of nationhood. In the film, Crawley remarks that the North was “the spirit of Canada, and “the essence of the nation.”⁴² By disassociating the landscape from its physical and historical context, and by reducing its “primary reference points” to abstract images of emptiness and wildness, Crawley was able to reproduce an image that was identifiable as being essentially Canadian, a synchecdoche for Canadian values about its frontier past in which voyageurs and coureur de bois wrestled with hostile natural forces.⁴³ The filmmaker never actually defines the term “North” in the documentary; he just describes it ambiguously as the “silent barren that lies beyond the fringe of settled Canada.”⁴⁴ This ambiguousness is intentional, I think. Whether it was the polar landscapes of the Arctic (something that Crawley does not depict), or the transitional zones of Ontario and Quebec, the wilderness landscape in Crawley’s documentary is interpreted to be North of somewhere. Historian Claire Campbell’s definition of a “historic region,” which she argues is defined by its fur-trade narrative as opposed to its geographical or historical features is instructive here. Like the historic wilderness, the definition of North is constituted through a series of symbols and mythologies. Discrete wilderness spaces like the Canadian Shield and the

⁴⁰ Barbara Wade Rose, “Budge:” *What Happened to Canada’s King of Film* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1998) 55.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Canadian Landscape* (1941).

⁴³ John Sandlos, “From the Outside Looming in: Aesthetics, Politics, and Wildlife Conservation in the Canadian North,” *Environmental History* 6 no. 1 (January, 2001), 7.

⁴⁴ *Canadian Landscape* (1941).

North Pole are linked together by ideas, images, and stories of solitude, emptiness, and vastness.⁴⁵

As a young organization tasked with defining the nation, it is hardly surprising that the NFB presented northern wilderness as a metonym for Canada.⁴⁶ It was a convenient and popular symbol about national identity, one that ordinary Canadians had

⁴⁵ Claire Campbell, “‘It was Canadian, Then Typically Canadian:’ Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 no. 1 (May 2008). 5-34.

⁴⁶ The Film Board’s romanticism of a pristine and specifically Canadian northern landscape continues to this day. In *This Land* (2009) photographer/filmmaker” Dianne Whelan joins a military outfit tasked with planting Canada’s maple leaf in the frozen earth of Ward Hunt Island - the country’s northernmost tip. For Whelan, the trip was an opportunity to see the world’s last primeval space, a “frozen white landscape” where there are “no smoke stacks, no large bulldozers extracting minerals, no coal blackening or destroying its innocence.” And in this wilderness sublime, Whelan feels overwhelmingly patriotic about her experience in the Arctic. “This film,” explains Whelan, “is a story motivated by my heart, by my love for this land, my home Canada.” The Arctic, a vast and unpolluted desert, a place Whelan had never visited prior to the making of *This Land*, inspired in her a feeling of home. At no time in her life did she feel more Canadian than when she trekked through the snow of the High Arctic. This sense of place motivates her to protect the Arctic from those dirty footprints and greedy hands of Southern capitalism. “I think of my mother, my grandmothers, and their mothers. I reach as far back into the wombs of my existence as I can because that’s how old the land feels up here. I am Irish, French, and Native; I am the blood of Canada before she had a name. I want to protect this land for Canada, and I want Canada to protect this land for humanity,” Whelan says.

Although the rangers are entrusted with creating boundaries in the Canadian ice, a display of national sovereignty that implicitly declares to the rest of the world, “this territory is occupied,” Whelan renders the polar landscape as *terra nullius*, a blank wilderness. Whelan films scenery of twisted icebergs, massifs, and immeasurable expanses of blue. The cinematography create “extended moments of... gothic visual excess” and prompt a feeling of human frailty and limitation. *This Land* is part of a genealogy of images that render the Arctic as still, unchanging, a landscape reduced to its barest of forms. Whelan’s arrangement of images recalls the work of sublime German romantic artists like Caspar David Friedrich and Group of Seven painters like Jackson and Lawren Harris.

Whelan also uses movement to evoke a sense of the North’s symbolic potency. In one scene, Whelan mounts her camera to the rear of a snowmobile as it bounces away from base camp, the pale lights of habitation flickering in the distance. This sequence, which recalls the disembodied “phantom ride” leitmotif of early silent film, infuses the depicted space with a sense of the sublime. “It’s such a big country. The trip is long,” says Paul Ikuallaq, a ranger sergeant. “You can travel for twenty minutes, but it feels like you’re not even moving.” The Arctic is big and therefore spatially disorienting. On cue, the scene jump cuts to an aerial shot of the Arctic wasteland, providing the viewer with a sense of scale. With the exception of a few galvanized military huts, the immense Arctic is completely void of civilization- a perfect symbol for the landscape’s purity.⁴⁶ The documentary concludes with a shot of the Arctic horizon. A single snowmobile inches across the expanse of ancient snow and ice, silhouetted by the infinite dome of the cold blue sky. There are no voice-overs, no whirr of the sled’s engines, just the wailing wind and composer Tanya Tagaq’s throat singing. And emptiness. Dianne Whelan’s film, like Radford Crawley’s depicts the North’s uninhabited wilderness as a proxy for Canadian-ness. In their breathtaking sweeps and their capacity for catastrophe, the tundra and glaciers are proof of a particular Nordic destiny.

accepted as truth. In fact, film commissioner John Grierson specifically hired Crawley because of his experience promoting the nation through depictions of Canadian landscapes. In the 1930s Crawley had produced a series of short promotional films for the Canadian Pacific Railroad that marketed the natural splendor of the country to tourists and immigrants heading west. Who better to create a positive and marketable vision of the nationhood than Crawley?⁴⁷ The filmmaker's experience in commodifying landscapes through cinematography meshed perfectly with the Board's mandate to create a pictorial record of Canadian identity.

Inuit Ethnographic Films and the Exotic North

NFB filmmakers continued to represent the North as a wild frontier, distinct from the civilized South. Such depictions articulated a federalist way of seeing the North, and illustrated the ways in which the Board simplified historically and ecologically complex geographies into abstract symbols of meaning. Not all NFB films rendered the North as bereft of civilization though. Between 1944 and 1970, the NFB produced thirty ethnographic films about the Inuit, including documentaries about folk art, traditional hunting and fishing practices, and community development and social change.⁴⁸ “There

⁴⁷ NFBA, Canadian Landscape file, Ross Mclean to H.O McCurry of the National Gallery, Jan 24, 1942.

⁴⁸ This chapter was first written in the summer of 2013. Unbeknownst to me at the time, historian Joan Sangster was working on a book about images of northern people entitled *The Iconic North: Cultural Constructions of Aboriginal Life in postwar Canada*. The book, which is an excellent bit of scholarship, contains a chapter on the construction of northern peoples in NFB films. While our interests do overlap, I am more interested in discussing the role of the postwar Inuit in the construction of a certain kind of North. NFB depictions of the North used the Inuit as an icon of a temporally and spatially isolated landscape. In some cases, these representations served commercial interests in the exotic. In other cases, as Sangster points out, they reflected a federal interest, indeed project, in the modernization of Inuit peoples. See: Joan Sangster, *The Iconic North: Cultural Constructions of Aboriginal Life in postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).

was a kind of cult of photographing the Eskimos,” remarked Lorraine Monk, an executive producer with the NFB’s Still Photography Division.⁴⁹ While these films challenged the mythic notion that the North was uninhabited, discursive strategies that essentialized Inuit culture as “simple,” and “primitive” nevertheless reaffirmed a colonial view of northern landscapes as a wilderness frontier, temporally and spatially distinct from the rest of Canada.

Such representations of the North and its denizens drew on western, orientalist ways of seeing.⁵⁰ First coined by Edward Said, the term “orientalism” refers to the patronizing attitude of the West towards non-Western cultures.⁵¹ Said famously argued that Western travellers and artists used different strategies to classify the inhabitants of the East as an exotic “Other.” Implicit in this kind of representation is that the West is superior to the culture that is observed. By depicting non-Westerners as primitive and pre-modern, Westerners implied that they required intervention (or colonization). NFB ethnographic films about the North similarly described exotic encounters with strange peoples who occupied a wilderness landscape.⁵² Filmmakers in the early 1940s on through the 1950s portrayed Eskimos as being “somewhere nearer to the beginning of the

⁴⁹ Monk quoted in Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), 168.

⁵⁰ I use the term “Eskimo” in this paper for the simple reason that NFB filmmakers and ethnographic experts were using this anachronistic, and problematic term to talk about their subjects.

⁵¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

⁵² In other words, they reflected a Western preoccupation with what anthropologist Roger Keesing terms “radical alterity,” a culturally constructed “Other” who is “radically different from Us.” Roger Keesing, “Theories of Culture Revisited,” in *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Robert Borofsky (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), 301.

spectrum of human evolution,” to quote Fatimah Rony.⁵³ One of the ways NFB filmmakers conceptualized the Inuit as “Other” was by imagining them, to quote Lorna Roth, “as geographical features within the immense, empty, and hostile landscape of the Canadian North.”⁵⁴ In *Arctic Hunters* (1944) and *Eskimo Arts and Crafts* (1944), for example, Laura Boulton depicted Eskimos as a Stone Age people huddling together in an effort to survive this barren environment of ice and snow.⁵⁵ Igloos are virtually indistinguishable from the northern terrain, while the Inuit are shown wearing their sealskin parkas and hiding behind snowdrifts. “Like the animals, the Eskimo survives by following the seasons,” the narrator in *Arctic Hunters* explains, drawing a clear connection to their primitive customs and the environment itself.⁵⁶ Unlike the modern person from the South, Boulton frames the Inuk hunter as an icon of the past, a Paleolithic inhabitant living on the edge. Her camera work exemplifies what E. Ann Kaplan describes as an “imperial gaze,” a way of seeing/representing cultural otherness as someone who is closer to nature.⁵⁷ By portraying Inuit as a people who practice strange and primitive rituals, Boulton perpetuated the myth that the North was a wild frontier inhabited by a Stone Age people clinging for survival. This representational strategy was typical of most ethnographic films about the Inuit in the postwar period. Films such as

⁵³ Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 147. This type of representation was evident in a variety of mediums including twentieth century ethnographic cinema. Rony notes that ethnographic documentaries generally recorded an encounter between a “spectator posited as Western, white, and urbanized,” and a “subject people portrayed as being somewhere nearer to the beginning of the spectrum of human evolution.” (8)

⁵⁴ Lorna Roth, *Something New in the Air: The Story of First Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 2005), 52.

⁵⁵ See Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

⁵⁶ *Eskimo Summer*, produced by Laura Boulton, NFB, 1948.

⁵⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Arctic Summer (1948) *Arctic Jungle* (1948) *How to Build an Igloo* (1949), *Land of the Long Day* (1952), *Angotee: Story of an Eskimo Boy* (1953), *The Living Stone* (1958), and the docu-fiction series about Tuktuk the hunter (1966-1967) all type casted indigenous peoples as animistic, completely absorbed by a hostile environment. The Inuit, garbed in an anorak, personified, and in some cases, amplified, the discreteness of the North.

The identification between the primitive Eskimo and a wild landscape was most conspicuous in the popular films of Doug Wilkinson. Wilkinson's career at the National Film Board began in the spring of 1945. After he was discharged from the Canadian army, Wilkinson packed his bags and moved to Ottawa to work with John Grierson at the NFB. The first project Wilkinson worked on at the Board was a documentary about the Canadian Armed Forces "Operation Muskox," an ostentatious display of sovereignty in the North in which a cavalcade of Bombardier snowmobiles and soldiers trekked across the Eastern Arctic. The job would prove transformative for the filmmaker, who worked on the production as a camera operator. According to Wilkinson, his experience in the "very bleak, very barren, and very stormy North" sparked an artistic curiosity that would burn for the rest of his career.⁵⁸ "I hated the land, but I wanted to find out how [the Eskimo] came to live there," Wilkinson remarked in an interview with the *Whig Standard* fifty years later.⁵⁹

After Wilkinson finished working on *Operation Muskox*, he convinced the NFB to send him back to the North so he could make a film about the curious lives of the Inuit. In 1949, he went to Churchill, Manitoba, and made *How to Build an Igloo*, a short

⁵⁸ Doug Wilkinson, *Land of the Long Day* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1955) 18.

⁵⁹ "Son Of Idlout," *The Whig Standard*, March 7, 1992.

documentary that celebrated the architectural ingenuity of the Inuit. The following year, Wilkinson returned to the North again, this time with his wife Vivian Wilkinson, who worked as a location manager, and Jean Roy, an eighteen-year-old cinematographer. For the next fifteen months, Wilkinson and his team lived with the Tununermiut at Pond Inlet. They filmed *Angotee: Story of an Eskimo Boy* (1953), a fictional account of a young Inuk growing up in the High Arctic, and *Land of the Long Day* (1952), a documentary about the Inuk hunter, Joseph Idlout.⁶⁰ The latter film became one of the most popular in the history of the NFB. Critics and audiences praised *Land of the Long Day* for its “remarkable beauty,” and “absorbing exposition of Eskimo life.” It even won the prestigious Golden Reel award in 1953.⁶¹



Fig. 2.4. “Inuit Idlout and Kadloo look at harpooned seal on ice of Pond Inlet, off Button Point” (1952) by Doug Wilkinson.⁶²

⁶⁰ Wilkinson cast locals from Chesterfield Inlet and dressed them in caribou skins he acquired at Baker Lake, a 200-mile trip that he travelled by dog sled.

⁶¹ NFBA, *Land of the Long Day* file, “information sheet” n.d.

⁶² LAC, R1196 0 14-7-E, National Film Board Still Photography Division, “Inuit Idlout and Kadloo look at harpooned seal on ice of Pond Inlet, off Button Point,” by Doug Wilkinson, 1952.

Land of the Long Day is a prime example of Wilkinson's rendering of the North as an alien landscape occupied by an exotic "Other." Shot on location in the northern part of Baffin Island, the Arctic landscape appears ominous and otherworldly, cold and distant. Wilkinson keeps the framing wide and unobstructed to highlight the vastness of the landscape. An austere chiaroscuro slashes through the blank environment, making the North appear supernatural. The camera lingers on exotic details of local wildlife and an Inuk's weathered features, while primitive foreigners blink curiously back at the camera (a technology they have presumably never seen before).

The filmmaker's presentation of the North as a mysterious and aboriginal landscape occurs in the opening scene of the film. The screen fades from black to a wide-angle shot of three igloos huddled against a purple horizon. As the camera tilts down to the camp, John Drainie, a non-Inuit radio actor impersonating the Inuk hunter in what one Toronto film critic characterized as a "mawkish and infantile voiceover," describes life in the High Arctic.⁶³ "All winter long it is night in my land," he says. "In winter only the moon shines over my land. Between November and February the sun has gone away. We live out our winter lives hunting and trapping by the light of our winter friend, the moon."⁶⁴ The cry of Idlout's huskies and the strident howl of the Arctic wind punctuate Drainie's animistic narration with mystical affect.

⁶³ NFBA, *Land of the Long Day* file, "Toronto Film Society – Member Evaluation Form," not dated.

⁶⁴ NFBA, *Land of the Long Day* file, "Baffin Island Script Commentary," March 17, 1952.

As a documentary filmmaker, Wilkinson used medium specific techniques and technologies to depict the North as a wild landscape occupied by a simple people. In doing so, he participated in a long-standing colonial project that conceptualized the landscape as Other. In her essay on depictions of the Inuit in *The Beaver*, historian Joan Sangster shows that Canadian writers, artists and photographers frequently emphasized the exoticness of the Eskimo's world – both the wildness of the landscape and the strangeness of their customs.⁶⁵ Images of the Inuit in front of a snowy backdrop, or sitting atop a sled pulled by dogs, were glaring reminders to Canadian spectators that the Eskimo was radically different from themselves who were, at least in their supercilious estimation, “modern, rational, progressive and technologically advanced.”⁶⁶

The last scene of *Land of the Long Day* typifies this kind of representation in which indigenous hunting customs are presented as thrilling spectacles of the wild and atavistic. The scene begins with Idlout's elderly father spotting a pod of narwhals swimming in the bay. They have returned to the shallows to breed and are vulnerable. Without any hesitation, Idlout springs into action and sets out for the beasts on his sealskin kayak. The cetaceans are surprisingly fast considering their girth, but Idlout and his friend, Kadloo are faster. They catch up to the whales in the matter of minutes and corner them in the shoals. They are trapped. Triumphantly, the Inuk hunter grabs his harpoon and launches it at one of the animal's head, just behind the blowhole. Idlout's aim is true and slowly the great mammal sinks into the ocean. Before it descends any

⁶⁵ This was common in 20th century depictions of Inuit. See: Joan Sangster, “The Beaver as Ideology: Constructing Images of Inuit and Native Life in Post-World War II Canada, *Anthropologica*, 49 no. 2. (2007), 192.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

further into the inky depths, the Inuit hunters drag the whale to the shore, where his children wait. Despite the violence of their act, their success means the Inuit family can eat muktuk (narwhal blubber) during the long and dark winter months.

On the surface, the sequence manages to present the thrill of the narwhal hunt with verisimilitude. The thrashing flippers of the whale, the steely concentration of Joseph, and the unsteadiness of Wilkinson's camera all contribute to the scene's ethnographic authenticity. Certainly, spectators not privy to what was happening outside the edge of the frame would have believed Wilkinson's documentary to be a truthful record of Idlout's hunt. The production notes for the film, however, reveal a different account of what happened. In private, Wilkinson admitted that he deliberately manipulated the narwhal scene to further underscore the exoticness of Inuit life. In a letter to his co-writer Leslie McFarlane (author of the famous *Hardy Boys* series), Wilkinson explained that he needed the climactic narwhal hunt to feel "primitive and elemental."⁶⁷ To achieve this, Wilkinson directs Idlout to use a harpoon instead of his rifle because it "appeared more authentic."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ NFBA, *Land of the Long Day* File, "Shot List," Reel 4, p. 2, March 7, 1952.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson's "authentic" record of Inuit culture refuses to acknowledge the director's own involvement in the film. Although Wilkinson coexisted with his subject and frequently staged a number of dramatic scenes like the narwhal hunt, the director concealed his presence in the film in an effort to heighten the movie's realism and to create a sense of spatial and temporal remove. See: Johannes Fabian, *Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).



Fig. 2.5. “Inuit Hunter Preparing to Throw Ivory Harpoon from Kayak,” (1951), taken by Doug Wilkinson⁶⁹

Wilkinson’s “creative treatment of actuality,” to borrow John Grierson’s term, is important because it demonstrates how ethnographic filmmakers used the conventions of documentary cinema to satisfy the longings of middle-class Canadians. The camera in documentary cinema is often assumed to be a kind of magic mirror that reflects undistorted reality.⁷⁰ In his discussion on safari films, for instance, Gregg Mitman notes that audiences “depend on the naturalist-photographer to give [them] an experience that is

⁶⁹ LAC R1196 0 14-7-E, National Film Board Still Photography Division, “Inuit Hunter Preparing to Throw Ivory Harpoon from Kayak,” by Doug Wilkinson, July 1951.

⁷⁰ For a discussion on the film camera and reality see: John Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Maya Dorn “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Reading*, 3rd edition, eds Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 51-65..

pure and unadorned.”⁷¹ Such documentaries, though, are not “objective” records of reality. Neither are ethnographic films. In *Land of the Long Day* Doug Wilkinson peddles a combination of technological wizardry, cultural desires, and formal choices to reproduce a violent image of life on the fringe, a portrait that gratifies commercial interests, and audience curiosities about Canada’s most exotic landscape. Like other films in the ethnographic/travelogue genre, Wilkinson’s seemingly objective portraiture of native life naturalizes the stereotype that the Inuit live as they always have i.e. with no modern technology, in a savage and unforgiving wilderness.⁷²

Wilkinson was not the first ethnographic filmmaker in the North to cultivate a sense of spatial and temporal difference through behind-the-scene trickery. In *Nanook of the North* (1922), Robert Flaherty famously cast a group of native actors for their photogenic qualities. In an effort to create a sense of primitiveness, Flaherty stages several scenes in the film, including the sequence in which the hunter, Nanook takes a bite out of a gramophone record. The scene is meant to be amusing, but the humour is also meant to convey the crudeness of Eskimo culture, which is apparently unfamiliar with modern technology and culture.

While Doug Wilkinson’s orientalism was overtly colonial in its fixation on the primitiveness of Inuit culture, his films also exhibited a liberal sensitivity towards Joseph Idlout and his family. During his time with Idlout, Wilkinson frequently referred to the

⁷¹ Greg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). 204. According to Mitman, early hunting documentaries by Douglas Burden, Merian Cooper, and Martin and Osa Johnson blended scientific accuracy and carnivalesque showmanship to create a picture of the exotic.

⁷² Amy J. Staples, “Popular Ethnography and Public Consumption: Sites of Contestation in Museum-Sponsored Expeditionary Film,” in *The Moving Image* vol. 5. no. 2 (Fall 2005), 61

Inuk as a “dear friend” and “brother.” In his writings, Wilkinson celebrated Idlout’s exceptional ability to thrive in an inhospitable environment. The filmmaker’s esteem for Idlout and his way of life is apparent throughout *Land of the Long Day*. The filmmaker repeatedly portrays the Inuk hunter as discerning, patient, and self-reliant. Idlout is the master of his own destiny, distinguishing himself amongst his peers through feats of strength and ecological knowledge acquired over a lifetime of trials and tribulations. As evidenced by his ability to navigate the stormy Arctic Ocean in a handmade kayak and hunt a 940kg animal with nothing but a spear, Idlout was more comfortable in the elements than any white man could ever hope to be. But even this admiration is rooted in colonial desire of the primeval. In his portrayal of Idlout, Wilkinson highlighted the virtues most valued in Canadian Society: individualism, strength, and fortitude. As Shari Huhndorf writes, Westerners were absorbed with Eskimo culture because it depicted the “most intense Darwinian struggle” where only “the strongest and cleverest survived.”⁷³

Wilkinson’s representation of Idlout as someone who is in tune with the natural rhythms of nature also exemplifies of what Shepard Krech describes as the “ecological Indian” myth.⁷⁴ The idea of the ecological Indian first emerged in the nineteenth century, and was based on the antiquated notion that the primitive native embodied an alternative lifestyle that held the key to a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. As philosopher and eco-critic Neil Evernden notes, “anyone seeking ... the eternal standards by which humans ought to live, would have to inquire which standards are given by

⁷³ Shari Huhndorf, “Nanook and His Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922,” in *Critical Inquiry* 20 no. 1 (Autumn, 2000), 134.

⁷⁴ Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian* (New York: Norton, 1999).

nature. Hence, the widespread interest in primitives, who are often presumed to be living by those primitive standards.”⁷⁵ In *Land of the Long Day* Wilkinson frames the Inuit as a people who are innocent, untroubled by the vices of modern civilization. This rendering in Inuit life is even more apparent in the book version of the documentary, which was published in 1956, Wilkinson recounts a conversation he had with Idlout about life in the South during a cold winter’s eve. According to Wilkinson, the density of urban dwelling disconcerts the Inuk hunter who has only known the freedom that a life in the wilderness can afford:

His mind could not accept the fact that so many people could live and work in such a confined space. As we travelled along on the sled under the broad sweep of the star-filled sky, he said, ‘Since you told me of all those people living on one small island I have not slept well at night. I awaken thinking about the men and women and children all crammed into such a small space, pushing and shoving, fighting for air to breathe. I see people stacked up one atop the other and I become one of them striving to climb upward to reach open air. I awake in a sweat, light a cigarette, and for a long time I cannot sleep. I lie there thinking of what life must be like for all those poor people in New York.’ ‘When I am in my house,’ he continued, ‘I am happy for a while for it is warm and there is always food. But after a few days I grow tired of the house; I grow tired of many people so close to me. I want to get away, off on the hunt, out into the open spaces of the ice-covered sea where I can look out and see no other soul. Then I breathe deeply; I am happy; I feel like a man again. A few days on the trail and I am ready to return to my camp. I am glad to be back with my family, in the warmth and comfort of my house. For a few days I like my home, but I get restless again and I must go off on the hunt or a visit to the traps. How people in your land can live day after day, month after month, year after year in the same house and not go off to hunt I do not know. I could not do it. I would like to see your land, but I could never live there. For I like the sky over my head and the feel of the snow-covered ice beneath my feet. I like to look about and feel myself free.’⁷⁶

Wilkinson believed that Idlout and his family embody a type of pre-fall innocence. The fur-wearing, igloo-building inhabitants of the barren Arctic are peaceable, happy, and brave despite their uncertain circumstances. Although the land appears to outsiders to be barren and severe, the Inuit are content to live off, and learn from, the land. Eskimos, it

⁷⁵ Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 25.

⁷⁶ Wilkinson, 11-12.

seemed, occupied a better world than those eking out a living in the chaos of the modern and industrial South.



Fig. 2.6. “An Inuit man preparing to throw a harpoon at a sinking seal”
(October, 1951) by Doug Wilkinson⁷⁷

Although his affection for the Tununermiut Inuit and their simple lifestyle was genuine, Wilkinson clearly indulged in a type of popular twentieth century nostalgia that idealized the ecological native. He was determined to preserve a picture of this prelapsarian innocence before it vanished from the face of the earth with his camera. This filmmaking practice was akin to salvage ethnography, a research paradigm first developed by Franz Boas. In the early 20th century, Boas argued that it was essential that

⁷⁷ LAC, R1196-14-7-E National Film Board Still Photography Division, “An Inuit man preparing to throw a harpoon at a sinking seal ” by Doug Wilkinson, 1951.

anthropologists record indigenous activities on camera before they evaporated from human history.⁷⁸ The aim was to create a visible document of these last remaining cultures who exhibited a harmonious relationship with their local environments.

Wilkinson was similarly concerned that the Eskimo “was on his way out.” The filmmaker lamented that Southerners were “slated to be the interested spectators of his demise.”⁷⁹

Someone needed to preserve an image of the traditional Inuit, or Canadians would not have any “knowledge of the Eskimo...and his daily life on the land.”⁸⁰ They would also lose an important icon of the primeval; a world that had not been consumed by the avarice of industrial society. Documentary filmmaking was a way for Wilkinson to archive the lives of the disappearing Eskimo, and everything that their existence represented. Film scholar Adrian Ivakhiv likens the kind of salvage ethnography evinced in films like *Land of the Long Day*, to the wilderness-preservation movement. According to Ivakhiv, ethnographers and wilderness advocates both endeavored to preserve a romantic picture of prelapsarian innocence. “The point in both cases is to re-create something presumed to be authentic, whole, and essentially static in nature, the product of evolutionary processes perhaps, but no longer evolving,” writes Ivakhiv.⁸¹ Such “climax communities,” whether natural or cultural, have long reached their zenith and can only be observed from the outside. The result is a “static diorama,” an object to be “scrutinized through the colonial eye of science, power, and romantic nostalgia.”⁸²

⁷⁸ For Wilkinson, this objective justified eliminating the use of the rifle during the narwhal hunt.

⁷⁹ Doug Wilkinson, “A Vanishing Canadian,” *The Beaver*, Spring, 1959, 28.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 25.

⁸¹ Ivakhiv, 148.

⁸² Ibid.

Land of the Long Day was not the only attempt by the NFB to capture a picture of traditional Inuit life before it disappeared from the face of the earth. Wilkinson's *Angotee: Story of an Eskimo Boy* (1953), John Feeney's *The Living Stone* (1958), and the *Netsilik Eskimo Series*, each sought to "produce a picture of the old ways."⁸³ The *Netsilik Eskimo Series* in particular was a clear example of the NFB's preoccupation with salvage ethnography. Filmed between 1965 and 1967 by director Quentin Brown and series supervisor Dr. Asen Balikci, a professor of anthropology at the Université de Montréal, the twenty-one films documented the resourcefulness of the pre-modern Netsilik, who lived in the Arctic "long before the coming of the white man."⁸⁴ According to the film's promotional sheet, the series gave audiences "insight and understanding into a primitive culture now almost *vanished*..."⁸⁵

To show viewers what life was really like in the Arctic "before the coming of the white man," Brown hired locals from Pelly Bay to participate in the making of the film. Brown and his team filmed the Pelly Bay Inuit hunting, cooking, and living in a manner that closely resembled early Netsilik culture. Balikci, the series supervisor, remarked that the amateur actors "reverted willingly to their ancient ways." "The Inuit [from Pelly Bay] showed considerable aptitude in recalling and representing the earlier way of life," the anthropologist observed in his production notes.⁸⁶ Reenactments may have been a way for the filmmakers to make Inuit history come alive, but as Balicki's comments demonstrate, the Inuit were still figured as a primitive people living in a primordial environment. It

⁸³ NFBA, Netsilik Series file, "At the Caribou Crossing – film information guide," not dated.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ NFBA, Netsilik Series file, "Ethnographic Filming and the Netsilik Eskimos," *Quarterly Report*, not dated, 25.

took little prompting from the filmmakers for the Pelly Bay Inuit to embrace their heritage. Interestingly, the historical images in the *Netsilik* series do not differ that greatly from the representations of contemporary Inuit in Doug Wilkinson or even Laura Bolton's films. By not acknowledging the temporal difference between the Netsilik Inuit and the Inuit in modern ethnographic films, NFB filmmakers naturalized the belief that the North was an untouched wilderness, and that the Eskimo were primitive children.



Fig. 2.7. Stills from the *Netsilik Series* (1967), directed by Quentin Brown

Ironically, Doug Wilkinson and Quentin Brown's renderings of life in the High Arctic silenced the indigenous voices they sought to preserve. Wilkinson's documentaries, for example, never explored the cultural effects of modernism on Inuit culture in the twentieth century despite his experience as a service officer with Northern Affairs at Baker Lake in the mid-1950s. He drew on age-old stories about exotic locales,

wild animals, and primitive peoples, and in doing so, classified the North as an ancient landscape inhabited by a primitive and quaint people. This nostalgic image of the primitive noble savage supplanted the historical reality of the landscape, which was dynamic and historically undergoing radical social and ecological change. Indeed, the historical and cultural reality of northern peoples in the twentieth century was markedly different from the experiences depicted in the ethnographic films of the NFB. Most eastern Arctic communities in the twentieth century were not isolated from the rest of Canadian society; they were adapting to external forces that brought with them new economic and social conditions. Political visionaries were petitioning the North to be seen as “Canada’s last frontier,” and the federal government was attempting to establish its sovereignty in the Arctic through the pageantry of military exercises and scientific expeditions. The government was also preoccupied with how to manage the indigenous peoples who lived in this now accessible region. In most cases, the external “forces” prohibited the Inuit from a traditional lifestyle. For the Inuit and the Dené, paternalism on this kind of scale was unprecedented. Federal authority in the North in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was characterized by a policy of benign neglect. Although the state was legally responsible for the welfare of the Inuit as per *Re Eskimo* (1939), the nuts and bolts of northern administration were vague, and often contradictory.⁸⁷ The state’s ambivalence enabled the Inuit to pursue their traditional lifestyle without much governmental interference. This era of parliamentary inattention, however, was replaced by a more active and interventionist period of administration after the Second World War.

⁸⁷ See: Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarnit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocations in the Easter Arctic, 1939 -63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

The federal government increased its efforts to assimilate the Inuit into mainstream society. As a part of this effort, the state detailed a range of issues that in their estimated needed to be resolved: starvation, disease, and alcoholism as persistent problems in northern communities. According to federal employees, these hardships were a consequence of isolation and harsh living conditions. For the government, the solution was relatively simple. It provided the Inuit and the Dené with low-rent housing and increased social services, amenities that were essential for a more stable modern existence. Moreover, the federal government tried to overcome the perceived environmental handicaps of northern peoples by assimilating them into the wage economy and the political process. As Frances Abele notes, “the difficult circumstances of northern natives appeared to southern civil servants as a consequence of native people’s...absence of viable economic opportunities.” The North was a harsh environment, and diminishing wildlife made life difficult and ultimately unsustainable. The solution to this geographic problem, Abele argues, was to develop a native labour force and to create business and employment opportunities.⁸⁸ Integration would afford northern peoples a viable life that did not rely on the vagaries of their challenging surroundings. But the development strategy faltered in unanticipated ways. The permanent settlements established by the state strained old authority patterns and kin-

⁸⁸ Frances Abele, “Canadian Contradictions: Forty Years of Northern Political Development” *Arctic* 40 no. 4 (December 1987) 315.

based sharing relationships. The Inuit, who were moved to communities far away from their traditional hunting and trapping grounds, felt confused and placeless.⁸⁹

This is all to say that NFB representations of the North as a primitive wilderness obfuscated the effects of the state's modernization schemes and overlooked the agency of northern peoples, and their efforts to reclaim their sense of dignity and traditional life.⁹⁰ In NFB documentaries in the 1950s and well into the 1960s, the Inuit are merely presented as exotic reminders of a vanished era. By perpetuating this popular vision of Eskimo life, NFB filmmakers established a broader hegemonic ideology of race and culture in which white Canadians were implicitly assumed to be superior.⁹¹ The Inuk hunter nobly struggled to survive in the harsh northern climate with a spear. By contrast, the filmmaker documenting the Inuk was a sensible, modern, and benevolent individual

Such stereotypical depictions helped create a cultural and geographic landscape on which political and economic decisions could be made.⁹² As Peter Geller notes, these kinds of images and narratives were “constituted into an archive of social facts, photographs and films,” and “marshaled as evidence for and justification of either active

⁸⁹ There were several NFB films that looked at the Inuit's assimilation into modern Canada. *Our Northern Citizen* (1956) examines the impacts of new developments on the Inuit in Baffin Island while *Labrador North* (1973) explores the social effects of relocation.

⁹⁰ It is important to remember that “films stand still, but their subjects move on... Even as a film is being shot, its subjects are in transition, moving toward a future that the film cannot contain.” David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 33. This is particularly poignant in the story of Joseph Idlout. The NFB film, *Between Two Worlds* (1990), directed by Barry Greenwald, and produced by Arctic activist Peter Raymont, documents Idlout's life after the filming of *Land of the Long Day*. Idlout eventually became a trapper and guide for the government. Trying to improve his family's fortunes, he gets caught up in the White world. Idlout does not know who he is or where he belongs. He is “Between Two Worlds.”

⁹¹ Sangster, 192.

⁹² Sangster, 192.

policy or benign neglect.”⁹³ This political agenda was most explicit in ethnographic films that tackled the issue of northern development and social aid. In these films, the North was depicted as a place requiring aid: the Inuit were suffering because the land was not providing in the same way it had for generations. And they were unable to adapt. Ethnographic films about northern development explicitly endorsed governmental efforts to save the Inuit from perceived environmental and social uncertainties through modernization. The film that embodied this paternalism the most was René Bonnière’s *The Annanacks* (1964). The documentary was written by Don Snowden, an information officer for the Department of Northern Affairs tasked with solving poverty and unemployment in the North. In the documentary, government officers are framed as a benevolent presence in the lives of the George River Inuit. The film establishes the Annanack family and the other members of the George River community as a people on the “verge of starvation because of the decline in the herds of Caribou.”⁹⁴ Without options, the Inuit travel to Fort Chimo to ask the federal government for aid. They are told by the officer at the government depot to trade their ample supplies of timber (a rarity in the Arctic) for food. With the “guidance and assistance” of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, the George River form the first Eskimo co-operative. The federal government also helps the Inuit establish the “democratic process of elections.” Under the mentorship of the state, the newly-elected president, George Annanack begins integrating the George River settlement into a regional economy by establishing fishing and logging operations.

⁹³ Geller, 49.

⁹⁴ *The Annanacks*, produced by René Bonnière, NFB 1964

The portrayal of the Inuit as a backward people in need of social assistance in *The Annanacks* was a product of its time, reflecting the welfare state's progressive, social democratic attitude toward indigenous peoples in the North. The film generalizes the Inuit as a people struggling to survive in the barren North, while state officers are presented as benevolent experts who are tasked with helping the Annanack clan overcome a dire situation. As the film explains, the government helps resolve issues “of distance, climate, lack of communication and lack of technical training and business techniques,” by teaching the Inuit how to transition from a hunting economy to a modern wage economy, where they “maximize their use of natural resources.”⁹⁵ In doing so, the state provides the Inuit with a “measure of security.”

Ethnographic documentaries about northern development, and in particular, governmental strategies to help northern peoples modernize bore striking similarities to some of the more exotic pictures of Eskimo life popular in the 1940s and early 1950s. Both types of films emphasized the extremeness of the northern environment and the primitiveness of Inuit customs. These films, however, also differed in key ways. Documentaries about modernization made explicit the notion that the North was under the jurisdiction of the Canadian state. It was not only an imaginative frontier, a platonic ideal that existed somewhere outside of time; it was a real space in need of environmental and social transformation. In short, it was a space to fill, a place to occupy, and a landscape to colonize. There was one other similarity between these two types of ethnographic

⁹⁵ Ibid.

documentaries, one reckons. They both continued to perpetuate the North as an object of southern desire.

Across Arctic Ungava and Narratives of Conquest and Discovery

Like the National Film Board's ethnographic films, documentaries about Arctic exploration promoted and legitimized the South's physical and intellectual colonization of northern spaces. Through narratives of travel and discovery, films such as *Across Arctic Ungava* (1949) *The Last Voyage of Henry Hudson* (1964), *Alexander Mackenzie: Lord of the North* (1964), and *Stefansson: An Arctic Prophet* (1965) visualized the "opening up" of the North to Southern political and economic interests. In these rousing tales of exploration, the landscape was framed as an object of imperial desire - a place to plant a flag. Their existence simultaneously confirmed the South's authority over northern spaces and contributed to the transformation of the North into an object of scientific knowledge, discovery, and eventually, colonization.

Across Arctic Ungava (1949) is one of the most famous Canadian documentaries about the relationship between northern exploration and the opening up of the North to southern interests.⁹⁶ The film's premise is simple: French botanist Jacques Rousseau travels across "the unmapped wilderness of the Ungava peninsula" to record geographic and biological features of the landscape.⁹⁷ The film documents the voyage, which occurred in the summer of 1948. (Rousseau had persuaded the Arctic Institute and the National Museum in Montreal to finance the trip to "the least known regions in the

⁹⁶ *Across Arctic Ungava*, Produced by Michael Spencer, NFB 1949.

⁹⁷ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, official information sheet, not dated.

Eastern Arctic” the previous autumn.)⁹⁸ The botanist is joined by Edgar de Aubert de la Rue, a geologist who had procured a grant from the Arctic Institute, geographer Pierre Gadbois of the Geographical Bureau of the Dominion of Department of Mines and Resources, and Jean Michéa, an ethnologist and amateur filmmaker who documented the voyage with his 16mm camera.⁹⁹ The information that the team collects in northern Quebec is to be used by the government to determine the economic potential of the region.¹⁰⁰

Jacques Rousseau and Jean Michéa never intended for the footage to be made into a documentary. It was only when Michael Spencer, an executive producer of the NFB’s “Arctic Notebook Series,” saw Michéa’s footage that the Film Board became involved in the project. After watching the film of the voyage, Spencer sent an enthusiastic letter to cinematographer and long-time collaborator Chester Kissick. He praised Michéa’s “fantastic and thrilling images of northern life,” and began to outline a film based on the footage.¹⁰¹ According to Spencer, Michéa’s photography was perfectly suited for a film about Arctic exploration.¹⁰² Several weeks later, the film producer wrote to the curator of the National Museum, P.J. Alcock, and asked if he could use Michéa’s 16mm footage to make a documentary about the expedition.¹⁰³ Alcock agreed and sent the dailies to the NFB headquarters in Ottawa. Although the raw material was there, the challenge was to

⁹⁸ Jacques Rousseau, “The Vegetation and Life Zones of George River, Eastern Ungava and the Welfare of the Natives,” *Arctic* 1 no 2 (Autumn, 1948) 1.

⁹⁹ Jacques Rousseau, “By Canoe Across the Ungava Peninsula Via the Kogaluk and Payne Rivers Report supplied by Dr. Jacques Rousseau,” *Arctic*, 1 no. 2, (Autumn 1949). 50

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Rousseau, “à travers l’Ungava, *Actualité économique*, 25 (avril-juin 1949): 83- 120, Jacques Rousseau fonds, Collections and Archives –Montreal Botanical Gardens, Montreal, Quebec.

¹⁰¹ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, Michael Spencer to Chester Kissick, “Re: ‘Ungava,’” June 15, 1949.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, Michael Spencer to P.J. Alcock, July 3, 1949.

turn these random images into a coherent story about the “keen excitement of...Canadian exploration”¹⁰⁴ Spencer hired Doug Wilkinson to edit the footage.

Like most presentations of northern discovery, *Across Arctic Ungava* is unabashedly nationalistic, promoting the ideals of the state through an exciting account of discovery. It celebrates Rousseau’s mastery of the chaotic North and explains how his conquest has helped pave the way for future resource exploitation and colonization. To emphasize the magnitude of the expedition (and to stir within the viewer, a sense of national pride and sense of ownership), Wilkinson relies on well-worn, but nevertheless popular tropes, about brave men overcoming an inhospitable and uncharted environment through a combination of intelligence and grit.¹⁰⁵ It is a safari film of sorts, characterized by a series of exotic encounters with strange creatures and peoples, and celebratory

¹⁰⁴ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, official information sheet, not dated.

¹⁰⁵ *Across Arctic Ungava* was part of a larger genealogy of expedition and travelogue films. Shortly after the two French brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière developed the cinématographe in Lyon circa 1895, a profusion of actualités (an early prototype of the newsreel and documentary) about the darkest corners of the map were made. Films such as the Danish *Traveling with Greenlandic Dogs* (1897), and the Edison Company’s *Klondike Gold Rush* (1898) and *Packers on the Trail* (1901) depicted encounters with a wild North. Captain Frank E. Kleinschmidt, leader of the Carnegie Museum Expedition in Alaska and Siberia was one of the first to record his journey in the Far North with a movie camera. In 1908 Kleinschmidt shot over ten thousand feet of film of Eskimo culture. William Van Valin, a teacher in Sinrock, Alaska, also used motion pictures to capture life in the Arctic. Van Valin joined John Wannemaker, director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum on an expedition to Point Barrow, where he remained until 1919. During his tenure there, Van Valin produced *Tip Top of the Earth*, a series of six twenty-minute films that documented his trip in Point Barrow from 1912 to 1919. In the 1920s and 1930s the expedition film (an offshoot of the safari genre) began to develop a consistent schema. The basic motifs in Arctic exploration narratives – the wind swept tundra, icebergs, igloo and kayaks, the Inuit with his spear, the rough and tumble fur trader, and the frost bitten explorer trapped in his icebound ship became commonplace. Robert Flaherty’s immensely popular *Nanook of the North* was the first film to popularize the expedition genre. In his essay “Cinema and Exploration,” the French intellectual and film critic, André Bazin argues that Flaherty’s film was a pivotal moment in polar exploration narratives. “Bazin and other critics like the German theorist Siegfried Kracauer lauded *Nanook*’s innovative style and its realistic depictions of Inuit life. Polar exploration films like *Nanook of the North* were the beginnings of a particular narration of geographical space, and a specific discourse of cinematic authenticity.

scenes of arrival and departure.¹⁰⁶ Wilkinson imagines the northern landscape as an empty and barren wasteland; an extreme environment that tests the limits of humankind and modernity. At each point along their journey, the men must cross both physical and symbolic boundaries to accomplish their goal. Louis Applebaum's baroque soundtrack provides an emotional subtext to the film's wide-angle panoramas of spongy flatland that "stretches for thousands of treeless miles," elevating the film to the level of myth.

The excitement (and the film's payoff) is drawn from Wilkinson's ability to frame the North as an obstreperous obstacle indeed. Early in the documentary presents Rousseau and the other men as blundering novices in the domain of frontiersmanship. Having spent most of their career in sterile laboratories and in the comfortable confines of university classrooms, the greenhorn scientists are apparently helpless in the Arctic wilderness.¹⁰⁷ In a comical scene early in the documentary, two scientists contend with the turbulent Kogaluk River. The water is too powerful and the two men finally succumb to the powerful current and drift downstream. The depiction of the scientists as inexperienced tenderfeet was slightly exaggerated, but it nonetheless served to support the movie's dramatic story of Southern resolve. By the second half of the film, Wilkinson shows how the scientists adapt to their situation. They haul Arctic char into their boats without fuss, paddle effortlessly in the same tributaries that overwhelmed them only a few days earlier, and successfully navigate the tundra flats without the aid of their indigenous

¹⁰⁶ Amy Staples, "Safari Adventure: Forgotten Cinematic Journeys in Africa," *Film History* 18 No. 4 (2006), 394.

¹⁰⁷ The relationship between narrative and landscape is explored more fully in Martin Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 20 No 1 (Spring, 2011): 61-78

guides.¹⁰⁸ In the documentary's most iconic sequences, Michéa photographs the expedition portaging up a rocky slope with the nimble expertise of veteran outdoorsmen. They pause at the top of the summit and survey the tundra. The dramatic image confirms to the viewer that the men have triumphed over the Arctic environment.



Fig. 2.8 still from *Across Arctic Ungava* (1949), produced by Michael Spencer

Wilkinson's depiction of Jacques Rousseau, a bespectacled chap with a Rooseveltian mustache, personifies the film's nationalistic subtext about the inevitability of conquest. He epitomizes the men who, in Barry Lopez's words, "plot the metes and bounds that permit a division and registry of the landscape."¹⁰⁹ The botanist successfully leads the team across the uncharted landscape, navigating their course while logging all

¹⁰⁸ When *Across Arctic Ungava* was completed, Michael Spencer sent the film to the Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who was working as Director of Polar Studies at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire at the time. The anthropologist was a colleague and friend of both Douglas Wilkinson and Jacques Rousseau. According to Spencer, Stefansson was quite pleased with the movie's depiction of the thrills of exploration.

¹⁰⁹ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* (New York: Vintage, 1986),

sorts of valuable details about the Ungava peninsula. For Wilkinson, Rousseau was the perfect leading man for a film about the thrills of northern discovery and exploration.¹¹⁰ Rousseau was a polymath of sorts: a highly regarded botanist, a northern explorer, and a masculine adventurer who often travelled alone in the wilderness for weeks at a time. The francophone botanist *par excellence* was also interested in the relationship between man and nature. He was, as the Montreal Botanical Garden (MBG) notes, “a forerunner of multidisciplinary.”¹¹¹ During his travels, the scientist took numerous photographs of natural landscapes and native customs. The images reveal the inquisitive “eye of the scientist,” and a distinctive “respect for the lifestyle and aboriginal knowledge.”¹¹² As the MBG explains, “Rightly, it is said that he is the father of ethnobotany in Quebec.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ The exploits of Rousseau were widely circulated in both the public press and in academic journals.

¹¹¹ “Jacques Rousseau: Natural Landscapes and People from Quebec and Other Countries,” *Collections and Archives –Montreal Botanical Gardens*, access date March 14, 2015

http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin/archives/rousseau/accueil_en.htm.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.



Fig. 2.9. “Lac Mistassini. Rousseau dans le portage d’Opitchouane,” July 31, 1944 by Ernest Rouleau¹¹⁴

Across Arctic Ungava’s depiction of distant and wild geographies, and southern exploration certainly inflames the colonial imagination. The North is presented as a world of unknown value, a picture of potentiality. This kind of representation of nature, one that “overwhelms...human beings in the landscape” and “erases local culture and life,” tacitly reorders that landscape as “raw nature, available resource and empty territory.”¹¹⁵

Interestingly, the actual expedition was far more difficult and less prosperous than the documentary lets on. Indeed, an examination of Jean Michéa’s account of the expedition reveals a much different story than the euphoric version of the trip that appears onscreen. After a Canso flying-boat dropped the exploration party off at Povungnituk, a small trading post on the Eastern shore of Hudson’s Bay, 66° N and 77° W, the men headed

¹¹⁴ Photograph of Jacques Rousseau, “Lac Mistassini. Rousseau dans le portage d’Opitchouane,” July 31, 1944, JBM 04, S3, SS3, Jacques Rousseau collections, Montreal Botanical Garden Archives, Montreal, Quebec.

¹¹⁵ John Pickles, *Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-Coded World*, New York: Routledge, 2004), 119.

inland on the Kogaluk River. The expeditionary team paddled for three days with their Montagnais guides until they arrived at Tassiat Lake. Michéa writes in his journal that the first leg of the trip left the men “nearly dead” from fatigue.¹¹⁶ Still they pressed on. The next morning they began a twenty-mile portage across the countryside, which would have been impossible if it were not for the help of the four Montagnais. On August 2nd, the explorers arrived at their supplies cache on the shores of Payne Lake. After they rested, the party crossed Payne at dawn, and headed into the uncharted territories of the northern parts of Nunavik, Quebec – “the first white men to go there.”¹¹⁷ But the land of Milk and Honey it was not. “We were not in paradise,” the ethnographer observed bleakly in his journal. The landscape was “nothing but rocks,” and there was “nothing worthwhile, even for [the] geologist or botanist.”¹¹⁸ Worse, the explorers were lost. They wandered eastward in the rocky wilderness flummoxed by the unfamiliar landscape. Michéa writes: “In such a land, there is no definite boundary between the west part of Ungava peninsula (water flowing to Hudson Bay) and the east part (water flowing to Ungava Bay).”¹¹⁹ Even the “native guides did not know the easiest route.”¹²⁰ The befuddled party had to watch “when one small lake was emptying in another [sic]” to see if they were still heading in the right direction.¹²¹ Finally on August 12th, the eight explorers arrived at their destination - a small trading post overlooking the immense Ungava Bay. They spent a

¹¹⁶ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, “Jean Michéa Notes,” n.d.

¹¹⁷ J.P. Michéa, Canada Department of Mines and Resources – Mines, Forests and Scientific Services Branch, *Annual Report of the National Museum for the Fiscal Year 1948-1949*, (Ottawa: 1949), 54-55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 55.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

week collecting samples of Arctic flora and rocks, charting fluctuations in the weather, gauging soil readings, and battling a plague of mosquitoes and blackflies.

The contrast between the actual expedition and the triumphant tale described in *Across Arctic Ungava* illuminates how NFB filmmakers mediated a circumscribed and nationalistic vision of terrestrial occupation in the North.¹²² Together, Jacques Rousseau, Jean Michéa, Michael Spencer, and Doug Wilkinson created a picture of modern man successfully conquering distant lands in the name of science and the state.¹²³ The jubilant narrative of scientific discovery indicates that the filmmakers were aware of the larger cultural and political interest in making the North visible to southern interests. Rousseau's expedition was financed by the Arctic Institute under the assumption that the scientists would bring back practical information about the North. The botanist requested that the filmmakers emphasize the practical nature of their discoveries. In a letter to Spencer, Rousseau explained that their expedition "added materially to [Canada's] scanty knowledge on sub-soil," and "contributed to the development of the mining industry."¹²⁴ The Ungava peninsula was a "vital strategic area of Canada," which contained "great mineral wealth." In addition to the expedition's charting of the Northern landscape, the team also amassed an "important collection of spiders" hitherto "unknown to science" and "discovered a new species of plant."¹²⁵

¹²² For a discussion on verisimilitude and the imitation of reality in Arctic cinema, See: Rosalind Galt, "It's so cold in Alaska': Evoking Exploration between Bazin and the Forbidden Quest," *Discourse* 28:1 (Winter, 2006) 53-71.

¹²³ For the historical roots of this kind of depiction see: Janice Cavell "Arctic Exploration in Canadian Print Culture, 1890-1930" in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, 44 No. 2 (2006) 7-43.

¹²⁴ NFBA, *Across Arctic Ungava* file, Jacques Rousseau to Michael Spencer June 27, 1949.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*2.

The film camera itself played an important role in the expedition's mapping of the Ungava landscape. For Arctic explorers like Rousseau, filmmaking was a tool that helped them document hitherto undiscovered (and unseen) environs. The lens of the camera was especially adept at collecting visual and auditory information about the terrain's economic possibility. Furthermore, the film camera legitimated Rousseau's discoveries in the North. Historically, major expeditions such as the one undertaken by Rousseau, required some type of visual representation of the trip.¹²⁶ Scholar Angela Byrne explains that it was the collecting and transporting of mineralogical samples, biological specimens, and cultural artifacts that verified explorers' observations and supported their reputations.¹²⁷ Film images similarly provided both a story of northern exploration and ocular proof of the scientist's findings. As historians Michael Bravo and Sverker Sorlin note in their edited collection, *Narrating the Arctic*, "narratives in the form of story-telling constitute part of the equipment of travel itself."¹²⁸ Canadian explorers had long used film to record their expeditions and to help raise fund for their next voyage. George H. Wilkins, an Australian polar explorer, ornithologist, and amateur filmmaker recorded Vilhjalmur Stefansson's famous three-year Arctic expedition. Richard S. Finnie, a government filmmaker, shot numerous documentaries about state-sponsored expeditions

¹²⁶ Potter, 8.

¹²⁷ Angela Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North: Science, Antiquarianism, and Travel, 1790-1830* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) 85.

¹²⁸ Michael Bravo and Sverker Sorlin, *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices* edited by Bravo and Sorlin (Canton: Watson Publishing International, 2002).

in the Arctic.¹²⁹ Jean Michéa likewise used the film camera to demonstrate the authenticity of their scientific exploits in the North.



Fig. 2.10 Still from *Across Arctic Ungava* (1949)

The dual function of filmmaking (as a tool used in the actual act of discovery and as a device used to narrate that discovery) in *Across Arctic Ungava* is important.

Filmmaking, as a number of scholars have noted, is closely related to the extension of state power in the North. Scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that narratives of discovery turned spectators into “armchair conquistadors,” and affirmed their “sense of power” over the periphery.¹³⁰ Filmmaking, a visual way of storytelling, was especially important in the South’s administration in unfamiliar or distant northern spaces. As Peter

¹²⁹ *In the Shadow of the Pole* (1928), which documented the government’s expedition of the Arctic in 1928, was his most famous.

¹³⁰ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994) 104.

Geller notes, photography and filmmaking were both used as tools to catalogue and chart isolated regions of the continent, which were in turn used to justify their annexation or colonization.¹³¹ Michéa's camerawork in *Across Arctic Ungava* was a proxy for the government's claim over Ungava by providing northern administrators with a synoptic view of the environment from a safe distance. In the same way that field sciences efforts' to collect, sketch, measure, record, narrate remote geographies rendered colonial frontiers visible and therefore conquerable, *Across Arctic Ungava* imposed an external order (scientific, rational, cinematic) upon the landscape and the people who inhabited it. The camera supported the accounts and claims of Rousseau and the other scientists with startling clarity, and in the process revealed a world wholly different from anything most Canadians had witnessed before. These images made the North comprehensible to southerners. Jean Louis-Comolli describes the ideological significance of this cinematic process in his essay "Machines of the Visible." Filmmaking operates as "a geographical extension of the field of the visible and the representable," Comolli writes. Through cinematic "journeys, explorations, colonization, the world becomes visible at the same time that it becomes *appropriable*."¹³² Seeing (and recording) was a form of possession. In other words *Across Arctic Ungava* did not just narrate the stories of people who discovered (and conquered) northern landscapes, it also literally produced the North as an object to be rationalized and occupied through the act of recording.

¹³¹ Geller, 165.

¹³² Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath (St. Martin's Press, 1980). 122-123.

Science Films and Southern Authority in Northern Spaces

Arctic expeditions were an important part of Canadian public memory and national myth making. The NFB's portrayals of brave men tussling with the inhospitable climes of the North were dramatic reminders of Canada's destiny in the North. In *Across Arctic Ungava*, Wilkinson presents Rousseau and his expeditionary team as scientific heroes, boldly accumulating valuable knowledge about the region's economic suitability. One might assume that documentaries about Arctic science would be more neutral in their depictions of the North. How can a genre of filmmaking that purports to be about organisms and geological formations be anything but objective? Lincoln Washburn, the Director of the Arctic Institute of North America, was certainly adamant that northern science had no political agenda. According to Washburn, the objectives of the Arctic Institute were "purely scientific." The government financed operation endeavored "to learn more about the North, to solve the many problems that confront us there and which must be solved before we are in a position to describe the North accurately and completely."¹³³

But northern science was not neutral, and neither were the NFB's films about northern science. As historian Stephen Bocking has shown, the discipline was a critical component of the federal government's postwar schemes in the North. Funded by the state, biologists, meteorologists, and geologists gathered useful bits of intelligence about northern geographies and their prospective worth. On the surface NFB films about Arctic

¹³³ A. L. Washburn, "Geography and Arctic Lands," in *Geography in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Growth, Fields, Techniques, Aims and Trends*, ed. G. Taylor, 3rd ed. (New York: The Philosophical Society, 1957), 1211.

biology and geology may appear to be about nothing more than ice or snow. More deeply, however, they, like documentaries about Arctic exploration assisted government projects in the North by charting the resource potential of the landscape. Furthermore, scientists, who were not above a little patriotic showboating, stuck flags in the soil (or ice) onscreen to mark their presence in these regions.

The first NFB documentary about northern science was Dalton Muir's *High Arctic: Life on the Land* (1958), which he described as "a factual film in good taste with the widest possible appeal and distribution."¹³⁴ Produced by Unit B's "Science Program," the documentary was intended to provide a general overview of the Arctic environment.¹³⁵ In a letter to producer Hugh O'Connor, the writer of the documentary, Strowan Robertson, declared that, "no film has reached the public which gives an accurate picture of the geological, geographical and biological conditions of this immense area."¹³⁶ "Consequently," explained Robertson, "the average citizens knows of the Arctic only in terms of polar bears, Eskimo and extreme cold."¹³⁷ This was intolerable to Robertson. The filmmaker wanted *High Arctic* to demystify "the last of the relatively unknown areas of Canada" by educating the public on its ecological diversity.¹³⁸

To show the "North as it really was," Muir records in "vivid detail" the "exciting evidence of plant and animal life and their constant struggle for survival in the harsh

¹³⁴ NFBA, *High Arctic: Life on the Land* file, Strowan Robertson to Hugh O'Connor, 29 May 1958.

¹³⁵ See: Tom Daly interview in Peter Harcourt, "The Innocent Eye: An Aspect of the Work of the National Film Board of Canada," *Sight and Sound* 34 no. 1 (Winter 1965), 21. See also: Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949-1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 68-70.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ NFBA, *High Arctic: Life on the Land* file, "film proposal," Strowan Robertson to Tom Daly, not dated

environment.”¹³⁹ On the surface, the Arctic looks “cold and bleak,” an inimical world of “rocks, scars, and sterile earth.” but the documentary shows that even here “ecological systems thrive and work.”¹⁴⁰ A closer look at this mythological landscape “reveals signs of life.” The narrator of the film describes the various habits and mechanisms that allow organisms to thrive here as the camera zooms in for a close up of some moss clinging to asymmetrical rocks. Even in the most inhospitable regions, nature endures.¹⁴¹ Muir explained in his production notes that he would use a combination of long, medium and close-up shots to “support” the “ecological thesis” of the film.¹⁴² The documentary will be “a sequence of pictorial beauty” that contains “the most telling statistics,” Muir said.¹⁴³ For the NFB filmmaker, the movie camera was able to help him reveal scientific phenomena that static means of representations (maps, charts, and photographs) could not. Unlike photography, Muir could use moving images to present a macro-view of the Arctic landscape and then, through editing, cut to a time-lapse sequence of receding of ice in the spring. In a matter of seconds, he could show audiences how geology and climate work together in the formation of the Arctic landscape.

High Arctic and its sequels, *Face of the High Arctic* (1958), and *Island of the Frozen Sea* (1958) were made for elementary and high school students. The NFB encouraged teachers to pin-up film reviews of the documentaries on their bulletin boards “to arouse interest” and “to stimulate follow-up activities” in the classroom.¹⁴⁴ Film

¹³⁹ NFBA, *High Arctic: Life on the Land* file, R.D. Muir, “Statement of Intent,” not dated.

¹⁴⁰ *High Arctic: Life on the Land*, produced by Strowan Robertson and Hugh O’Connor, NFB 1958.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² NFBA, *High Arctic: Life on the Land* file, R.D. Muir, “Statement of Intent,” not dated.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ NFBA, *High Arctic: Life on the Land* file, “A Teacher’s Guide to the Film,” not dated, p.1.

distributors further endowed teachers with worksheets for students to fill out while they watched the documentary.¹⁴⁵ The quizzes were compatible with contemporary biology and geography textbooks, so they could easily be incorporated into the Canadian public school curriculum. While education films like *High Arctic* were seemingly apolitical in their aspirations, these documentaries about the North reflected the federal government's political and economic ambitions in northern spaces. Dalton Muir shot the film at Eureka weather station, a scientific research base funded by the federal government. The meteorological station operated as a way for Canada and the United States to confirm their presence in the North during the Cold War.¹⁴⁶ Scientific installations like Eureka were bastions against Soviet occupation - their very presence proclaimed that Canada was here first. Muir also collaborated with scientists who worked for the Arctic Institute (1944) and programs like the Geological Survey of Canada's "Operation Franklin" (1955). In his research notes, Muir acknowledges their important contributions to the film. These men were the same individuals who were often tasked with buttressing political and military imperatives in the North during the Cold War.¹⁴⁷ As historian Edward Jones-Imhotep notes, scientists and the institutions that supported them, "embodied wider struggles to bring a certain understanding of the nation into being." Muir's film was made possible because of the federal government's preoccupation with

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Gordon Smith, "Weather Stations in the Canadian North and Arctic Sovereignty," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* vol. 11 no. 3 (Spring: 2009).

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Bocking, "Science and Spaces in the Northern Environment," *Environmental History* 12 (October, 2007), 869. Other projects including the Defense Research Board, Canadian Wildlife Service, and the Fisheries Research Board of Canada

Arctic environments. The film’s emphasis on the resource possibilities in this “abundant landscape” certainly pays tribute to the government’s aspirations in the North.



Fig. 2.11. Still from *High Arctic: Life on the Land* (1958), by Dalton Muir

The close relationship between science and state power in the North is explicit in James de B. Domville’s *Arctic IV* (1974). The film follows Dr. Joseph MacInnis, a scientist specializing in underwater medicine “and a man obsessed with the sea,” as he explores the Arctic Ocean near Resolute Bay. The documentary begins dramatically with MacInnis hovering a couple of hundred meters above the North Pole in a helicopter. Through a voice-over we listen as the scientist reports to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that his sub-aquatic expedition of the Arctic Ocean is about to begin. Trudeau responds, calling MacInnis’ expedition a “great achievement for Canada.” For emphasis, Domville places a Canadian flag in the foreground of the shot.

The association between sovereignty and science is repeated later in the film. In an interview, MacInnis explains that he is “trying to change the consciousness of the Canadian people and awaken them that almost half of their country is underwater, and that it needs exploration, management, and understanding.” He continues: “I do dramatic things to draw attention to the fact we need this kind of exploration...and what better way to do that then pick the pinnacle of diving - that is the North Pole.”¹⁴⁸ On cue, MacInnis jumps into the ocean and scuttles below the surface to plant a flag underneath the ice. This borderline-absurd scene mirrors the first sequence in the documentary in that it visualizes how scientific discovery and state ownership are linked. NFB films like *Arctic IV* uncritically assumed that northern science and sovereignty went hand in hand. The government financed scientific research institutes and expeditions in the North and vice versa, scientists helped establish a government presence in northern spaces.



Fig. 2.12. Still from *Arctic IV* (1974) by James de B. Domville

¹⁴⁸ *Arctic IV*, produced by Colin Low, NFB, 1974.

Scientists were more than just explorers claiming new land for the government, however. Scientists also used carefully calibrated instruments and fieldwork to assess the region's physical properties, and in some cases, its economic potential. Likewise, NFB documentarians accumulated visual and auditory information about the landscape's economic potential for the government through the use of aerial cinematography and powerful lenses. In the same way that exploration films "discovered" a fruitful and possibly lucrative north, documentaries about science also unveiled the North as a landscape of untapped economic potential. The film cameras in these science documentaries zoom, soar, and provide a seemingly detached perspective of the physical properties of the North. The information gained through this kind of filmic surveillance contributed to the government's spatial knowledge of northern spaces. Bruno Latour's theory on the production of scientific knowledge helps explain the role NFB cinema played in the discovery of the North. In *Science in Action*, Latour argues that "knowledge" cannot be defined without understanding how knowledge is *gained*.¹⁴⁹ Knowledge, explains Latour, is not just the opposite of ignorance or belief; it is a "cycle of accumulation" where information and material objects are brought back to a central location to be observed. Those in the center have the luxury of familiarizing themselves with things, people, and events that are distant, within the comfort of their labs or offices.¹⁵⁰ They also have the financial recourses and political clout to send out more expeditions, which eventually supply even more information about the external world.

¹⁴⁹ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 220.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

How is knowledge about the periphery brought back to the center for calculation? Firstly, information is rendered mobile. Secondly, the data collected by field scientists is stabilized so that it can be transported back undisturbed and intact. And lastly, the information is made combinable so that it can be aggregated and organized into practical knowledge.¹⁵¹ Early scientific expeditions used carracks and other vessels to transport detailed sketches, maps, and samples of flora and fauna back to scientific institutions so it could be observed more easily. Today, information is collected via newer and more adaptable communication technologies like the Internet, GPS, or, as I argue, the film camera. NFB movies functioned as vessels that carted scientific information from the North back to the center. Images of the landscape were rendered stable by affixing its information to celluloid, and made combinable through film prints and distribution services. Airborne NFB cameras could glide and soar through the landscape, recording everything within the scope of its lens. Veering back South to the National Film Board headquarters in Montreal, the footage was then edited into a coherent narrative so the landscape could be better understood, approximated, and in the end, rationalized. No matter how far away or infinitely big the North was, it ended up on a scale that Canadian observers could dominate by sight.¹⁵² Films provided an easily interpreted visual record of the North by reducing it to an aspect ratio of 1.66:1 and transmitting that image into theatres, classrooms, or government offices. It was what film scholar Bill Nichols described as “an economy predicated on distance and control, centred around a single, all-

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 223

¹⁵² Ibid. 227.

seeing vantage point.”¹⁵³ While its intention was not to claim space for the government, the NFB’s mission to be “eyes of Canada” helped make the North visible and thus controllable.



Fig. 2.13. Still from *Canada, the Land* (1971) by Rex Tasker

A Developed Northern Landscape

NFB documentaries about Arctic exploration and science simultaneously reflected and contributed to the state’s struggle to rationalize the North. So too did films about Northern development. In the 1940s, series such as *Canada Action Series* and *Canada Carries On* produced short documentaries that grandly showcased the development of the Northwest Territories. According to these wartime series, the North was a vital part of Canada’s future because it was a bulwark against the Eastern bloc, and because it

¹⁵³ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 31. See also: John Tagg, *The Burden of Representations: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillian, 1988), Tagg. Tagg looks at how photographic documentation contributed to the rise of bureaucratic forms of state power since late 19th century.

contained a wealth of lucrative natural resources. *Highways North* (1944), *Northwest by Air* (1944) and *Land of Pioneers* (1945) each acclaimed the “awakening of a new land” that could radically transform the Canadian economy.¹⁵⁴ In particular, they praised the construction of the Alaska Military Highway and the Canol pipeline, which were key in integrating northern spaces into the Canadian political and economic mainstream.¹⁵⁵ “Yes, the country is wild and rough in places, but the isolation of the Canadian northwest is gone forever,” the narrator of *Northwest by Air* boasts as a survey plane flies overhead, its wings glinting in the sun.¹⁵⁶ The development of new transportation arteries and better aerial technologies will reveal “the grandeur and the future promise of Canada’s great Northwest” to the entire world.¹⁵⁷ *Northwest Frontier*, a laudatory film about the hardiness of the Northern pioneers, similarly describes the story of the landscape as a “conflict between the old, isolated North and the new pulsing currents of modern business and social life moving in.”¹⁵⁸ The documentary argues that the South’s technological superiority makes the development of the North inevitable. “The bush plane,” the narrator extols, is “drawing this huge territory into the mainstream of Canadian life.”¹⁵⁹

To demonstrate the South’s conquest over the chaotic North, NFB filmmakers frequently used images and descriptions of what David Nye terms the “technological sublime”¹⁶⁰ In the script for *Northwest Frontier*, James Beveridge describes the arrival of

¹⁵⁴ *Highways North*, produced by Canada in Action Series, NFB, 1944.

¹⁵⁵ The pipeline was actually constructed by the United States. By most accounts, the project was a failure due its inflated costs and ecological degradation.

¹⁵⁶ *Northwest by Air*, produced by James Beveridge and Margaret Parry, NFB, 1944.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

the South as a kind of ecstatic experience. “A shadow swept down the river, a new noise split the silence, the roar of aircraft down the Mackenzie, over Great Bear Lake...up to the Arctic Islands,” the screenwriter writes. The plane, with its sleek lines, its raw power, and its ability to conquer space and time, produces a sense of near-spiritual ecstasy. The aircraft is a powerful symbol of development and progress, a Nation coming into being.

The NFB continued to produce films that celebrated the transformation of the North into a modern space. Documentaries such as *Land for Pioneers* (1950) *Beyond the Frontier* (1952), *Our Northern Citizen* (1956), *Down North* (1958), *The Accessible North* (1967), *North* (1968), and *A Northern Challenge* (1973) extolled the abundance of resources buried beneath the Arctic and Subarctic landscape. The North was “bountiful,” “raw,” and “plentiful,” the narrator of *A Northern Challenge* rhapsodizes. In *Down North* (1958), director Hector Lemieux similarly describes the Mackenzie River delta as a “fertile sub-Arctic valley.”¹⁶¹ The short documentary presents the North as Canada’s final frontier – a utopian landscape where Eskimo and white men work together to harness the country’s resources. Through a combination of indigenous labour and “white man’s technology,” the land is exploited for the benefit of “Canada and the world.”¹⁶² The Mackenzie delta will supply the country with all the “raw materials it needs,” the narrator exclaims.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ NFBA, *Down North* file, “information sheet,” 1959.

¹⁶² *Down North*, produced by John Howe, NFB, 1958.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

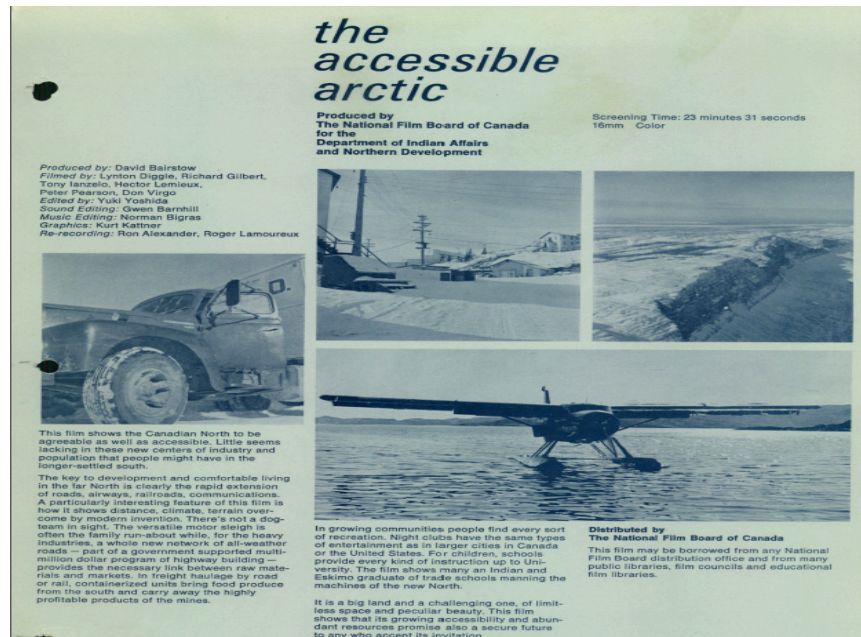


Fig. 2.14. Film poster for *The Accessible North* (1967)¹⁶⁴

Cinematography once again plays a key role in narratives about northern development and the modernization of the landscape. For example, *The Accessible North* (1967) uses aerial cinematography to show the North’s “limitless space” and its “abundant resources [which] promise... a secure future.”¹⁶⁵ Wide-angle shots of industrial mining and transportation infrastructure further illustrate the enormous scale of northern development. Bird’s eye perspectives also support the film’s claim that the region is undergoing rapid industrial transformation. “A ten-year, one hundred million dollar program of highway construction is under way in the Yukon,” the narrator boasts as the camera pans slowly over the modernized landscape. “Over 9000 tons of payload” can move in 15 hours from the “Sub-Arctic down through the flat farmlands of the Peace

¹⁶⁴ NFBA, *North* file, “information sheet,” not dated. The film was originally entitled *Go North, Go Northwest*

¹⁶⁵ NFBA, *The Accessible North* file, “commentary – the Accessible Arctic,” November 1967.

River District.”¹⁶⁶ The denuded landscape is not intended to shock or disgust the viewer, but instead meant to inspire awe and demonstrate the South’s total mastery over this once untamed (and therefore unproductive) wilderness.

North (1969), a fifteen-minute documentary co-produced by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and directed by Josef Reeve, similarly advertises “the vastness, the variety, and the welcome of the North” through evocative imagery.¹⁶⁷ The film was first conceived in 1967 when Vic Adams, Chief of the Liaison Division for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) sent a letter to the National Film Board requesting a short documentary that would encourage “tourists,” “sportsmen,” and “business entrepreneurs” to visit the “captivating” Northwest Territories.¹⁶⁸ The NFB assigned Bill Canning, a young producer, to work on the project immediately. Rather than “telling” the audiences about the landscape’s delights, Canning wanted to show audiences the amplitude awaiting in the North Country. In a proposal for the film sent to Jon Evans, Chief of the Industrial Division at DIAND, Canning explained he was going to use “the pulling power of a film” to capture the North “as it really is.”¹⁶⁹ For Canning, the landscape is the central character of the film. The natural lushness of this landscape, wrote the producer, “reaches down to our smog bound skies and whispers, ‘Come, come and see me, come and fish my waters, come and see my mountains, my open spaces - Come North for I am the last frontier on my continent.’”¹⁷⁰ In an earlier meeting with Vic Adams, Canning had suggested that the movie be shot on 70mm film

¹⁶⁶ *The Accessible North*, produced by David Bairstow, NFB, 1967.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ NFBA, North file, “T.V. Adams to Frank Spiller,” 6 March 1967.

¹⁶⁹ NFBA, North file, “William Canning to Jon Evans, 3 May 1967.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

stock but for financial reasons eventually settled for 35mm. Canning stated emphatically that 16mm “was out of the question for a film that would live or die on the scope and magic of its colour.”¹⁷¹ The officers at DIAND were initially reluctant to approve the original budget (\$63,095) for the documentary, but eventually acquiesced when Canning described how “wide panoramas” and “breathtaking aerial photography” would publicize “the vast difference in terrain” and show “that the land is virtually man free.”¹⁷²

North was released on June 19th 1969 at Hyland Theatre in Toronto in front of *First Time* (1969), a sex-comedy helmed by Hollywood journeyman James Neilson.¹⁷³ The moviegoers who went to see the comedy starring Jacqueline Bisset, were more impressed with Canning’s film. *North* was, as one critic wrote, “an eloquent introduction to our anticipated future activities in that part of Canada.” “The truly fine photography stirred strong sentiments about Canada’s North,” he remarked. “We never got tired of seeing it,” explained another filmgoer.¹⁷⁴ Through its imagery, which is mostly characterized by slow pans and magisterial perspectives, *North* documents the “many-sided” views of the landscape, including both its exotic and modern features. “The film captures the allure of it all,” a promotional poster for the film explained.¹⁷⁵

North’s depiction of the landscape as an abundant economic hinterland reflected a twentieth-century, federal way of seeing Northern spaces. The discovery of oil at Norman Wells in 1920, the launch of the first Eastern Arctic Patrol under the command of Captain Bernier in 1922, and the arrival of the bush plane signaled new economic possibility in

¹⁷¹ NFBA, North file, “T.V. Adams to Jon Evans, 14 April 1967.

¹⁷² NFBA, North file, “William Canning to Jon Evans, 3 May 1967.

¹⁷³ NFBA, North file, “Distribution Proposal for Film Entitled *North*,” October 2, 1972.

¹⁷⁴ NFBA, North file, “J. Soutendum to Lorne Mitchell, 13 September 1971.

¹⁷⁵ NFBA, North file, “Film Poster,” n.d.

the North. The famous explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson described the North as “alive,” “friendly,” and “fruitful” in *The Friendly Arctic*, an account of the Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-19). According to Stefansson it was “the mental attitude of the Southerner that makes the North hostile.”¹⁷⁶ This antiquated view prevented the landscape from becoming, to quote Stefansson, “a country to be used and lived in just like the rest of the world.”¹⁷⁷ The explorer’s knack for storytelling and his compelling argument that the Arctic was in fact not “lifeless” nor “silent,” impelled politicians like Prime Minister Robert L. Borden to examine the economic potential in the polar region more closely.¹⁷⁸

After the Second World War, the Canadian federal government spent considerable time and resources developing the North into a productive landscape.¹⁷⁹ Fearing a Soviet attack in the North, the Canadian government established a military presence in the Arctic.¹⁸⁰ It also initiated widespread economic programs in the region to help stimulate northern development and encourage private investment. As John Sandlos and Arn Keeling show, the Cold War demands for industrial minerals such as nickel, cobalt, zinc, lead, copper, asbestos, and uranium signaled a bright future for northern industrialization.¹⁸¹ The development of the North received a boost from Lester B. Pearson in 1946. The diplomat and future Prime Minister wrote in an article for *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review*, that “Go North” had officially replaced “Go

¹⁷⁶ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic: The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), 314.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 687.

¹⁷⁸ See Richard Finnie’s *In the Shadow of the Pole* (1928), *The Arctic Patrol* (1929), and *Patrol to the Northwest Passage* (1931) for early filmic examples that documented the opening of the North.

¹⁷⁹ Hamelin, 8.

¹⁸⁰ P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Matthew Farish, “The Cold War on Canadian Soil: Militarizing a Northern Environment,” *Environmental History* 12 (October 2007), 920-50.

¹⁸¹ John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, “Claiming the New North: Development Colonialism at the Pine Point Mine, Northwest Territories,” *Environment and History* 2 (January): 7-18.

West as the call to adventure.”¹⁸² Echoing Stefansson, Pearson argued, “a whole new region has been brought out of the blurred and shadowy realm of Northern folklore and shown to be an important and accessible part of our modern world.”¹⁸³ With the aid from the government in the form of more capital and political manpower, the “Snowy wastes of the Canadian North” would yield “many more mineral secrets.”¹⁸⁴ A year later, in 1947, the Department of Mines and Resources produced a report entitled *Canada’s New Northwest*. The report argued that the “region was an economic unit of potential importance to the national economy.”

Governmental interest in the North reached its peak in 1958 when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and the Conservatives turned this “Northern Vision” into a successful election platform. In his election campaign, Diefenbaker proselytized that the future of Canada lay in the Northland, where rich mineral deposits and untapped raw materials would usher in a new era of growth and prosperity.¹⁸⁵ After he was elected, Diefenbaker created the ‘Roads to Resources’ programs, which strengthened the Nation and cultivated new avenues of commerce in the North. The development of the North did not end with John Diefenbaker, of course. Under the leadership of Prime Ministers Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Canadian State continued to reshape the North in its image.

Despite the concerns of a growing number of environmentalists and indigenous

¹⁸² Lester B. Pearson, “Canada Looks ‘Down North’” *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review* 24 no. 4 (July 1946), 639.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 642.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 646.

¹⁸⁵ John Diefenbaker, “A New Vision” (speech, Opening Campaign Speech, Winnipeg, Manitoba, February 12, 1958).

rights activists about the exploitation of the landscape, NFB documentaries continued to support the industrialization of the North through the 1970s. *A Northern Challenge* (1973), for example, describes the Arctic barrens, which were “until recently, a forgotten wasteland,” as an untapped landscape of “oil, mineral and gas resources.”¹⁸⁶ “As our need for these resources grows, they become increasingly important to Canada’s future,” the narrator explains in a formal, baritone voice.¹⁸⁷ The film celebrates the ways in which industrialization and new transportation infrastructures “demolished the effects of space and time.”¹⁸⁸ Highways, railroads, and most importantly, aircraft technology, connected the once-distant North to the rest Canada. The documentary then examines the Federal Government’s decision to construct ten airfields in the remote Arctic. The Department of National Defense agreed to participate in the 5 million dollar project and built six airbases with military personnel. According to the film, the airfields will “integrate a network of existing airstrips” and help “establish further links of Northern community and new resource areas,” the documentary reports.¹⁸⁹ In addition to providing important connections to the rest of Canada, the airstrips facilitated the conveyance of fundamental wares to the Inuit who had been relocated. The Inuit at Whale Cove, for instance, shudder at the mention of returning to “the hardship and insecurities of following caribou.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ *A Northern Challenge*, produced by Bill Roozeboom, NFB 1973.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.



Fig 2.15. Still from *A Northern Challenge* (1973) by Bill Roozeboom

Conclusion

Non-fiction filmmaking is particularly effective way of circumnavigating the physical world. Audiences are able see the world as the camera sees it. The camera pans, zooms, and tracks its way through a range of geographies, recording visual information about places near and far. But the camera is not as neutral or objective as it appears to be in documentary cinema. There is always someone behind the equipment maneuvering its line of sight and therefore steering ours. Just as a cartographer foregrounds certain topographical features on a map and diminishes others, a filmmaker decides what aspects of the landscape to show and what to conceal. Distinguishing between what is *found* and what is *constructed* in non-fiction cinema is difficult. “Documentaries,” film scholar William Guynn explains, “tend to produce an image whose power of analogy is prodigious and capable of mimicking the chronology of real events by representing the

movement of persons and objects through time.”¹⁹¹ In order to discern how individual filmmakers or larger institutions like the NFB constructed Canadian landscapes, we must pay attention to the filmmaking process as well as the larger context in which the images were produced.

In the case of the North, one of Canada’s most enduring and potent symbols of national identity, the NFB envisioned a certain kind of landscape. Filmmakers such as Radford Crawley, Doug Wilkinson, Quentin Brown, and Dalton Muir used a combination of filmmaking techniques and narrative tropes to construct the North as a place of national significance – cultural, economic, political, scientific etc. Their constructions were of course reflective of Southern, and more specifically, federal ways of seeing landscape. Normative representations about the region’s primitiveness or its economic potentiality said more about the desires and expectations of the South than they did about the ecological and social realities in Resolute or Inuvik. In the view of the NFB, and by affiliation, the federal government, the North was the last economic frontier of the country, a key to the future of Canada.

The NFB’s representations of the landscape justified, legitimized, and clarified the State’s ambitions in the North. Through depictions of the exotic and the modern, NFB filmmakers presented a southern vision of the landscape, and stitched together a celebratory history of nation-building, in which the development of the North was presented as both necessary and inevitable. Indeed, the film camera itself was an important technology of state power in the North. With its ability to capture images and

¹⁹¹ William Guynn, *A Cinema of Nonfiction* (Cranbury: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 14.

sounds, the camera helped the government accumulate valuable information about Northern geology and biology. The filmmaking process also helped the government extend its authority in the North. In this sense, filmmaking in the North was analogous to Arctic expeditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like those intrepid explorers who built cairns and planted flags as acts of occupation, NFB documentarians claimed geographic, intellectual and cultural space for the federal government in the North.¹⁹² As NFB film crews marched through the North in search of images, they marked the region as “explored” and under the jurisdiction of the state.

The preoccupation of the NFB with the North emerged in part out of its own institutional mandate to integrate disparate geographies and populations into mainstream Canada.¹⁹³ The NFB’s desire to assimilate the North into the rest of Canadian society was first discussed in its 1962 annual report, in which NFB executives urged its members to “improve and expand its film distribution” in the North.¹⁹⁴ According to Board members, it was paramount that the NFB worked to “effectively bring the Canadian story to the peoples of the north,” and to supply the “stories of the north to the rest of Canada and its world neighbors.”¹⁹⁵ The Film Board saw itself as a government-authorized cultural moderator, linking distant geographies to the rest of the country through a shared set of stories and cinematic images. At the official opening of the NFB head office in Montreal,

¹⁹² For a good resource on the relationship between nationalism and cinema see: *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

¹⁹³ In some respects the NFB responded to Harold Innis’ concern over problems in communications in the North. For Innis, communication was necessary to conquer space and time. Unreliable radio in North threatened “Canadian National Life.” NFB cinema helped unify the North, and provided a reliable network of shared Canadian stories, and governance in the North. See: Harold Innis, *Changing Concepts of Time* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1952), 18-19.

¹⁹⁴ NFBA, “1962 NFB Activities in the North,” 11 February 1963.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Vincent Massey remarked that the agency “play[ed] a vital part in making Canadians conscious of their country...” Canada was “vast and complex” but through “the eyes of [NFB] cameras” Canadians can “know every nook and cranny.” Massey lauded the “imagination” and “skill” of NFB filmmakers who brought Canada’s “people more closely together” and gave “an awareness of [the country] and [its] identity.”¹⁹⁶ He was undoubtedly talking about the filmmakers who braved the northern frontier to capture its alien configurations. In order to draw the North into the mainstream of Canada – both symbolically and economically – the NFB flouted the paradoxes and the diversity of the landscape. Consequently, the NFB participated in what geographer Louis Hamelin calls “Homogenous Canadianization,” a discursive process in which the North is made into a region similar to all the other parts of Canada.¹⁹⁷ An exotic North, or a North that was abundant with natural resources was much easier to comprehend as a nationally significant space than a North that was fragmented, complex, and contradictory.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Vincent Massey Archives (VMA), B1987-0082/34I, file 4, Vincent Massey, “His Excellency’s Remarks at the National Film Board,” 27 January, 1956.

¹⁹⁷ Hamelin, 92.

¹⁹⁸ While this chapter does not examine the voices of Northern people who produced their own images and stories about the North, there are a few examples that are worth mentioning. NFB films such as *Between Two Worlds* (1990), *Qallunaat! Why White People are Funny* (2006), *If the Weather Permits* (2003), *Inuvunga: I am Inuk, I am Alive* (2004), and the Nunavut Animation Lab series responded to the dominant discourse that constructed the North as a homogenous space, outside of history. Films in the 1990s and 2000s also included ecological critiques of the South’s rapacious appetite in the North and the issues of climate change. *People of the Ice* (2003), *Climate on the Edge* (2003), *Never Lose Sight* (2009) are but a few examples. This is all to say that the North is continually being reformulated and remapped, and that NFB cinema is part of this ongoing construction of the North.

Chapter 3

Cry of the Wild: Environmental Discourses in NFB Cinema

One of the major contentions I make in the first two chapters of this dissertation is that National Film Board documentaries generally reflected a governmental way of seeing nature and landscape. In many cases this meant that the environment was presented as an object to be exploited and controlled by state authority. There were a number of reasons for why the NFB promulgated these visions of the land. The first was practical. Although Film Board members were quick to recite the agency's lofty ambition of declaring "the excellence of Canada to Canadians and to the rest of the world" when asked about their motivations, the reality is that their production decisions were usually dictated by pragmatic concerns.¹ As a fledgling institution trying to find its wings, the NFB relied on the federal government for financial support and political guidance.² Sponsored-filmmaking was one of the ways in that kept the NFB financially viable. As a result, a large percentage of the documentaries produced in the postwar period were "functional works of information commissioned by government departments and used in educational contexts."³ The *quid pro quo* relationship between the NFB and the government provided the Board with financial stability, but it also shackled documentarians to state visions of

¹ Canada. "An Act to Create a National Film Board," *Statutes of Canada*, 1939, 101-5. This mandate was slightly modified in 1950, but retained in its core objective to present Canada to the world. "An Act Respecting the National Film Board," *Statutes of Canada*, 1950, 1, 567-574.

² Zoe Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

³ Jim Leach, "Dark Satanic Mills: Denys Arcand's *On est au coton*," in *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries*, edited by Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 87.

nature. Sponsored films frequently endorsed the conservation and natural resource policies of the government well into the 1980s. *Foresters*, (1968), a documentary made for Department of Fisheries and Forestry, and *Tomorrow is Too Late* (1974), which was produced for Environment Canada's Fisheries and Marine Service, are prime examples of this patronage system. *Foresters* praises the well-disciplined scientists who resuscitate Canadian forests that have been ruined by wasteful industrial practices. *Tomorrow is Too Late* likewise celebrates the efforts of Environment Canada to restore depleted fish stocks, boost economic productivity, and reestablish ecological equilibrium in Canadian waterways.⁴

Endorsing the “views” of the hand that feeds you was politically expedient and financially prudent for the National Film Board. But the NFB did not just adhere to the state's vision of the environment because it was afraid of alienating the body on which it depended for funding. The NFB was also impelled by a cultural mandate that sought to unify the country through cinema. In its ongoing quest to create a picture of “the nation,” the NFB affirmed and reinforced popular beliefs about the country's relationship with its geography, including notions about the abundance and beauty of nature. NFB films therefore perpetuated the longstanding myth that Canada originated from, and was defined by its engagement with the natural world.

The first two decades of the NFB can therefore be understood as a period in which documentarians “filmed like a state.” The official picture of nature and nation visible in NFB cinema would be in the ensuing decades, however. Although the state was still

⁴ *Foresters*, produced by Werner Aellen, NFB, 1968; *Tomorrow is Too Late*, produced by David Bairstow, NFB, 1974.

actively involved in the production process, young filmmakers were inspired to make documentaries that exceeded, and in some cases, opposed the viewpoints of the government. This chapter focuses on the emerging tensions within NFB representations about nature. Influenced by the environmental movement and emboldened by shifts in film theory, documentarians in the 1960s began examining the complex relationship people had with the natural environment. Some filmmakers, such as Larry Gosnell, critiqued the ills of unregulated technology and urban growth, while others like Bill Mason questioned the ability of the government to resolve these modern issues. Still other filmmakers went against the grain of utilitarianism, extolling the benefits of wildness and environmental stewardship. Unlike their predecessors, who advertised nature's economic potential, this small group of auteurs proclaimed that nature was valuable for its beauty and ecological diversity.

Alternative discourses about nature did not appear overnight, however. Nor did they completely replace traditional state ways of seeing. The transition from conservation discourses to “environmentalist” narratives was *complex* and *contested*. The government's involvement in NFB affairs continued to influence the types of narratives and images the agency produced.⁵ During this period, the Department of Fisheries, for instance, produced *Babine River Story* (1961), a documentary about how state officers were “combatting the problem posed by rock slides in the Babine River with respect to the salmon run.” The Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources co-produced *Waterfowl* (1964), a film about “a resource in danger.” The film's purpose is to inform

⁵. See NFBA, “Wetlands conservation file,” info sheet, n.d.

the public of about the destruction of wildlife due to the drainage of wetlands. Saving waterfowl is a practical consideration in which wildlife is framed as an economic resource that needs to be conserved so wildlife enthusiasts and hunters can enjoy nature's bounty. Even films that can be described as "environmental" were ambivalent about the role of the state in protecting nature. The documentaries of Larry Gosnell and David Bairstow perfectly illustrate the contested status of the NFB's environmental cinema.⁶ On the one hand, both documentaries inaugurated a new way of thinking about nature in the twentieth century. Gosnell's *Poison, Pests, and People* (1960) and Bairstow's *River With a Problem* (1961) argued that humans unintentionally disturbed local environments when they tried to control it. However, Gosnell and Bairstow disagreed on how the public should respond to this environmental crisis. In *Poison, Pests, and People*, Gosnell warned that the reliance by the agricultural industry on toxic pesticides unwittingly produced unhealthy human bodies and ecosystems.⁷ The only way to protect organisms from harm, argued Gosnell, was to stop using pesticides altogether. Bairstow, though, had a different solution, one that was more in line with the state's technocratic way of thinking about environmental issues. In *River With a Problem* Bairstow argued that state experts and scientists could troubleshoot the ecological problems caused by modern society. The government could reinstate "the balance of nature" with better technology and modern waste management practices.⁸ In this sense, Bairstow's environmental thesis that nature

⁶ *Poison, Pests, and People*, produced by Don Mulholland, NFB 1960; *River with a Problem*, produced by David Bairstow, NFB 1961.

⁷ *Poison, Pests, and People*, 1960

⁸ *River with a Problem*, 1961.

and people had a complex relationship was neutered by its endorsement of simple, high modern solutions to the problem of water effluence.

The complex and uneven development of environmental discourses in NFB cinema was also apparent in films about wilderness. In addition to concerns about the health of local environments, environmentalists in the mid-twentieth century also advocated for the protection of nature in its original state. According to wilderness enthusiasts, industrial development and economic growth threatened the last remaining spaces of wild in Canada. They further argued that the destruction of wilderness enfeebled humankind's already weak relationship with the natural world. As Peter Matthiessen eloquently concluded in his epilogue of *Wildlife in America*, "The relationship between fish and mussel is but one mystery in the shimmering web of life that is starting to unravel around us. If we fail to recognize them, marvel at them, and conserve for our descendants the opportunity to be part of the great wonder and diversity of life, we are fatally diminished as a species."⁹ NFB filmmakers used cinema to remind the public of this sobering reality. Humans had become disconnected from nature. According to documentarians Ernest Reid, Christopher Chapman, and Bill Mason it was vital that people reestablish a physical and emotional connection with wilderness.

Despite their radical critique of industrial society, wilderness narratives in NFB films oscillated between state conservationist perspectives and a broad-based, environmentalist views. *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963), for instance, occupied a fuzzy middle ground where contemporary preservationist discourses about the value of

⁹ Peter Matthiessen, *Wildlife in America* (New York: Viking, 1959), 281.

wilderness overlapped with traditional state attitudes about ecological management. The documentary presented an “environmental” viewpoint that nature was intrinsically valuable but it also framed wilderness preservation as a *technical* obstacle to be solved by state expertise and regulatory sophistication. In the film Ernest Reid and Christopher Chapman argued that institutions like Parks Branch were indispensable in safeguarding Canada’s wild spaces.¹⁰ Bill Mason, one of Canada’s most popular environmental advocates, had a more critical view of the state’s ability to manage wilderness. In *Death of a Legend* (1971) and *Cry of the Wild* (1972), the filmmaker castigated the Canadian Wildlife Service’s (CWS) retrograde conservation policy towards wolves, which he argued was based on the flawed view that the animals were “wanton killers.”¹¹ Exterminating wolves in the name of conservation was antiquated and morally dubious. Mason showed Canadian audiences the beauty and complexity of lupine behavior. In doing so, he made a case for a noninterventionist approach to wildlife preservation, a view that diverged sharply from Reid and Chapman. It also contested the conservationist agenda of the documentary’s sponsor, the Canadian Wildlife Service. According to Mason, if wildlife was to flourish, humans needed to respect Nature’s schemes. Only then could they rekindle a healthy relationship with nature, a relationship characterized by wildness and freedom.

This chapter seeks to examine the fragmented representations of nature in NFB documentaries in the 1960s and 1970s. It suggests that the meaning and utility of nature was complicated by an emerging group of NFB filmmakers who disagreed with the

¹⁰ *The Enduring Wilderness*, produced by Ernest Reid, NFB, 1964.

¹¹ *Death of a Legend*, produced by Bill Mason, NFB, 1971.

state's technocratic vision of the environment. Institutional mandates allowed filmmakers to explore alternative definitions and ways of seeing the natural world. However, I also demonstrate that this change was not as neat or as tidy as many assume. A thick reading of these films, and an understanding of their production history shows that governmental sponsorship still inflected this new genre of filmmaking. Thus, the NFB can be read as a contested site, in which ideas, attitudes, and representations of nature were negotiated.

NFB and the 1960s

To understand the transition from the high modern, state sponsored discourses of nature popular in the 1940s and 1950s to the more ecologically sensitive environmental narratives of the 1960s and 1970s in NFB cinema, it is important that we understand the larger historical context. Two major factors influenced NFB filmmakers' progressive representations of nature in this period. The first dynamic that shaped NFB discourses about nature was a shift in the National Film Board's approach towards documentary cinema.¹² The period between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s was characterized by an evolution in filmic theory. During the 1940s documentaries were considered to be an objective window into reality. Cinematic images were pieces of evidence that, when

¹² Some NFB scholars, such as Gary Evans have described the 1950s as a "golden age of filmmaking." The NFB released a number of innovative and well-regarded documentaries in the decade such as *Neighbours* (1952), *Corral* (1953), *Paul Tomkowitz* (1954), and *Les Raquetteurs* (1958). The 1960s continued to push the envelope in terms of production quality. Both the English Production and French Production branches produced a number of films in the 1960s that were celebrated around the world for their technical and aesthetic innovations. For example, Jean Rouch, a French filmmaker and one of the founders of ciné-verité in France, rhapsodized about Pierre Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* (1964) in the influential publication, *Cahier du Cinéma*. Rouch's remarked that Perrault's documentary was a new and bold kind of filmmaking. Jean Rouch, *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 144 (June, 1963), 1-22. For more on the NFB's golden years in the 1950 see: *In the National Interest and Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries*, edited by Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

stitched together, gave a clear and unbiased picture of the external world. Under the direction of John Grierson, the father of this classic documentary style, the NFB mandated that its employees make films that maintained this illusion of truth. At the beginning of the 1950s, however, Grierson's vision of documentary cinema began to erode. The commissioner resigned in 1945 and many of his ideas were incompatible with contemporary theories about documentary filmmaking or the political reality of postwar Canada. Increasingly, filmmakers within the NFB embraced the idea that cinema was inherently subjective, and that non-narrative cinema merely provided a glimpse of this fragmented and sometimes contradictory world.

“Unit B” filmmakers were some of the first documentarians to question the relationship between image and reality. Unit B was created in 1948 under the premise that NFB filmmakers should make movies as artists and not as government sycophants. The aim of the unit was to produce and distribute high quality and aesthetically engaging films that were bipartisan. Under executive producer Tom Daly, Unit B became known for its groundbreaking cinema, which included films by Norman McLaren, Colin Low, Wolf Koenig, Don Owen, Roman Kroitor, and Arthur Lipsett. Influenced by the work of French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, Unit B filmmakers began using lightweight equipment and synchronous sound to capture their subject.¹³ In the process, they developed a technique they called “candid eye.” Unlike the expository documentaries of the 1940s, candid eye films did not have a preexisting argument or a script. Rather, the story unfolded naturally as the filmmaker followed their subject. Unit B filmmakers also

¹³ Kirwan Cox, “Canada,” *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film* ed. Ian Aitken (Routledge: New York, 2006), 168.

considered Grierson's "voice of God" narration style as passé. Rather than using the booming voice of Lorne Green to impose an external order on the narrative of the film, Unit B directors had their subjects narrate what was happening onscreen. Sometimes there was no commentary at all.¹⁴

The importance of this kind of filmmaking, as Jim Leach and Jeanette Sloniowski observe, "lies less in the specific techniques" than in their challenging of "some of the basic assumptions of documentary film theory and practice."¹⁵ Candid eye filmmaking and cinema vérité technics raised questions about authorship and subjectivity, issues that the filmic dogma of Grierson could not, or would not answer. Overtime, documentarians shifted away from Grierson's vision of a national cinema in which governmental views were supreme. Unmoored from the restraints of old technologies and antiquated ideas about the purpose of non-fiction filmmaking, NFB employees began producing works that interrogated authority. The Board acknowledged the importance of making films that challenged the status quo. In an *Annual Report* for 1965-66, the National Film Board conceded that Canadians had come to expect a more complex type of film. "Audiences were becoming increasingly sophisticated, knowledgeable and organized," interested in the "intensive study of specific subjects, rather than in general information," the report noted.¹⁶ Canadian viewers wanted films that "challenged and stimulated," rather than

¹⁴ Film scholar Peter Harcourt argues that Unit B films are characterized by a "quality of suspended judgment, of something left open at the end, of something left undecided." Peter Harcourt, "Images and Information: The Dialogic Structure of *Bûcherons de la Manouane* by Arthur Lamothe" in *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries*, edited by Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). 62.

¹⁵ Leach & Sloniowski, *Candid Eyes*, 7.

¹⁶ NFBA, *Annual Report*, 1965-1966, 7.

movies that “didactically informed.”¹⁷ These new currents in film theory influenced the ways in which nature was represented. While sponsored works were still prolific in the 1960s, a number of filmmakers such as Larry Gosnell, David Bairstow, and Graham Parker used techniques borrowed from journalism to investigate environmental issues. Interviews about the effects of pollution could be filmed more or less on the fly, while cinematographers equipped with lightweight gear could photograph images on a moment’s notice. Environmental cinema still had a long way to go, but these filmmakers helped develop a more sophisticated way of representing nature, science, and technology.

The second historical factor that influenced NFB representations of nature in the 1960s was the emergence of environmentalism as a popular movement. The origins of environmentalism in North America are complex and variegated. In part, it developed out of two 19th century intellectual trends: conservationism and the wilderness preservation movement. Conservationists appealed to the utility of nature. To ensure that the land continued to provide in perpetuity, conservationists argued that exploitation practices should be guided by the principles of “wise use.” Preservationists had different, more quixotic goals. They advocated for the protection of large tracts of wilderness areas. The continent’s last vestiges of wild spaces were vital to the spiritual and physical health of North Americans and needed to be preserved from any kind of use.

Although conservationism and the wildlife preservation movement influenced environmentalism, environmentalism diverged from the two ideologies in specific ways. Environmentalism, the historian Samuel Hays argues, sought to improve the quality of

¹⁷ Ibid.

air, water, and land through individual activism, while conservationists praised the “efforts of managerial and technical leaders to use physical resources more efficiently.”¹⁸

Scholar John McCormick further elaborates in *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* that “if conservation [was] a utilitarian movement centered on the rational management of natural resources.” By contrast, environmentalism concentrated on “humanity and its surroundings...”¹⁹ The latter movement was also characterized by a sense of crisis “that was greater and broader than it had been in the earlier conservation or wilderness preservation movements.”²⁰ Environmentalism was particularly concerned with the effects of radioactive fallout and chemical poisoning.²¹ At the end of the 1950s, young, educated citizens concerned about toxic substances and other Cold War-era dangers demanded greater transparency from private corporations and government bodies.²² Humans needed to be warned about dangerous activities, especially

¹⁸ Samuel P. Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History: Essays* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1998), 380. Historically, it was the government who regulated how people and institutions interacted with nature. Canada’s natural resource policies were informed by the notion that nature was finite. Politicians within Dominion Parks Branch and the Department of Northern Affairs were the first to argue that conservation required rational decision-making based on scientific principles and technical training. Over the next five decades, conservation morphed from an emphasis on forestry and wildlife management strategies, to soil protection and agricultural restoration. After the Second World War, the federal government prioritized the safeguarding of Canada’s mineral and timber resources, which were seen as essential commodities for postwar reconstruction and the country’s long-term economic growth. The State was not just interested in conserving natural resources, however; it was also concerned with managing pollution and mitigating the impacts of industrial waste especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁹ John McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 47-48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ In his book, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*, Ronald Inglehart notes that western ideals in the postwar period were transitioning from an emphasis on “material well-being and physical security” to a concern for the “the quality of life.” Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3.

²² See: Adam Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance.’ The Environmental Movement and the 1960s,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (September, 2003), 525-554. Rome argues that the 1960s are an important period for environmentalism because of three important developments: the revitalization of liberalism, the growing discontent of middle-class women, and the counterculture. Although Earth Day (1970) is

those that occurred where people lived. The activists also insisted on having a role in decision-making processes alongside scientists and policy makers.²³ It was not enough to warn the public; industry needed to be restricted from dumping waste or emitting toxic fumes into the air through regulation and parameters outlined by concerned citizens.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was one of the first books to warn the public about the dangers of environmental carelessness.²⁴ Carson's book, writes Mark Dowie, engendered "a brand new constituency of middle-class activists."²⁵ By the 1960s it became near impossible for citizens to ignore the effects of industrial growth on the natural environment or on human health. The emergence of ecology as a scientific discipline in this period confirmed the notion that postwar economic growth had an

considered by many to be the inauguration of modern day environmentalism, Rome argues that Earth Day was not a spontaneous moment; it was a culmination of a decade of growing awareness.

²³ Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3. See also: Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Another important text on the origins of the environmental movement is Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993); Gottlieb identifies neo-malthusianism and the roots of pollution concerns in urban centres (manifested in rise of workplace health experts, sanitary experts) as contributing to environmentalism. He rejects the notion that the environmental movement was rooted in the struggle to preserve nature. According to Gottlieb, this view overlooks environmentalism's urban and industrial ancestry: the social-reform movements of the 19th century that sought to improve the daily lives of working people.

²⁴ Studies on nuclear fallout and Rachel Carson's claims about the ubiquity of pesticides in the environment triggered a widespread fear of invisible pollutants that can travel hundreds of miles to endanger human life. Carson's book *Silent Spring* was particularly important in raising awareness about the relationship between pollution and human health. In *Silent Spring* the former biologist with the United States Bureau of Fisheries, contended that synthetic pesticides like DDT did not break down naturally and consequently accumulated in the environment and in the gut of birds, fish, small mammals, and humans. The book alarmed North Americans with its portent of imminent biological collapse and widespread toxic poisoning. (Carson claimed that one-quarter of Americans would develop cancer from agricultural pesticides). Still, the Chemical industry balked at Carson's assertions, declaring that if one were to accept her premise, society would "return to the Dark ages," where "insects and diseases and vermin inherited the earth." Robert White-Stevens, Interview, *CBS Reports* (April 3rd, 1963). The vitriol aimed at Carson backfired, however, and the biologist became a martyr in the crusade against the chemical industry hegemony.

²⁵ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 23.

identifiable impact on ecosystems and human bodies.²⁶ Over time, the public became more conscious of humankind's interconnectedness with the natural world.

In Canada, *Silent Spring* was a major catalyst for the environmental movement but it was not the only one. For instance, historian Mark McLaughlin argues that “modern environmentalism” in New Brunswick was sparked by protests against the province's controversial spruce budworm spraying program in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷ Sportsmen and scientists decried New Brunswick's war against the budworm. They claimed that the DDT was killing salmon and harming other game species.²⁸ The protestations of the public were comparatively radical in that they challenged the government's technocratic belief that pesticides were essential in saving the province's forests from destruction.²⁹ In her essay, “Let us heed the voice of youth: Laundry Detergents, Phosphates and the Emergence of the Environmental Movement in Ontario,” Jennifer Read argues that environmental attitudes in Ontario began to shift in the mid-1960s when governmental institutions, which “rejected non-expert input,” failed to curb the dumping of phosphate-based detergents into local water supplies.³⁰ Grassroots organizations like Pollution Probe responded to this public health problem by demanding change at the provincial and federal level. The Toronto-based Pollution Probe used the press and television to hold the

²⁶ Rachel Carson's ideas that everything was connected were provocative but not necessarily groundbreaking. The impact humans had on ecosystems was explored in a pair of 1948 bestsellers, William Vogt's *Road to Survival* and Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet*

²⁷ Mark McLaughlin, “Green Shoots: Aerial Insecticide Spraying and the Growth of Environmental Consciousness in New Brunswick”, *Acadiensis*, 40 no. 1 (2011), 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 13.

³⁰ Jennifer Read, “Let us heed the voice of youth!: Laundry Detergents, Phosphates and the Emergence of the Environmental Movement in Ontario,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7 (1996): 230. There are other essays that have examined the roots of environmentalism in Canada. For example, see: Arn Keeling, “Urban Waste Sinks as a Natural Resource: The Case of the Fraser River,” *Urban History Review* 34:1 (Fall 2005). 58-70.

polluters accountable and to mobilize public support for the banning of phosphate-based detergents. Historian Ryan O'Connor likewise argues that Pollution Probe was responsible for inspiring the environmental movement in Ontario.³¹ Motivated by Larry Gosnell's CBC documentary *The Air of Death* (1967), students from the University of Toronto formed Pollution Probe.³² The organization attempted to establish relationships with community members and environmental stakeholders to generate support for their environmental cause. Pollution Probe quickly grew and by the end of the 1960s, the group had successfully campaigned against the institutions responsible for polluting the Great Lakes and other environmentally destructive projects.³³

It is within this larger context of the environmental movement that NFB filmmakers began investigating the relationship between humans and nature. Inspired by new ideas in film theory and conscious of an emerging environmental consciousness, filmmakers began to look more closely and personally at the people's relationship with the natural world. While a number of filmmakers tapped into this nascent environmental ethic, NFB documentarians were also some of the first to sound the alarm on the unknown (and unseen) threats of pollution, and in the process helped change Canadian attitudes about the environment. Significantly, NFB films about biodiversity, ecological ruin, and pollution predated protests of non-soluble detergents in Ontario's waterways or even Carson's *Silent Spring*. This indicates that there was an important link between NFB filmmaking and the birth of environmentalism in Canada.

³¹ Ryan O'Connor, *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

³² Ibid. 12.

³³ Ibid. 68.

Poison, Pests, and People

One of the first NFB documentaries to investigate the harm caused by industrial society was Larry Gosnell's *Poison, Pests, and People* (1960). In the film, Gosnell argues that the use of pesticides by the agricultural industry distressed local ecosystems and caused illness. The film stands as one of the NFB's most intriguing documentaries about the environment. *Poison, Pests, and People* diverged from the Board's high modern representations of farming and agriculture and promoted an ecologically sensitive way of thinking about local environments. In the 1940s and 1950s, the NFB encouraged farmers to adopt state-sponsored technologies and scientific knowledge to improve the landscape. (Gosnell himself celebrated the government's efforts to transform the agricultural landscape into a more productive and homogenous space in documentaries such as *The World At Your Feet* and *Chemical Conquest*.) In contrast, *Poison, Pests, and People*, openly condemns agriculturists' preoccupation with improving nature. Supposed "cure-alls" like pesticides create unanticipated ecological problems within local ecosystems, of which human beings were a part.

Gosnell's contention that high modern solutions to agriculture were problematic developed over time. As a graduate of the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph University, Gosnell's instructors imparted to the young filmmaker the virtues of science and technology as a way to improve nature. After he graduated in 1949, Gosnell began making short documentaries about the exploits of agricultural scientists who helped the Canadian farmer protect his crops from ravenous pests through the development of pesticides. When he was hired by the NFB in 1951, Gosnell continued to laud the

scientists' proficiency in troubleshooting problems related to crop failure. *The World at Your Feet* (1953) and *Chemical Conquest* (1956) both revered agricultural science as a way to solve productivity issues and make farms more profitable. During the production of *Chemical Conquest*, however, Gosnell encountered startling research about the country's dependency on pesticides, which caused his faith in science to waver. Since *Chemical Conquest* was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Gosnell did not have the opportunity to explore these issues in the film.

As Gosnell began working on his next film, he began to develop a more sophisticated and critical understanding of pesticides and their hazardous effects on the environment. The first thing he learned was that insects were becoming resistant to some of the most potent chemicals on the market. Secondly, he discovered that both the government and the chemical industry were encouraging farmers to use deadlier poisons to exterminate these "super pests."³⁴ "It has become an axiom of modern pest control that the more you use of a given chemical, the more you will eventually have to use," Gosnell observed.³⁵ The use of parathion, one of the most lethal pesticides in Canadian history, was a perfect example of the length to which agriculturists were willing to go to destroy pests.³⁶ The pesticide was primarily used to kill red mites, which feasted on apples. Initially, the toxin was effective in killing mites. Over time, however, the bugs developed a resistance to the substance. The tenacious adaptability of the insects inspired the chemical industry to introduce "400 or so new organic pesticides...that were just as

¹⁹ Chemical Conquest file, "Draft Outline Chemical film," n.d. 1.

³⁵ Ibid. 3.

³⁶ NFBA, Poison, Pests and People file, "Chemicals in Agriculture notes," April 17, 1958. 1.

lethal, if not more so, to the natural enemies of a given pest as to the pest itself.”³⁷ This chemical arms race was not sustainable, Gosnell opined. In their effort to develop deadlier pesticides, the agricultural industry had inadvertently compromised local ecosystems. The chemical compounds destroyed the pernicious pests, but they also killed other organisms in the process. Gosnell concluded that once people use pesticides, “nature ceases to be on their side.”³⁸

The implications of the agricultural industry’s war on insects were troubling to the young filmmaker. If birds and mammals were dying from insecticide poisoning, what did this mean for humans? A report from a Food and Drug Directorate laboratory in Ottawa told a sobering story. The laboratory found that every person that they tested had traces of DDT in their body tissues.³⁹ According to Gosnell, the authorities were “very concerned about this situation.”⁴⁰ They suspected that pesticides were to blame for a host of human illnesses including cancer. Despite their apprehensions however, the Food and Drug lab could not do anything about the problem: they did not have funds to conduct further research.⁴¹ “Why do we use these chemicals so extensively if they are known to be dangerous to human life,” Gosnell wondered after he read the report from the Food and Drug lab.⁴² He hypothesized that society was unable to stop using them because it “depends on them so exclusively that if we were to suddenly stop...there would be no

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.* 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.* 3

⁴² *ibid.* 2.

crops.”⁴³ Pesticides were too engrained in Canadian farming practices. Deadly as they were, pesticides were quite effective in protecting crops from pests. A crop sprayed with toxic chemicals was more likely to yield a high return. To stop using them was not an option for the farmer who was struggling to make ends meet. A pamphlet published by the technical staff at Cyanamid of Canada Ltd. summarized the technological determinism that Gosnell was up against: “Insects and weeds are man’s biggest competition for food. Millions of dollars’ worth of food production are lost annually by infestations.” The pamphlet continued to boast that their modern chemicals were a panacea helping farmers grow “healthier livestock and more profitable crops.”⁴⁴ Moreover, there was no smoking gun that proved pesticides actually harmed humans.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cyanamid of Canada LTD, *Your Farm and How to Keep it Productive* (Montreal: 1959).



Fig. 3.1. An advertisement for Shell Chemical Corp. collected in Gosnell's research notes

Disturbed by the profligate use of dangerous chemicals in Canadian society, and angered by the chemical industry's refusal to acknowledge the deleterious effects of pesticides, Gosnell decided to make a film that warned the public of the dangers of pesticides. Because of the documentary's provocative claims, the NFB monitored the production of the film very closely.⁴⁵ Don Mulholland, one of the producers on *Poison, Pests, and People*, cautioned Gosnell that his "editorial viewpoint" was "highly partial."⁴⁶ He explained that the thesis that "we are all being murdered in our beds" was sure to rankle a few industry heads and potentially sour its relationship with key government

⁴⁵ NFBA, Poison, Pests and People file, memo, Julian Biggs to Don Mullholland, August 10, 1959.

⁴⁶ NFBA, Poison, Pests and People file, Don Mulholland to Larry Gosnell, July 3, 1959.

sponsors such as the Department of Agriculture. “If we’re going to take that point of view, we have to be able to prove we’re right – and we’ll have to prove it in court,” Mulholland advised.⁴⁷ Gosnell agreed that his claims were contentious. That was the point. “This is a very controversial subject,” he wrote in a letter to Mulholland.⁴⁸ “We will no doubt be vilified by chemical companies and pest control experts. Just the same, I think we should do it.”⁴⁹

Gosnell took Mulholland’s counsel seriously and sent letters to as many experts as he could in order to determine exactly how these poisons found their way into markets and grocery stores. Gosnell wrote in his notes of one particularly revealing story in which a “dangerous situation resulted from a lack of information.”⁵⁰ When the filmmaker visited several fruit and vegetable growers who supplied the big Campbell and Heinz plants in the Leamington district of Southern Ontario, he was told by a farmer that they sprayed their crop with DDT very close to harvest and well after the legal time limit of 25 days. When he asked a manager at Heinz about this, the manager assured Gosnell that this was not a problem because the chemicals “only concentrated in the skin of the crop.”⁵¹ The plant manager at Heinz also promised Gosnell that the canning factories tested their produce and would not can any food that had any residue. A representative from the canning facility in Leamington, which supplied 85% of the baby food consumed in Canada confirmed “that they made a careful check of representative samples of baby food

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ NFBA, Poison, Pests and People file, Gosnell to Mullholland July 17, 1959.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁰ NFBA, Poison, Pests and People file, “Chemicals in Agriculture notes,” n.d. p.4

⁵¹ Ibid.

cans.”⁵² Gosnell was not satisfied with their answer however, and sent a letter to the Department of Agriculture. An official within the Department replied two weeks later that Heinz did not have any facilities or procedures for carrying out these checks.⁵³ Gosnell was flummoxed.

This particular story illustrated the conundrum that the agricultural industry found itself in. Food producers believed that there were enough checks and balances within the agricultural industry to keep poisoned fruits and vegetables from appearing in grocery stores. Consequently, companies like Heinz and Campbell encouraged their farmers to use copious amounts of DDT and other insecticides on their crops. In their view, crops that were sprayed typically ensured a higher yield and thus a more profitable return. Why not, since pesticides would never reach grocery stores. The problem extended to other areas of the industry as well. Farm owners represented a stable market for chemical producers to peddle their goods. Agricultural chemists advertised pesticides to farmers as “miracles of modern science,” Gosnell wrote. They show a “single-minded dedication to the business of selling more chemicals, more powerful chemicals, to an ever-widening agricultural market.”⁵⁴ Pesticide manufacturers benefitted enormously from farmer’s reliance on their goods and were accordingly reluctant to have their products pulled from the shelves. After Gosnell compiled his research, he began to film *Poison, Pests, and People*. The documentary was shot mostly in Ontario, but he also travelled to New Brunswick, Washington D.C. and to Saskatchewan to film interviews and local farmers.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Poison, Pests and People was one of the first National Film Board documentaries to argue that human endeavors to control nature (in this case, maximizing agricultural productivity by introducing inorganic compounds) impact the health of Canadians. As the promotional piece for the film's premiere on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) "Documentary 60" program noted, human beings were "part-losers in the battle of extermination."⁵⁵ In doing so, Gosnell introduced a necessary reclassification of the human/non-human divide preached by twentieth-century conservationists. Unlike his contemporaries, Gosnell based his understanding of the environment on emerging ecological ideas that claimed humans were part of a natural continuum and therefore susceptible to changes within it.⁵⁶

The documentary begins with a quick survey of the ways pesticides are used in contemporary society. Toxic chemicals such as DDT are sprayed around the world, the film informs. The substance has protected mono-crops from mites and fungi, and stopped outbreaks of malaria in India. But there is a consequence to society's reliance on this toxic substance. Despite their positive contributions, DDT and other pesticides have disturbed wildlife and even entire ecosystems, the film explains. Larger organisms such as fish, birds, and mammals have all been "poisoned in the destructive war man wages against pests," the narrator states ominously.⁵⁷ To illustrate this, Gosnell cuts to a close-up of a salmon as it gasps for breath. The fish has been unintentionally poisoned, the

⁵⁵ NFBA, *Poison, Pests, and People* file, Promotional Poster, 1960.

⁵⁶ The concept of ecosystem was first proposed by Arthur Tansley in the 1930s and later advanced by Eugene Odum in the 1950s.

⁵⁷ *Poison Pests and People*, produced by David Bairstow, NFB, 1960.

narrator reports. The DDT is breaking down the salmon's nervous system and it can no longer take in oxygen through its gills.



Fig. 3.2. Still from *Poisons, Pests, and People* (1960), directed by Larry Gosnell

Poison, Pests, and People then discusses how human beings were also susceptible to these synthetic chemicals. In the film, the Gosnell interviews a number of experts including Dr. W.C. Martin, a specialist in geriatrics in New York and Dr. L.W Hazelton, president of Hazelton Laboratories in Falls Church, VA. Martin confirm that pesticides indeed pose a serious risk to human beings. In another interview, Dr. Malcolm Hargraves, a blood specialist at the Mayo Clinic recounts with dispassionate authority several instances where people died from chemical exposure.⁵⁸ The film then proceeds to show how these deadly substances enter human bodies. When it rains, toxic chemicals filter

⁵⁸ Ibid.

into local reservoirs. Humans drink the water and are thus poisoned. Dr. R.A. Chapman of the Food and Drug Division for the Department of National Health and Welfare corroborates Gosnell's claims that pesticides from food can poison people. Pesticides discovered in fruit and vegetables at local grocery stores "can cause serious harm," Chapman says.⁵⁹

The documentary's explanation of how pesticides invade human bodies is significant. Mirroring the work of contemporary ecologists, *Poison, Pests, and People* demonstrates that humans were connected to the larger environment, and that even the smallest disturbance had consequences that reverberated throughout this complex web. Perhaps the clearest example of this link between human beings and the environment is found in a scene that was shot for the documentary but later cut.⁶⁰ The movie fades from black into a wide shot of a small park in a non-descript suburban neighborhood. The camera then tilts down to a group of children playing by a pool. A passing truck sprays a thick fog of DDT along the quiet boulevard. The cloud obscures the children as it floats past the static camera. The documentary then cuts to a nearby forest, where the same poisonous cloud descends lightly on the forest. Pushing through the branches, the camera finally settles onto a small stream where a dead fish bobs up and down in an eddy. The motif of water connects the image to the poisoned fish with the children swimming in the pool. The message is clear: humans are breathing in the same fumes that kill smaller organisms; the things that kill fish also threaten us.

⁵⁹ *Poison, Pests and People* (1961)

⁶⁰ NFBA, *Poison, Pests and People* file, "script," by Larry Gosnell, p.1



Fig. 3.3. Still from *Poisons, Pests, and People* (1960)

Just as Don Mulholland predicted, *Poison, Pests and People* angered a number of people within the agricultural industry. When a shorter version of the documentary called *Deadly Dilemma* (1961) was shown at the Resources for Tomorrow conference in Montreal, representatives from the agricultural sector criticized Gosnell's film for "over-stressing the deadly effect of chemical sprays on wildlife."⁶¹ They objected to his claim that DDT sprayed on the forests of New Brunswick killed salmon in the Miramachi River. Scientists employed by federal and provincial pest control programs also chastised Gosnell for his documentary. Dr. Smallman, Director of Entomology and Plant Pathology for the Department of Agriculture, for example, complained that the filmmaker had

⁶¹ "Insecticide Film Shelved," *Globe and Mail*, February 1, 1963.

“pulled the rug out from under them.”⁶² Smallman had expected a film about the “degree of control and highly developed sense of responsibility of the government” in monitoring toxic levels, not “fear mongering.”⁶³ Unhappy with the depiction of the government, Smallman demanded that the NFB pull the film from distribution.

Larry Gosnell left the Film Board shortly after *Deadly Dilemma* was blacklisted but he did not stop making environmental films. His most famous effort was the CBC documentary, *The Air of Death* (1967), a film about air pollution in Southern Ontario and its links to cancer and respiratory disease. According to a CBC study, 1.5 million Canadians tuned into the television broadcast, an amazing number for an in-house production. The film was a major moment in the history of Canadian environmentalism.⁶⁴ Like *Poison, Pests, and People*, the television program triggered a firestorm of controversy. Gosnell’s assertions that the Electric Reduction Company in Dunnville, Ontario was responsible for respiratory diseases and cancer in local residents, made a lasting impression on audiences. Upon seeing the movie, concerned citizens urged the Ontario government to investigate the matter. A 1968 government report confirmed Gosnell’s suspicions that industrial pollution affected animal and plant health, but it also stated that humans were safe from harm.⁶⁵ The investigation committee concluded its report by reprimanding the CBC for airing an “irresponsible and alarmist” piece of

⁶² NFBA, *Deadly Dilemma* file, Peter Jones to Michael Spencer, “Re: *Deadly Dilemma* Revision,” May 23, 1962.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ryan O’Connor, “An Ecological Call to Arms: The Air of Death and the Origins of Environmentalism in Ontario,” *Ontario History*, Vol. CV, No. 1 (Spring 2013).

⁶⁵ Ontario Advisory Committee on Pollution, *Report on the Committee Appointed to Inquire into and Report Upon the Pollution on Air, Soil, and Water in the townships on Dunnville, Moulton, and Sherbrooke, Haldimand County* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer, 1968), 346

journalism.⁶⁶ The CBC subsequently went on trial in 1969 in front of the CRTC, which held public hearings on whether the national broadcaster should make political documentaries. Despite the backlash Gosnell's films continued to inspire environmental activism. As historian Ryan O'Connor notes, Gosnell's *Air of Death* was a catalyst for Pollution Probe, an environmental organization founded by students and faculty from the University of Toronto.⁶⁷

The films of Larry Gosnell anticipated the environmental movement in Canada. His polemic against chemical insecticides in *Poison, Pests, and People* even anticipated Rachel Carson's seminal critique of the agricultural industry, *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson claimed that the efforts by man to manipulate nature were "conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy when it was supposed that nature existed for the convenience of mankind."⁶⁸ Gosnell similarly criticized the high modern belief that humans could modify the environment without consequence. This new perspective marked an important transition in NFB discourses about nature. While state-sponsored films denounced the visible and economically wasteful destruction of wilderness spaces and natural resources, Gosnell condemned postwar society's dependence on science and technology as a way to improve the natural world. Such hubris unintentionally led to the destruction of ecosystems, and by extension, the humans who were connected to those environments.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 285.

⁶⁷ Ryan O'Connor, 42.

⁶⁸ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1962), 297.

A River with a Problem

The production and subsequent release of Larry Gosnell's *Poison, Pests, and People* foreshadowed later developments in NFB environmental cinema. The same year the documentary premiered on CBC television, the National Film Board began developing another project about environmental pollution, entitled *River with a Problem* (1962). The film, which was written and produced by veteran NFB filmmaker David Bairstow, investigated water contamination, a "problem of growing concern."⁶⁹ Bairstow had just completed *Morning on the Lièvre* (1961), a visual tour of Quebec's Lièvre River, photographed to the accompaniment of someone reading Archibald Lampman's eponymous poem. The contemplative film was a beautiful paean to the sublimity of the river's "crystal deep."⁷⁰ But Bairstow recognized that not all rivers were as pure or splendid as the Lièvre.⁷¹ There were other waterways in Canada that harbored ugly and hazardous secrets deep beneath their placid surfaces. Bairstow elected to focus his documentary on the Ottawa River, a particularly filthy tributary, a "river with a burden," carrying with it "the choking refuse of civilization and industry," Bairstow describes it.⁷²

The pollution of the Ottawa River was a matter of public record. In an address to parliament in the summer of 1955, Prime Minister St. Laurent called the situation "a serious matter" that required an "immediate solution."⁷³ Walter Gray, a reporter for the *Globe and Mail* explained several years later that the Ottawa River had become the "the

⁶⁹ NFBA, River with a Problem file, "Info sheet," 1961.

⁷⁰ *Morning on the Lièvre*, produced by David Bairstow, NFB 1961.

⁷¹ *Morning on the Lièvre* actually ends with a Lampman verse that warns against man's unrestrained use of the river.

⁷² NFBA, River With a Problem file, "Info sheet," n.d.

⁷³ "River Pollution a Serious Matter," *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1955, 8.

shame of the nation.” “The scum floating on its surface casts a repulsive effluvium over its channel as it swirls downstream,” Gray wrote.⁷⁴

In the film, Bairstow shows how effluent from industrial activities upstream shatters the “balance of nature,” and destroys the underwater environment⁷⁵ “When man dumps waste into the river,” the narrator of the documentary intones, a “revolution occurs in the underwater kingdom.”⁷⁶ In an animated sequence, the film shows how this “revolution” transpires. The microscopic flora in the water thrive on the excreta of other creatures. When a new substance is introduced into the water, the flora becomes preoccupied with breaking it down. The microscopic organisms feast on the dross, using up large quantities of oxygen to digest the new substance. As a result, larger organisms such as fish and aquatic plants begin to suffocate. Eventually, the entire river dies. Drinking water becomes tainted. Fishing industries dry up. Marinas go bankrupt. Like the sunfish or the water lily depicted in the animation sequence, cities that rely on the river for sustenance slowly asphyxiate.

⁷⁴ Walter Gray, “A Perfect Example of Pollution,” *Globe and Mail*, June 1 1961, 7.

⁷⁵ While *River with a Problem* was directed by Graham Parker, the archival record shows that David Bairstow was the true author of the project. The idea was Bairstow’s and it was Bairstow who wrote the script. Moreover, the producer was actively involved during production. As a result, it is Bairstow’s voice that I focus on.

⁷⁶ *River With a Problem* (1962).



Fig. 3.4 Still from *A River With a Problem* (1961), directed by Graham Parker

In a lot of ways, *River with a Problem* resembled *Poison, Pests and People*. Both films identified industrial pollution as a major problem in modern society. Still, there were important differences between the two films. While both documentaries argued that urban growth and new technologies disturbed the “balance of nature,” their presentation of this contemporary issue could not have been more different. Gosnell was polemical. Caustic. For Gosnell, the agricultural industry needed to be held accountable for their irresponsible and borderline insidious activities. Bairstow was less inflammatory. He does not hold the government accountable for lax regulations, nor does he criticize the pulp industries’ deplorable operational standards in *River with a Problem*. In fact, Bairstow was so vague about who was responsible for the contamination of the Ottawa River that the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, arguably the single biggest polluter of the waterway, praised the documentary for its evenhandedness. “All have agreed that you have done a most effective job of presenting a controversial subject in a fair and impartial

manner,” Douglas Jones, a manager at the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association remarked.⁷⁷ In the documentary, the narrator ambiguously explains that pollution was just an unfortunate side effect of modernity. “The timeless pattern of...self-purification in a natural river” was disrupted by the “byproducts of urban growth,” the narrator says over an animated sequence of industrial expansion.⁷⁸ The use of animation earlier in the documentary exemplified the film’s lukewarm stance on industrial pollution. Instead of carping industry for polluting local water supplies, Bairstow focuses on how the city of Ottawa is solving the issue of contamination. Graham Parker, the director of the film, interviews engineers, health experts, and civic officials including the mayor of Ottawa, Charlotte Whitton, and John Pratt, a silver-haired M.P. for the Liberal Party, well-versed in the art of folksy idioms. Each interviewee brags about their modern solutions to this contemporary issue.⁷⁹ “We have got to change our methods of thinking [and] spend a great deal more money on working with nature and not against it,” Pratt explains in the film.⁸⁰ “When this happens, the river will revert back to its natural state.”⁸¹ The concept of working with nature is well intentioned, but the individuals in the documentary seem to prefer fixing the environment than working alongside it. Bairstow was especially interested in the ways engineers and city planners used technological solutions, such as a state-of-the-art interceptor sewer to solve the issue of waste. “Although the cost is high (32 million), and the engineering complex, installing an interceptor sewer that runs two

⁷⁷ NFBA, *River with a Problem* file, R.A. Jones, Assistant Executive Secretary to David Bairstow, July 24, 1961.

⁷⁸ *River with a Problem* (1961).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

and half miles is “worth it to restore our mighty river,” Mayor Whitton rationalizes.⁸² In the film, Bairstow also lauds the civil servants who use science to determine safety levels in drinking water. The Water Purification Board, which researched the effects of radioactive materials on fish, mussels and other organisms to “determine the maximum quantity we can accept in our waters without any danger,” is a key factor in the Ottawa River’s rehabilitation.⁸³ Significantly, the film does not mention the possibility of limiting industrial waste, or penalizing the perpetrators for dumping sewage into the water. Presumably, Bairstow avoided this approach because it would antagonize industry leaders and curb urban growth, neither of which was healthy for the development of Ottawa.

Bairstow’s film reflected a larger progressive attitude about environmental management. As Matthew Gandy observes in *Concrete and Clay*, city planners in the twentieth-century believed that they could manage municipal growth and create healthy living environments with science, technology, and more efficient urban strategies.⁸⁴ The policies of J.R. Menzie, chief of the public health engineering division of the Department of National Health and Welfare embodied this technocratic way of thinking. Menzie was confident that his staff could “fix the Ottawa River.”⁸⁵ According to the director, the city needed to develop modern sewage systems and invest in water treatment technologies. If

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See: Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2003). See also: Christopher Fullerton, “A Changing of the Guard: Regional Planning in Ottawa, 1945-1974 in *Urban History Review* vol XXXIV no. 1 (Fall, 2005).

⁸⁵ Walter Gray, “A Perfect Example of Pollution,” 7.

the money was there to support these endeavors, his staff could implement “effective remedial action.”⁸⁶

Municipal and federal politicians endorsed *River with a Problem* because it showed audiences why environmental remediation was important and something worth spending money on. J.R. Menzie, who appears in *A River with a Problem*, believed that the biggest challenge for the city was finding enough money to build a proper sewer system. The federal government was willing to provide low interest loans to the city for remediation, but the majority of the finances would have to be paid for by the city. If remediation was going to proceed, the public had to be convinced that cleaning up the river was necessary. The documentary clearly demonstrates the importance of expensive sewage technology in cleaning up the Ottawa River. The film perfectly complimented the political agenda the government. In a letter to Graham Parker, Mayor Whitton noted that the film was an “attractive and interesting” movie about the city’s “great waterways.” Whitton was confident that “everyone who saw this film” would have a “better understanding of this tremendous problem.”⁸⁷ Pratt similarly explained to Bairstow that he was going to use the documentary to spread “the cause of anti –pollution among the communities of [his] riding.”⁸⁸ The M.P did have one major criticism of the movie however. He, and other members of parliament who saw the movie, were “puzzled” that there was no mention of a piece of legislation which passed in 1960 that lent municipalities 2/3 of the cost of sewage disposal plants at “a very low rate of interest for a

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ NFBA, River With a Problem file, Charlotte Whitton to Graham Parker, February 12, 1962.

⁸⁸ NFBA, River With a Problem file, Honorable John Pratt to David Bairstow, February 13, 1962.

period of up to 50 years.”⁸⁹ “The feeling on Parliament Hill,” wrote Pratt, “is that...some mention might have been made of the fact that the government has made money available to any municipality wishing to eradicate this unpleasant problem.”⁹⁰ No doubt Pratt’s complaint was related to the concern that the public might not think this project economically viable or politically feasible.

Poison, Pests, and People and *River with a Problem* demonstrated the ways in which NFB discourses about the environment were evolving. Nature had always been a prominent theme in the Board’s picture of Canada, but it was generally portrayed in terms of its economic worth and symbolic importance. NFB filmmakers like Larry Gosnell and David Bairstow started to envisage a different, less acquisitive kind of relationship with the natural world.⁹¹ Their films showed Canadians that human waste contributed to local health risks and that efforts to control nature sometimes had dire consequences for the environment. Environmental protection was about protecting the public from the effects of modern society.

Despite their similarities, *Poison, Pests, and People*, and *River with a Problem* also epitomized the uneven development in NFB discourses about nature. Bairstow contended that environmental remediation necessitated a political and technical solution. Bairstow’s faith in government to protect the health of its citizens was more in line with previous NFB documentaries about resource conservation, which asserted that state expertise could fix nature and manage natural resources in perpetuity. Gosnell, on the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Other films include *Life and Radiation* (1961), the “World Population and Resource Series,” which aired on television throughout 1961, and Bill Mason’s folksy *The Rise and Fall of the Great Lakes* (1968).

other hand, claimed that humans needed to radically alter their behaviors toward the environment. Human beings inclination to enhance nature's productivity through laboratory research and the production of chemical pesticides was not sustainable. If society was going to stop polluting local ecosystems, it had to adopt agricultural practices that did not rely on technological solutions or other quick-fixes.

The Enduring Wilderness

The 1960s bore witness to other kinds of environmental narratives in NFB cinema. One of the most prominent themes in this period of filmmaking was that of wilderness preservation. Ernest Reid and Christopher Chapman's *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963) and Bill Mason's wildlife documentaries *Death of a Legend* (1971) and *Cry of the Wild* (1972) were the most celebrated works about Canada's complicated relationship with wilderness. Echoing the clarion call of wilderness preservationists and contemporary environmentalists, both filmmakers proclaimed that society needed to protect wilderness spaces and the wildlife that lived in them from the "expanding patterns" of "mankind."⁹² The preservation of wilderness would safeguard ecological diversity, and save humanity's soul in the process.

Yet, the wilderness documentaries of Ernest Reid, Christopher Chapman, and Bill Mason exemplified the complex and uneven development of environmental attitudes in NFB cinema. On the one hand, documentaries such as Reid's *The Enduring Wilderness* and Mason's *Death of a Legend* clearly diverged from the state's high modern attitudes

⁹² *The Enduring Wilderness*, Produced by Ernest Reid, NFB (1963).

toward the environment. The filmmakers used cinema to project an ecologically informed way of thinking about the value of nature. However, these films were also “sponsored” by the government and therefore reflected a state way of seeing nature. In some cases, they even praised the technocratic efforts of the federal government in passing laws that restricted development and exploitation in Canada’s last remaining bits of wild. Films about wildness, in short, were negotiated texts in which radical environmental critiques of high modernism vied with traditional state viewpoints. Although the narratives and images in NFB documentaries about wilderness were conflicted, one must also acknowledge that these films were remarkably different from their predecessors in their definition of nature as an intrinsically valuable, and ecologically complex place.

The Enduring Wilderness was the first NFB film to present wilderness as a dynamic place worth preserving. Produced and distributed a year before the United State’s famous Wilderness Preservation Act, director Ernest Reid and award-winning photographer Christopher Chapman argued that nature in its original state was historically and culturally valuable.⁹³ For most Canadians, the land, although a nice symbol of Canadian-ness, was ultimately measured in terms of its economic worth and its resource potential. In *The Enduring Wilderness*, however, Reid and Chapman, contend that nature cannot be simply assessed in terms of boards-per-foot or cubic volume. Echoing the musings of nineteenth century wilderness preservation advocates such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, the filmmakers assert that nature was spiritually beneficial and culturally significant. The two filmmakers argue through stunning images of fields,

⁹³ Ibid.

streams, and mountains that human beings were comparatively small and insignificant in comparison to the untamed wild. In the wilderness, a person could shed the trappings of modern life and become transformed, or at the very least, spiritually and physically restored.

When the Department of Northern Affairs (DNAN) first approached the NFB to make a film about Canada's national parks, it was in a mind a movie that would encourage people to visit these federally protected spaces.⁹⁴ A memo from the Parks Branch outlined a project that advertised the picturesque beauty of national parks and their modern amenities. NFB filmmakers Reid and Chapman imagined a different kind of film, however. They wanted to produce a documentary that not just marketed parks, but also advanced the cause of wilderness preservation through stunning displays of raw nature.⁹⁵ The filmmakers still urged Canadians to visit national parks, but this message was part of a larger discourse about the necessity of preserving wild spaces. Like other wilderness advocates of that period, Reid and Chapman believed that nature was a "public good." National Parks helped preserve the last vestiges of wilderness and therefore satisfied an individual's "spiritual longing to contend against wind and cold, and storm and tide."⁹⁶ As Reid wrote in his notes, Canadian parks were "natural museums" of immense beauty and ecological diversity.⁹⁷ In other words, they were more than just a

⁹⁴ NFBA, The Enduring Wilderness file, Sid Roberts, National Parks Branch to Graham Crabtree, Liaison Officer, NFB, May 15, 1962.

⁹⁵ Chapman assured the DNAN that the film would "express the philosophy behind the preservation and establishment of National Park areas." The ambiguity of this statement gave him the freedom to examine more abstractly the importance of wilderness in Canadian society. NFBA, The Enduring Wilderness file, "The Meaning of Wilderness," Christopher Chapman, June 12, 1962.

⁹⁶ NFBA, The Enduring Wilderness file, "script notes," n.d.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

place for recreation; parks fulfilled a spiritual and physical need sorely lacking in modern society.

The preservationist message of *The Enduring Wilderness* echoed the voices of a growing number of Canadian nature enthusiasts. Since the early twentieth century, nature writers such as Ernest Thompson Seton, Grey Owl, and Farley Mowat, preached that nature in its most primeval form was a place of transcendence and splendor. Their writing influenced a generation of Canadians who longed to leave the city and get back to nature. In the mid twentieth century, Canada witnessed a mounting felicity towards wilderness and alfresco activities. Vacationing in the great outdoors was so ingrained in postwar culture that historian W.L. Morton described wilderness outings as “the basic rhythm of Canadian life.” “The typical Canadian,” wrote Morton, “spends most of his holiday among the lakes of the Shield or the peaks of the Rockies.”⁹⁸ Wilderness spaces promoted in glossy Parks Branch pamphlets were especially suited for middle-class retreats. Parks were easily accessible yet they still afforded tourists a chance to experience the tranquility of prelapsarian beauty and solitude.⁹⁹ As a National Parks Branch pamphlet published in 1957 explained, parks were a place where nature “flourished in its *original state*.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ W.L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 5.

⁹⁹ The history of national parks shows us that the meaning and value attributed to these places was multifaceted and constantly changing. In Canada, national parks were first established at the end of the 19th century to accommodate middle class fantasies about the sublime, and as a way to protect natural resources from abuse. Seventy years later, they were regulated and perceived primarily as ecological preserves. The best book on the subject is Alan MacEachern’s *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, *Wisdom’s Heritage: The National Parks of Canada*, (Ottawa: 1957), 1.

Visitors could discover “outstanding natural landscapes,” as well as a cross-section of native trees, plants, animals and birds “as they appeared before man arrived.”¹⁰¹

Reid and Chapman similarly frame Canadian wilderness as spiritual sanctuaries from modern life in *The Enduring Wilderness*. As the narrator of the documentary explains, humans need “the tonic of wildness.” Upon entering the woods, people are immediately “refreshed by the sight of [nature’s] inexhaustible vigour.”¹⁰²

In order for wilderness to retain its salubrious properties, however, it needed to be kept separated from human civilization. True wilderness was where human beings were not.¹⁰³ In the film, Chapman and Reid represent wilderness as a place that is unspoiled and spatially distinct from modern society. To emphasize wilderness’ separateness from civilization, the filmmakers rendered nature as sacred and sublime. Throughout the documentary, Chapman uses extravagant compositions, and stark contrasts between light and dark, to accentuate the vastness of wilderness. Images of immense (and seemingly empty) mountain peaks and immeasurable spans of blue and white skies throughout the film create extended moments of visual excess that prompt a feeling of human frailty and

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁰² In an earlier version of the script, Chapman explains wilderness capacity to revive the soul as a “secret, hidden meaning...that can be found only in the heart of the wilderness,” he says. NFBA, *The Enduring Wilderness* file, “Wilderness,” script by Chris Chapman, n.d. p.4..

¹⁰³ But even parks were not immune to civilization’s destructive appetite. W. Phillip Keller, an agrologist and famous nature writer, mourned that the construction of highways was destroying the country’s “finest park scenery.” It wasn’t just roads that threatened national parks either. More and more tourists were visiting national parks. According to Keller, park traffic had increased a whopping 1000 percent in just ten years. The Northern Affairs and National Resources explained in their annual report (1957-58) that tourism had increased to 3,500,000 people in the last year. This was an increase of nearly of 2,000,000 visitors in three years. They anticipated 7,000,000 by 1975. W. Phillip Keller, *Canada’s Wild Glory* (Toronto: Nelson, Foster & Scott, 1961). 4. *The Enduring Wilderness* was in part an attempt to preserve and protect the sanctity of national parks.

limitation.¹⁰⁴ The sublimity of nature is on full display in the opening scene of the documentary. The screen slowly dissolves from a black screen to a panoramic shot of the Pacific coast, where dark waves heave themselves onto a rocky shore and then slide back into the ocean. Chapman lets the camera linger on the image of the primordial battle between the two elements. The length of the shot is worth noting. The shot lasts longer than most shots do in popular cinema. The conscious decision to let the images on the screen move to and fro without cutting to a close-up or to smaller detail within the frame mimics how someone might observe such a spectacular display of wildness. According to Chapman, nature was eternal and stirred a kind of spiritual awakening in those who were fortunate enough to witness it. “We should feel that taming the wilderness is an impossible task,” Chapman scrawled on the margins of his script.¹⁰⁵



Fig. 3.5. Still from *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963), directed by Ernest Reid

¹⁰⁴ The images of raw nature evoke the work of artists like Caspar David Friedrich and Thomas Cole, as well as the American photographer Ansel Adams.

¹⁰⁵ NFBA, The Enduring Wilderness File, “The Meaning of Wilderness,” script by Chris Chapman, June 12, 1962, p. 2.

Audiences were captivated with Chapman's groundbreaking cinematography. The film's depiction of nature in national parks was "breathtakingly spectacular," exclaimed one viewer.¹⁰⁶ "[Chapman's] camera captures the feeling of solitude and grandeur that is the spirit of the wilderness," remarked another.¹⁰⁷ The enthusiastic response towards these images was precisely the kind of reaction Chapman hoped to elicit when he first began shooting. During production, he explained to Reid that he wanted the Canadian landscape to "speak for itself." Chapman believed that "visuals" of the wilderness sublime were far better suited to conveying "the feeling of actually being in wilderness," than narration or voice-overs.¹⁰⁸ According to the cinematographer, excessive non-diegetic sound distracted audience members from experiencing the splendor of nature.¹⁰⁹



Fig. 3.6. Still from *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963)

¹⁰⁶ John Hepworth, "Cinema 65," *Loyola News*, March 26, 1965.

¹⁰⁷ "Canadian Films Win Awards," *St. Catherines Standard*, April 24, 1965.

¹⁰⁸ NFBA, The Enduring Wilderness File, "The Meaning of Wilderness," script by Chris Chapman, June 12, 1962, i.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

For Chapman and Ernest Reid, who served as the film's director, national parks were important because they contained within their boundaries the last remaining places where Canadians could experience this kind of resplendence. The world outside the borders of these designated areas were corrupted and degraded. "Our history is short," the narrator says after several minutes of silence. "Only four hundred years ago the first settlers came through the surf and up the shore, seeking a home in the brooding forests of the new land."¹¹⁰ After several minutes of wilderness scenery, the camera cuts to a wide shot of a small cabin huddled against the foot of a mountain. Forests surround it from every other angle. The narrator continues: "for the pioneer, the fight against the wilderness was lonely and long. At first, their work made little impression on the vast stretches of mountain, forest, and plain." The narration compliments Chapman's cinematography, which recreates the formidable wilderness setting that confronted European settlers when they first arrived on the continent. When "civilization spread," the narrator continues, "the pattern of nature eventually gave way to the pattern of man."¹¹¹ On cue the camera tilts down a mountainside to a train slicing through the landscape, and then cuts to a sequence of an iron bridge looming over a pristine shoreline. Several moments later, the camera cuts again, this time to images of well-manicured farms. The scene continues, panning over a pulp mill, smokestacks belching smoke, and serpentine highways. Humans have tamed nature and made it productive. The sequence visualizes the process by which settlers pushed back the wild and created a world that was more

¹¹⁰ *The Enduring Wilderness*, 1963.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

conducive to a life of convenience and capitalism. These manmade cityscapes, however, are banal and have “little variety,” the narrator laments.¹¹² They “tend to look alike.”¹¹³

Unlike his images of pristine wilderness, which are meant to evoke awe and wonder, Chapman’s angular and crowded depictions of industrial society are meant to convey a sense of artificiality and homogeneity. Shots of polluted environs, colossal skyscrapers, and an endless stream of automobiles flicker quickly across the screen to the tune of blaring horns and jumbo jets. Cement slabs and iron scaffolding crowd the edge of the frame and create a claustrophobic representation of the Canadian metropolis. Chapman’s frenetic portrayal of civic life paralleled the observations of mid-century cultural critics who argued that postwar culture was conformist and unimaginative. In the 1950s, American intellectuals such as C. Wright Mills and William Whyte contended that mass-produced goods, standardized workspaces, and suburban environments had consequences for the human soul.¹¹⁴ Most middle class North Americans “have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life,” Whyte laments in *The Organization Man*.¹¹⁵ In Canada, postwar residents similarly fell prey to what geographer Richard Harris calls “creeping conformity.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Shuster 1956); C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

¹¹⁵ Whyte, 3.

¹¹⁶ Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).



Fig. 3.7. Still from *The Enduring Wilderness* (1963)

The only way to escape the “creeping conformity,” of modern life was to visit the national parks of Canada, where nature was still pure and unadulterated, at least in the minds of the filmmakers. A “return to wilderness is tranquility regained,” Chapman mused during the production of the documentary.¹¹⁷ In contrast to the mundane and repetitive urban lives of Canadians, wilderness was diverse and abundant, a “temple that is infinitely complex,” Chapman wrote.¹¹⁸ “Every part is interwoven with another. From the prowling predators to the enzymes in the soil, the ecological relationships are subtle and deep yet so carefully balanced.”¹¹⁹ The elegance of this environment is visualized throughout the documentary. Chapman photographs herds of bison as they move across the plains and zooms in on a bee as it pollinates flowers. Each shot is linked through colour and movement, suggesting that all of nature is connected in some subtle but discernible way.

¹¹⁷ NFBA, *The Enduring Wilderness* file, “Look to the Wilderness review,” n.d. p. 6.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

While Reid and Chapman emphasize the dynamism of ecosystems, “which are interdependent,” they do not show how humans interact and help shape these environs. Indeed, it is impossible to ignore the film’s romantic (and Western) notion of wilderness, which views nature as something that is antithetical to human culture. In this sense, Chapman and Reid were not much different than the park administrators and boosters who marketed national parks as unspoiled wilderness in pamphlets, postcards, and guidebooks.¹²⁰ As environmental historians are quick to point out, these images presented nature as a place where humans are absent – completely removed from the landscape. Staffers and wilderness advocates used pictures of seemingly empty and wild landscapes to promote the primeval-ness of their parks and to satisfy the nostalgic expectations of the public. But even park administrators sometimes advertised the amenities of national parks – radiant golf courses, rustic wilderness lodges, and well-kept hiking trails were all features in the promotional material of national parks. What is fascinating here is that Chapman and Reid outright ignore these aspects of national parks and instead emphasize the unspoiled and pristine. Nature trails are only described in the film as paths that allow people to temporarily “visit” this “natural museum.” A representation of national parks as a place bereft of civilization white washes the ecological and historical reality and contradictions of these human-made spaces. Although the film celebrates the men who had the foresight to establish wilderness areas, it does not acknowledge the fact that humans continue to occupy and transform nature.¹²¹ Humans actively construct physical

¹²⁰ J. Keri Cronin, *Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology, and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

¹²¹ In the provocatively titled essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” William Cronon urged scholars to reimagine the concept of “wilderness” as a product of human desire.

and intellectual edifices onto the landscape. As Alan MacEachern reminds in his book *Natural Selections*, decisions to privilege the “natural” over the “unnatural” are inherently human judgments.¹²² Park managers and government officers preserve historic sightlines, directing the gaze of visitors away from the manufactured landscapes of modern civilization. Historian Claire Campbell argues compellingly that this particular notion of wilderness is “wed to a particular point in time” – a time when voyageurs paddled the vast stretches of rivers in his birch bark canoe.¹²³ Wilderness was constructed to be a place of solitude and ruggedness, virtues that embodied how Canadians viewed themselves and the history of their country. In *The Enduring Wilderness*, cinematography and text are allied together to guide the viewer’s gaze toward a picture of pristine nature.

The problematic depiction of wilderness as a place devoid of human culture in *The Enduring Wilderness* does not negate its significance as an environmental film, however. The release of the documentary signaled an important evolution in NFB discourses about the environment, which had previously framed nature as site for resource exploitation.¹²⁴ *The Enduring Wilderness* transcended the wishes of the Parks Branch by championing a non-instrumentalist way of thinking about land use in postwar

Pictures of wilderness bereft of civilization is not historically or ecologically accurate, rather it is representative of Western society’s longing for a place of uncorrupted virtue. William Cronon *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).

¹²² MacEachern, 9.

¹²³ Claire Campbell, “‘It was Canadian, Then Typically Canadian:’ Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 no. 1 (May, 2008), 6.

6.

¹²⁴ For more scholarship on the origins of the wilderness preservation movement see: Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). See also: James Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

society.¹²⁵ National parks “are museums that we visit to gain knowledge about ourselves, to weight he value of our civilization against the ageless splendor of the wilderness,” the narrator concludes in the documentary.

While the film introduced a new perspective on the meaning and value of nature, *The Enduring Wilderness* did not fully deviate from state ways of seeing. Reid and Chapman argue in the film that the federal government is responsible for addressing the spiritual needs of society through legislation. “How can we use the parks without spoiling them? To preserve them unchanged for a growing population requires expert planning and management,” the narrator explains. Education and expertise was key too. According to the film, park naturalists were essential in teaching Canadians “the meaning of wilderness.” The promotion of government management and expertise as tools to protect wilderness spaces indicate that the filmmakers did not completely break away from the ideology of the state.¹²⁶

Bill Mason and Wildlife Preservation

Ernest Reid and Christopher Chapman were critical of technological civilization and its conformist culture, yet they also supported the efforts of modern government institutions to manage wilderness spaces through technocratic solutions such as science

¹²⁵ According to historian Kevin Marsh, the establishment of wilderness preserves was “a form of land use” not just some “vague and romantic ideology.” The landscapes depicted in Chapman’s documentary actually existed as a physical point on the map; they were the physical manifestation of a change in environmental values, which argued that nature should be protected from exploitation. Kevin Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

¹²⁶ In 1971 William Pettigrew released the NFB documentary, *Epilogue*, an innovative documentary that uses multi-image techniques to contrast the majestic grandeur of nature in national parks with images of pollution and ecological degradation that result from the heedless exploitation of the environment. There is no narration in this film. The documentary illustrates the continuing legacy of Chapman’s work.

and legislation. NFB documentarians would continue to wrestle with the role the government played in protecting wild nature in the following decade. The most famous films to scrutinize the relationship between the state and wild nature were those produced by the environmentalist, Bill Mason. Mason was a powerful advocate of wilderness in Canada. He wrote, directed, and produced twenty-six wilderness documentaries, seventeen of which were distributed by the National Film Board. His documentaries about canoeing and wildlife have been viewed by many as a catalyst for the environmental movement in the 1970s. Historian Tina Loo notes in *States of Nature*, for example, that Mason's films about wolves were particularly important in the articulation of popular Canadian environmentalism.¹²⁷ According to Loo, his repudiation of state conservation activities meshed well with opinions of popular environmental advocates like Farley Mowat. *Death of a Legend* (1971), which tells the story of the wolf "fell afoul of predatory man and his technology," and its sequel, *Cry of the Wild* (1972), a feature-length film about the filmmaker's personal relationship with wolves, were the most polemical of Mason's films, arguing that humans should not interfere with the "rhythms and patterns" of nature.¹²⁸

The conviction that wildlife should be left unmolested was a radical position in the mid-twentieth century. Historically animals were resources managed under the purview of the state. For decades, the federal government had defined creatures such as deer, caribou, and beaver as public commodities similar to timber or uranium.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Tina Loo, *States of Nature* 174.

¹²⁸ *Cry of the Wild* (1972)

¹²⁹ Tina Loo, *States of Nature*, 152.

Predators, which did not have much economic value, were not protected by the state. In fact, carnivores were seen as anathema to wildlife conservation because they destroyed other fur-bearing critters. Wolves, for instance, hunted wild game without regard for the age, sex, or conservation status of the prey. Although wolves were not considered a resource, they were not free from the schemes of man. Wolves were “managed” in a different and more vicious way. At first, local residents kept lupine populations in check. Farmers and landowners in the nineteenth-century killed wolves on the assumption that they were bloodthirsty beasts preying on livestock. To protect their livelihood, locals declared war against the vermin. The bounty system, which was established by the federal government at the beginning of the 20th century, was a particularly effective way of ensuring that wolf populations did not irrupt in populated regions. Hunters looking to earn a few dollars killed the animal with extreme prejudice, trading the ears and paws of the animal in exchange for a financial reward.

Killing predators in national parks was eventually outlawed in 1940 when James Harkin, the first commissioner of the Dominion Parks Branch claimed that the “predatory animals [were] of great scientific, education, recreational and economic value to society.”¹³⁰ The prohibition on hunting predators in national parks, and the cessation of the wolf bounty system in the late 1940s was not inspired by environmental sentimentality. It was motivated by modern scientific ideas concerning balanced ecosystems. Nor did it mean that wolves were free to roam as they please. Despite their importance to healthy ecosystems, wolves were still exterminated in Canada throughout

¹³⁰ Harkin quoted in Tina Loo, *States of Nature*, 158.

the middle part of the twentieth century. Unlike in the past however, wolf killing was now under the jurisdiction of the state. Government officers argued that although wolves needed to be protected, it was sometimes necessary to cull their numbers to maintain a harmonious balance between predator and prey. Such an ecologically sensitive task could not be trusted in the hands of common folk who did not have any training in biology or wildlife management. In fact, killing wolves actually protected the animal from further harm at the hands of local hunters and farmers. As Canadian Wildlife Service biologist Douglas Pimlott argued in *Canadian Audubon*, the selective killing of wolves by the government “was necessary” because it limited the reflexive and prejudicial slaughter of the predator by rural folk.¹³¹

Killing wolves was part of a larger state-directed plan for economic development.¹³² Progressive-era beliefs saw wastefulness as an unpardonable sin. For the same reason foresters were penalized for indiscriminately harvesting timber reserves, wolves were “punished” for their compulsive appetite of valuable game species. To curb this improvidence, the governments in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario poisoned wolves with strychnine pellets and cyanide cartridges.¹³³ The Canadian Wildlife Service also killed wolves en masse.¹³⁴ In the 1950s, CWS officers slaughtered an estimated 17,500 wolves in a misguided attempt to fix the caribou crisis that plagued the Northwest Territories.¹³⁵ (Apparently, it did not occur to the Service that decreases in caribou were

¹³¹ Loo, 161.

¹³² Ibid. 159.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Alexander J. Burnett, *A Passion for Wildlife: The History of the Canadian Wildlife Service* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003),

¹³⁵ Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1978), 175.

the result of environmental change, or human predation.) In addition to trying to protect caribou populations, state biologists working killed wolves to obtain biological data. A dead wolf was valuable for scientists because it contained a wealth of information about the diet, biology, and health of the animal.¹³⁶

The first half of the twentieth-century was not kind to wolves. First they were ruthlessly targeted for their furs and purported mean disposition. Then government men exterminated wolves because they allegedly threatened an economic resource. But as the century marched forward, Canadians' antipathy towards the wolf began to change. In the 1960s, the wolf became a popular symbol of wilderness preservation. One of the biggest advocates of the wolf was the writer-naturalist Farley Mowat. In his famous book *Never Cry Wolf*, the author claimed that Canadians had misidentified the wolf as a murderous brute. According to Mowat, it was the Canadian government that was more responsible for this mischaracterization. He criticized the state and its hackneyed approach to wolf management, which, relied on antiquated ideas about the cruelty of the animal. The writer took special aim at the CWS, whom he had worked for in the North. Mowat considered them to be a bunch of reprehensible, ham-fisted fools.¹³⁷ Although they claimed to act in a scientific and rational manner, the CWS murdered wolves based on shaky testimony and hysterical tales about the beast's ravenous appetite for flesh.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf* (1963; reis., New York: Little Brown, 1999), vi. The book was an account of Mowat's time with the Dominion Wildlife Service. In it he challenged the government's characterization of the wolf as a "savage killer." Mowat recounted instances where the creature demonstrated restraint and affection. He also described the wolf's complex palate, which included rodents and carrion (not healthy caribou or humans).

The scientific community was not happy with Mowat's portrayal of the Canadian Wildlife Service. In the press they disparaged *Never Cry Wolf* as a work of "fantasy" and "semi-fictional."¹³⁸ They openly questioned the aims of Mowat (he was looking for publicity), his methodology (it was ill-formed and unsubstantiated), and his integrity (he was dishonest).¹³⁹ Whether Mowat was being truthful or not did not much matter in the end. The reputation of the CWS had been besmirched. After reading *Never Cry Wolf*, concerned citizens mailed hundreds of letters to the Service. They demanded that CWS stop butchering wolves.¹⁴⁰ As historian Karen Jones notes, *Never Cry Wolf* quickly transformed the public perception of the wolf as a "beast of waste and desolation...to a conservationist *cause celebre*."¹⁴¹

In an effort to rehabilitate their image as good-stewards of the country's wildlife, CWS turned to the National Film Board.¹⁴² In December 1966, David Munro, director of the Canadian Wildlife Service, sent a letter to the NFB, requesting that the Board make a documentary about the Service's commitment to "research and management," which was "vital to wildlife's survival."¹⁴³ Two months later he sent another letter specifying that the film project needed to touch on three related themes: "that Canada has a wildlife heritage; that wildlife, as well as having a recreational, economic, and aesthetic value, has an

¹³⁸For instance, Alexander Banfield, the Wildlife Service biologist who supervised Mowat's fieldwork in the Northwest Territories, explained in an issue of *Canadian Field Naturalist*, that most of the writer's observations about wolf behaviour were plagiarized from his own studies. A.W.F. Banfield, Review of *Never Cry Wolf*," *Canadian Field Naturalist* 78, 1 (1964), 52-53.

¹³⁹ Karen Jones, "'Never Cry Wolf': Science, Sentiment, and the Literary Rehabilitation of *Canis Lupus*," *The Canadian Historical Review* vol.84 (2001), 71-72

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid* 68.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁴² At first, the CWS approached Disney to make the film, but the project never went into production because the two parties could not settle on a viable budget.

¹⁴³ LAC RG 84, A-2-a, Vol. 2134, file U266, pt. 4. Memo from David A. Munro, Director Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 15 December 1967.

important survival value to some of our peoples today; and that research and management is vital if the wildlife resource is to be preserved.”¹⁴⁴ Munro wanted the documentary project to highlight the agency’s devotion to “properly conducted studies of wildlife,” and “intelligent solutions.”¹⁴⁵ Although CWS had a clear objective for the film, it did not want the documentary to be overtly didactic. The movie should be “compelling and entertaining,” and “somewhat provocative,” Munro explained to the NFB.¹⁴⁶ “It should not preach,” but make “audiences feel something of a worry about animal preservation, perhaps have a better feeling for animals importance.”¹⁴⁷ Several months later, Darrel Eagles, head of the CWS’s Editorial and Information Branch sent another letter to the National Film Board, explaining that the documentary should be about wolves. A film about this predator would help audiences understand “the whole rationale of wise use of our renewable resources.” [sic]¹⁴⁸ The film should emphasize “without a doubt” that the survival of the wolf was in large part due to the “recent work of Wildlife Service biologists in studying this predator and communicating this information to the public.”¹⁴⁹ A movie of this kind would “generate public support for conservation and legislation ... than any other single article or endeavor.”¹⁵⁰

A year later the NFB hired Bill Mason to make the Canadian Wildlife Service documentary. The NFB saw Mason as the perfect man for the job. He had just finished

¹⁴⁴ NFBA, Death of a Legend file, “General Guide Lines to be Used in Developing a Theme for a Canadian Wild Life Film,” February, 16 1966, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 3

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 2

¹⁴⁸ NFBA, Death of a Legend file, Darrell Eagles, to David Bairstow, July 22, 1966.

¹⁴⁹ NFBA Death of a Legend file, “Wildlife Film Project” n.d.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Paddle to the Sea (1966), *Blake* (1969) and, *Rise and Fall of the Great Lakes* (1968) and had become known as “the unofficial in-house wilderness filmmaker at the NFB.”¹⁵¹ Still, it is astonishing that the film, which would eventually be called *Death of a Legend*, was so widely beloved considering Mason had never even seen a wolf in the wild.¹⁵²



Fig. 3.8. Still from *Death of a Legend* (1971), directed by Bill Mason

Although the Canadian Wildlife Service was the main financial sponsor of *Death of the Legend*, Mason’s documentary was surprisingly critical of wildlife management. In fact, *Death of a Legend* and its sequel, *Cry of the Wild* clearly illustrates the ways in which Mason deviated from state ways of thinking about nature. The CWS was an institution that believed in the power of science and technology. They were technocrats. For nature to be saved (from itself and from humans) it needed to be *managed*. Mason’s non-interventionist and romantic vision of nature, however, was markedly different from

¹⁵¹ Ken Buck, *Bill Mason: Wilderness Artist from Heart to Hand* (Toronto: Rocky Mountain Books, 2005), 163.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

the views of the CWS. Mason claimed that humanity's designs to manage wildlife only created a bigger wedge between people and the natural world. Monitoring growth rates and capturing wolves for scientific research, although well-intentioned, were forms of control, and therefore reinforced the deeply lodged belief that humans were superior to nature. For Mason, this supercilious approach to wildlife management was woefully shortsighted and even immoral. Animals such as the wolf should be left to roam free, undisturbed. Only then could humans fully appreciate the splendor of the wild.

The disparity between the environmental perspectives of Mason and the conservationist philosophy of Canadian Wildlife Service is evident throughout *Death of A Legend*. Much to the chagrin of CWS, Mason did not trumpet the work of state biologists in the documentary. Instead, he made a “film that is on the side of the wolf.”¹⁵³ As long-time collaborator Ken Buck exclaimed, Mason turned a potentially “Disneyesque” film about the Canadian Wildlife Service into an “iconoclastic revelation of colossal mismanagement of wilderness and the environment.”¹⁵⁴ The documentary argues that the “wanton killer” myth of the wolf was so deeply ingrained in western lore that it had created a persistent cultural and legislative bias against the predator.¹⁵⁵ Although he does not mention the CWS by name, Mason implied that the CWS was “exhibit A” in the persecution of the wolf.

Society's enmity with the wolf was tragic in of itself, but it was also symptomatic of a deeper malady. As a devout evangelical Christian, Mason believed that human beings

¹⁵³ NFBA, *Death of a Legend* file, Film Information Sheet, n.d.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Buck, 166.

were hell-bent on destroying God's creation.¹⁵⁶ "In so many of [their] activities...have to destroy something in order to create something else. It all boils down to stupidity and greed ... the grinding war that all of us are waging against wild things," Mason wrote in *Canoescapes*.¹⁵⁷ In *Death of a Legend*, Mason pinpoints the arrival of Europeans in North America as a pivotal moment in humanity's alienation from nature. "Before man came into the picture," the continent was a "community of creatures maintained by tensions and change," the narrator states in the film.¹⁵⁸ (Mason dismisses the presence of "Indians" as having any major ecological impact on the landscape). The land was a biological Eden. But then the European settlers landed. Equipped with tools, a protestant work ethic, and a religious mandate to subdue nature, the New World immigrants ran roughshod over this dynamic "web," in which each "strand" supported the life of others.¹⁵⁹ The appearance of Europeans was hazardous to animals, especially for predators like the wolf, who were pigeonholed as bloodthirsty brutes. "Ecosystems did not account for the arrival of man," the narrator says pointedly as the film cuts to a montage of environmental ruin, including a gruesome sequence of a CWS agent shooting a wolf in the head.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Mason's Christian worldview was an important part of the NFB film *Waterwalker*, produced by Bill Mason, NFB (1984). For more on the intersection between Mason's environmentalism and his Christian worldview see: Bill Mason, *Path of the Paddle* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1980); Mason, "Perspectives on wilderness and creativity," *Park News*, 19 (2), 9-11; Mason, *Song of the Paddle* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988); James Raffan; *Fire in the bones: Bill Mason and the Canadian Canoeing Tradition* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996).

¹⁵⁷ Bill Mason, *Canoescapes* (North York: Stoddart, 1995), 156

¹⁵⁸ *Death of a Legend* (1971)

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 3.9. Still from *Death of a Legend* (1971)

But as Mason points out in the film, wolves were not murderous scoundrels driven by an insatiable lust for blood; they were complex and noble creatures. The predators were dangerous no doubt, but they were also complicated social creatures that even exhibited human traits – loyalty, compassion, generosity etc. Furthermore, wolves were essential to the health of ecosystems. Although many people claimed that wolves killed game indiscriminately, the predator was in fact a valuable member of its ecological niche. Echoing the work of the American conservationist, Aldo Leopold, Mason contends that the wolf is “essential to the natural scheme of things.”¹⁶¹ “The presence of wolves represents a healthy living wilderness, in ecological balance, and our lives are the richer for it,” the filmmaker explained in his outline for the project.¹⁶²

Mason’s advocacy for the animal was more than just about correcting Western society’s image of the wolf. By exhibiting the wolf’s noble traits, Mason hoped to

¹⁶¹ NFBA, Death of a Legend file, Film Information Sheet, n.d.

¹⁶² NFBA, Death of a Legend file, Bill Mason, “Outline for ‘The Wolf,’ Oct 3 1967, p.4.

rekindle in humankind, a love for all things wild.¹⁶³ Mason reflected in his memoirs that by capturing the beauty and dignity of the wolf onscreen he could help “bridg[e] the gap between ourselves and things natural.”¹⁶⁴ Wolves were powerful, dynamic animals, whose prodigious hunting abilities and peripatetic lifestyle exemplified what it meant to be free. “The wolf is a symbol of wilderness. To capture [it] on film was to capture the spirit of the wild for all to share,” Mason explained in the sequel to *Death of a Legend*, *Cry of the Wild*.¹⁶⁵

In order for society to experience this kind of primeval and semi-spiritual freedom, human beings needed to protect wilderness spaces and the organisms that lived there. But this solution posed a challenge: how could human beings manage something that was supposed to be wild free? Mason’s resolution to how society should go about protecting wolves was fundamentally different from those implemented by Canadian Wildlife Service. CWS believed that statistics, scientific research, and modern technologies were required to protect wildlife from harm. Mason, however, argued that wildlife should be left alone. In *Death of a Legend*, Mason reminds audiences of the innate ability of the wolf to take care of itself. He presents the animal as highly intelligent, equipped with social skills that allow it to survive in seemingly inhospitable environments without the help of man.

¹⁶³ Loo, 177. Tina Loo writes extensively about Bill Mason’s *Cry of the Wild* and *Death of a Legend* in her book *States of Nature*. She contextualizes these films within emerging environmentalism, and sentimental ideas about wildlife. Her work, to which I am indebted, does not explore how these films also reflected State values, however. This is where my work diverges from Loo’s analysis of Mason’s films.

¹⁶⁴ Mason quoted in James Raffan. *Fire in the Bones: Bill Mason and the Canadian Canoeing Tradition* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996) 188.

¹⁶⁵ *Cry of the Wild*, produced by Bill Mason, NFB, 1972

Despite Mason's insistence that nature should be left unmolested, his documentaries were fraught with contradictions. *Death of a Legend* and *Cry of the Wild* were negotiated texts, shifting from Mason's radical wilderness perspectives to traditional attitudes endorsed by the Canadian Wildlife Service. Most of the scholarship on Bill Mason celebrates the radical aspects of his environmental filmography. However, his documentaries about wolves were more complicated than most assume. A deeper analysis of his wolf documentaries shows that the ideology of the documentary's sponsor, CWS, is clearly present. During production the Wildlife Service demanded that Mason include more sequences of their biologists doing fieldwork.¹⁶⁶ Since CWS was financing the film, Mason had little choice but to add sequences of government agents operating in the field. One of the scenes he filmed for the documentary was of CWS biologist George Kolenoski attaching a radio collar around a she-wolf. The sequence feels misplaced in a film about the inherent freedom of nature. The collar is a symbol of the authority of the government over Canadian wildlife. The radio collar can "monitor wolves over great distances," the narrator says. Instruments like the one shown in the film were essential for state biologists who needed to study wolf movement and behavior from afar.¹⁶⁷ With the data provided by the collar, the CWS could implement specific management strategies and protect the animal. The film also documents the fieldwork of CWS biologist Douglas Pimlott, who watches the behavior of the animal from afar. According to the documentary, Canadians were becoming more cognizant of the diet of the wolf through his tireless observations in

¹⁶⁶ NFBA, Death of a Legend File, "Notes of a Meeting Held to Discuss Production Plans for the Wolf Film," Sept 21, 1967.

¹⁶⁷ *Death of a Legend* (1971)

the Arctic. Ironically, Pimlott was one of the CWS biologists who had justified the killing of wolves ten years before the release of the film.

The technocratic ideology of the Canadian Wildlife Service is also latent in the material production of the film. In *Death of a Legend*, Mason films wolves with techniques developed by CWS agents to survey wildlife populations, including birds-eye perspectives shot from planes. On a practical level, this viewpoint enabled spectators to see how wolves hunt in the Arctic. (Though, the wolves are mostly seen fleeing from the aircraft in the film). Yet, it also implied that humans have the capacity to observe all aspects of wolf behavior. In the context of the film, this synoptic gaze mimicked the objectivizing scrutiny of the CWS who used aerial technology to reduce complex animal behavior such as migration and hunting patterns to graphs and spreadsheets.

Mason's declaration that humans should embrace "nature's schemes" and not interfere with wild processes was further challenged when he ran up against the logistics of a difficult film shoot. Ernie Kuyt, a biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service and a wolf expert himself, warned Mason that photographing wolves in their natural habitat was too costly.¹⁶⁸ Kuyt recommended that the filmmaker use an enclosure technique to photograph the animals. Mason reluctantly contacted the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests and asked if he could photograph a group of wolves they had captured and domesticated a few years prior.¹⁶⁹ The department agreed and Mason filmed the wolves in pens just outside of Algonquin Park. To get more footage of the predator, he then flew the

¹⁶⁸ NFBA, Death of Legend file, Bernard Devlin to David Bairstow, "Wildlife Project Feasability," June 27, 1966.p.2.

¹⁶⁹ NFBA, Death of a Legend file, Ernie Kuyt to Bernard Devlin, November 8, 1966.

wolves to Fort Smith along with several deer, which were used as bait. This allowed him to photograph the hunt.

Eco-critic Derek Bousé contends that the role of a wildlife filmmaker is to coax the animal-subject to behave in ways that exhibit their wild attributes.¹⁷⁰ As Mason found out, this was no easy task. A pack of wolves idling underneath a spruce tree in northern Ontario were indifferent to the whims of the director. Film and television “are about movement, action, and dynamism; nature generally is not,” writes Bousé.¹⁷¹ To get his subjects to “perform” for the camera, Mason domesticated wolves on his property near Meech Lake, Québec. Sparky, a docile female, and Big Charlie, the alpha male, were tamed as pups, while the other two wolves he brought to his property were feral. With the wolves safely enclosed on his property, Mason could photograph them at a moment’s notice, and from all sorts of vantage points. He could get them to perform for the camera by barking out commands or by feeding them. Keeping wolves in a pen also enabled him to capture rare events like the birth of seven wolf cubs. Mason ingeniously built a den butted against the back of one of the kennels where he kept the wolves. The back of the burrow was removable so he could poke his camera inside and film the entire birth without disturbing the mother.¹⁷² Mason justified to himself (and his frightened neighbors) that keeping the animals on his property was the only way he could effectively dispel the myth that they were bloodthirsty villains.

¹⁷⁰ Derek Bousé, *Wildlife Films* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000) 4..

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Buck 170.

Mason also used the medium-specific techniques such as camera movement, editing, and audio tracks to edit together a dynamic portrait of wolf behavior. The use of close-ups, for instance, is utilized in Mason's film to create characters and to encourage audiences to identify with them.¹⁷³ As film scholar Béla Balazs explains, "good close-ups radiate a tender human attitude in the contemplation of hidden things, a delicate solicitude, a gentle bending over the intimacies of life-in-the-miniature, a warm sensibility."¹⁷⁴ The close-up serves other purposes in Mason's documentary too.¹⁷⁵ First, it allowed the filmmaker to isolate a wolf on the screen, which in turn helped Mason individualize and personify the animal. Second, the close-up provided Mason with a plethora of editing options including point-of-view shots (POV), and reaction shots that could be later stitched together into an exciting sequence about fighting between pack members. Exciting perhaps, but entirely fabricated for the camera. The wolves that appear onscreen are not as wild or free as Mason claims they ought to be. They were framed in certain ways to satisfy audience curiosities and to create a sense of verisimilitude of wolves in their natural habitat.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 29.

¹⁷⁴ Bela Balazs, "Theory of the Film," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Reading*, 3rd edition, eds Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1985), 256.

¹⁷⁵ Close-ups were introduced in the 1920s when the telephoto lens was developed. The lens allowed filmmakers to simulate closeness to animals without startling them or risking the sharp claws and fangs of a particularly belligerent creature.



Fig. 3.10. Still from *Cry of the Wild* (1972), Directed by Bill Mason

The tension between Mason's desire to leave nature alone and his longing to show audiences what it was like to be a wolf is felt most acutely in *Cry of the Wild*. The sequel boldly comments on, and self-critiques his efforts to make a movie about wolves. In doing so, the filmmaker reveals how humanity's effort to control nature creates unintended and often deadly consequences for other organisms. At the beginning of *Cry of the Wild*, Mason is frustrated that he is unable to record wolves in their natural habitat. They either run away from the filmmaker, or have been killed before he arrives. Mason is able to document Arctic wolves in their natural habitat on Baffin Island, but even this is from a considerable distance. As he watches the wolves slope off into the tundra, Mason confesses that he wants to draw the animal closer. "I want to look into their eyes and discover the range of emotions and expressions that I knows they are capable of," he

says.¹⁷⁶ And so Mason decides to raise a pack of wolves on his property in Gatineau. The experiment is mostly a success. Not only does their capture make it easy to film their behavior, he and his family form deep bonds with Charlie and Sparky. However, Mason soon realizes that domesticating wolves has actually led to their imprisonment. Like the CWS, Mason controlled the animals and bent them to his demands. Despite his best intentions, the filmmaker had become a hunter with a camera; a zookeeper with a lens. He was a hypocrite. The regimented way the animals were bribed for the camera with meat, or prodded to get them to bare their teeth was incongruous with his conviction that nature should be left untouched. If he believed nature was to be protected from man's interference, how could he in good conscience keep wolves in a small enclosure? To rectify his mistake, Mason attempts to release Charlie and Sparky back into the wild. But the wolves are unable to hunt caribou on the island where they have been released. "Charlie's greatest joy in life was having his stomach rubbed," Mason observes sadly.¹⁷⁷ Fearing that Charlie will starve, the filmmaker decides to bring him back to Gatineau. By the end of the film, Mason understands that he has defiled nature by trying to possess it. And therein lies the environmental lesson of *Cry of the Wild* and *Death of a Legend*: man alienates himself further from nature when he tries to exert dominion over it. For nature to be truly protected, Mason concluded that he must be satisfied knowing wolves "roam wild and free."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶*Cry of the Wild*, 1972.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ This paradox is one of the central themes in Daniel Botkin's *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the 21st century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).



Fig. 3.11 Still from *Cry of the Wild* (1972)

Conclusion

This chapter highlights emerging tensions within NFB discourses about nature. Specifically, I show how state-centered narratives about the meaning of nature competed with “environmental” narratives that critiqued high modernism and its conviction that nature should be controlled or managed. In *Poison, Pests, and People*, Larry Gosnell argued that humanity’s efforts to boost agricultural productivity created unintended consequences for local environments and human bodies. Filmmakers such as David Bairstow were much more ambivalent about the role of the government in managing nature. Although Bairstow believed that industrial pollution disturbed local environments, he also believed that with proper knowledge and technological sophistication, modern society could correct the mistakes of the modern world. In *River with a Problem*, the contamination of the Ottawa waterway was a technical problem that could be solved by state expertise. Ernest Reid and Christopher Chapman likewise exhibited a confidence in

governmental knowledge. While the two filmmakers were critical of technological civilization and its conformist culture in *The Enduring Wilderness*, they ultimately believed that modern government institutions could protect pristine wilderness spaces from the appetites of man.

The wildlife documentaries of Bill Mason offer the most complicated example of the ways in which NFB discourses were evolving. As a sponsored film, Mason's *Death of a Legend* was beholden to certain views about wildlife management. However, Mason also used the film as a platform to critique the Canadian Wildlife Service's management practices, and preach against society's technocratic way of interacting with the natural world. The transformation of the wolf from a ravenous brute that needed to be controlled, to a symbol of Platonic wilderness, was emblematic of the evolution in NFB representations about nature. For the first time in Film Board history, a filmmaker had advocated for an environmental ethic in which nature was left to its own "rhythms and patterns." This perspective, of course, conflicted with the high modern ideology of the film's sponsor. Agencies like the Canadian Wildlife Service believed that it was possible, indeed essential, to manage wildlife. They argued that by tagging animals, and killing renegade pests, state experts could maintain a healthy balance and protect entire ecosystems. Despite their authority, scientists and government agents were not unchallenged in their beliefs about the value and meaning of the environment. Official voices had to share discursive spaces about the definition of nature with independent filmmakers and activists. *Death of a Legend* and *Cry of the Wild* testified to the growing significance of NFB films as a protest medium, where government policies were

challenged, even ridiculed. As Tina Loo notes in *States of Nature*, Bill Mason made an argument for the protection of the wolf “because of its role in the ecosystem,” not because of its economic value.¹⁷⁹ More importantly, he incorporated this argument into a larger comment about the “morality of a world that would countenance and indeed participate in its disappearance.”¹⁸⁰ For the environmentalist, the battle against the wolf was a “violent manifestation” of the “technocratic and the modern,” and a sobering “reminder of the uncertain benefits of a progress built on extinguishing the wild.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Loo, 181.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Challenge for Change: Cree Hunters of Mistassini and Alternative Visions of Nature

“Objectively, unemotionally, one can state that the development of James Bay will set Quebec on a new road to progress. It is an undertaking, which once again will furnish tangible proof of Quebec’s vitality and spirit of enterprise, for the development of James Bay is the most daring project in Quebec’s history. James Bay is the land of tomorrow.” James Bay Development Corporation, initial phase plan.¹

“We are told that we own the land. But really nobody can own it, the land. For eventually everyone dies.” Sam Blacksmith, Cree Hunter.²

“Once the dispossessed and powerless have access to the means of information they can no longer be misled by Establishment bullshit. And that is in itself a revolution.” Patrick Watson, 1970.³

Several hundred years ago a large population of Cree lived in the vast boreal forests of northern Quebec, where they hunted, fished, and tended to the land. In the seventeenth century, men with surnames like “Hudson,” “James,” “Radisson,” and “des Groseilliers” arrived on the continent and challenged their claim to this territory, which the Cree called Eeyou Istchee, “the land of the people.” The white merchants established trading posts along the riverbanks and shorelines of Eeyou Istchee to help streamline the export of furs and other commodities valued by the European aristocracy. In the first years of contact, the relationship between the traders and the hunters was generally agreeable and trade flourished. In the following centuries, however, larger European enterprises appeared in James Bay and the relationship soured. Settlers coveted the supply of timber and other natural resources buried beneath the surface of the landscape. The

¹ Quoted in Boyce Richardson, *Strangers Devour the Land* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991).

² *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*, produced by Colin Low, NFB, 1974

³ Patrick Watson, “Challenge for Change,” *Canadian Film Reader* ed. S. Feldman and J. Nelson (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977), 112.

rapprochement between the James Bay Cree and white people became more discordant as the latter asserted its dominion over the landscape. The conflict continued on through confederation and into the modern age, as nationalists and industry titans looked to the North Country for profit and purpose.

The history of the Cree appears to be one of cultural and ecological decline: the old ways were disappearing; hunting grounds were razed; lakes were dammed, and rivers were flooded. Youth were sent to far away residential schools to learn how to be God-fearing citizens. In sum, the white man had permanently altered the social and environmental landscape of the Cree. But this narrative is missing something. As Hans Carlson writes in *Home is the Hunter*, the “energy and imagination” of the Cree was only challenged by modern society, not extinguished.⁴ The story of the Cree is a tale of resilience and adaptation. Carlson is concerned with how the James Bay Cree responded to the annexation of their homeland into “the rational vision and economy of North America.”⁵ *Home is the Hunter* contains many accounts of Cree adaptation and creativity in the face of environmental and cultural change. For example, in the early twentieth-century Cree hunters worked closely with representatives from the Hudson Bay Company and the government to protect declining beaver populations. The hunters created a simple but effective reserve system that protected game stock.⁶ Carlson also shows how the Cree adjusted to massive changes to their homeland in the twentieth-century. High modern projects like La Grande threatened to flood the hunting ground of the Cree and

⁴ Hans Carlson, *Home is the Hunter* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 168.

completely changed their interaction with the land. “With both wires and words, La Grande project integrated a distant region into the technical geography of an international electrical grid and into a cultural narrative that understood the land in a way that was anathema to Cree tradition,” Carlson observes.⁷ Yet, as Carlson notes, “Cree culture continued to move like river water to find a path around the rocks: it adapts and yet remains whole.”⁸ In the midst of radical transformations and modifications to the James Bay territory, the Cree continued to tend their garden and draw meaning from the land. They “learned a new way of negotiating power in order to maintain themselves and their relationship to the land.”⁹ Carlson’s story of the Cree and their confrontation with the modernization projects of the provincial government intersects with my own investigation of the National Film Board. One of the ways the semi-nomadic hunters opposed the James Bay project was by making intelligible to outsiders their complex relationship with the land through the technologies of cinema. In 1972, a group of Cree from the village of Mistassini permitted NFB filmmakers Boyce Richardson and Tony Ianzelo to document their seasonal hunt in the bush. The hunters believed that by letting the filmmakers record their traditional life, Canadian spectators would see the vitality of Cree culture and understand the importance of the land to their existence.

It is my contention in this chapter that the James Bay Cree used NFB filmmaking, a different kind of technology of “wires and words,” to challenge the province’s technocratic and nationalistic discourse about nature, and replace it with an alternative

⁷ Ibid. 204.

⁸ Ibid. 257.

⁹ Ibid. 205.

vision of human and non-human relationships. The film developed by Richardson and Ianzelo, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974), was not the first NFB documentary to challenge the utilitarian idea that human beings were superior to nature. (As I argued in the chapter 3, filmmakers such as Christopher Chapman, Bill Mason and Larry Gosnell condemned Canadians' instrumentalism.) But it was unique in other respects. *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* confronted the Board's white-centric interpretations of nature. In *The Enduring Wilderness*, Chapman and Ernest Reid defined wilderness as a place where human beings are not.¹⁰ This romantic characterization symbolically removed indigenous peoples from their homelands where they lived for centuries.¹¹ In contrast, Richardson and Ianzelo supported the cosmology of the Cree, which saw nature and human culture as inexorably connected. Throughout the documentary, the Cree show the filmmakers that they are keystone species in the wilderness, intimately fixed to a wider web of ecological relationships. In *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination*, Julie Cruikshank explains that local indigenous peoples frequently use stories about nature "to comment on broad human issues," and to "narrate complexities in local economic social life."¹² These accounts contrast with the stories of outsiders who perceive nature from an empirical and instrumentalist point of view. As Cruikshank notes,

¹⁰ "Wilderness," asserts historian Carolyn Merchant, "has been redefined in ways that exclude Native Americans and discourage access by minorities and disadvantaged peoples." Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," in *Environmental History* 8 no. 3 (2003), 381

¹¹ Not all films erased indigenous peoples from the wilderness, however. It should be noted that NFB films also racialized Indigenous people as aspects of a wild and primitive landscape. In Doug Wilkinson's films, the Inuit are integrated into the northern landscape. In doing so, Wilkinson perpetuates an image of the Other.

¹² Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 75.

outsiders typically define nature in terms that befit “imperial expansion, science, religion, and nationhood.”¹³ Cruikshank’s differentiation between local stories and stories told by colonial outsiders is particularly germane to *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*. The documentary was an explicit effort by the Cree subjects to counter the imperial and high modern narratives of the state by demonstrating the complexity of their encounters with the land. For the first time in National Film Board history audiences were able to “see the world through Indian eyes.”¹⁴

Cree Hunters of Mistassini was significant in other ways too. The documentary encouraged the Cree to effect political change on their own terms. The documentary was a catalyst for the Cree, who, after seeing the film, returned to the James Bay bush in defiance of Quebec’s hydroelectric project. The documentary therefore illustrates the impact this kind of activist cinema can have on the extra-filmic world, especially the ecological relationships between human beings and the environment.

Challenge for Change

To understand the political, ecological, and cinematic import of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* in NFB cinema it is paramount that we examine the environment in which it was produced. The documentary’s radical environmental narrative was made possible by Challenge for Change, a NFB program that was specifically tasked with making films that encouraged social activism. CFC ran from 1967 to 1980 and produced two hundred and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Richardson quoted in Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 170.

fifty films. It was considered by many to be one of the NFB's most influential and provocative contributions to Canadian non-fiction cinema. The first inkling of the future CFC program occurred in 1965 when the Canadian Privy Council requested that the National Film Board make a documentary about poverty, an issue that still persisted despite governmental efforts to expand social welfare services. Executive Producer John Kemeny agreed with the Privy Council's suggestion and assigned Tanya Ballantyne to make a documentary about a Canadian family "trapped in the teeth of grinding poverty."¹⁵ While researching for the project, the filmmaker met the Baileys, a family of twelve living in a derelict part of Montreal. Ballantyne and her crew followed the family around their apartment for three weeks. They filmed the struggles of Mrs. Bailey to feed her ten children and the labours of Mr. Bailey to rescue his family from the city's underclass. When it was released, Canadian spectators praised *The Things I Cannot Change* (1966) for its gritty portrayal of destitution.¹⁶ It received six awards in Canada, and even won the prestigious Robert. J. Flaherty award for best feature length documentary. The NFB was less impressed. Kemeny and others inside the Board considered the documentary to be exploitive and insensitive. One of the most vocal critics of the documentary was NFB filmmaker Colin Low. Low did not approve of *The Things We Cannot Change* because it reveled in the desperation of the Bailey's dire situation and it did not afford them an opportunity to speak for themselves.¹⁷

¹⁵ Evans, 158.

¹⁶ *The Things I Cannot Change*, produced by John Kemeny, NFB, 1967.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The NFB was disappointed with the documentary, but it liked the idea behind it. Members from the Privy Council and the National Film Board began discussing how they could use non-fiction cinema to cultivate meaningful exchange between ordinary citizens and larger governmental institutions. In the winter of 1967, an interdepartmental committee consisting of representatives from the federal government and the NFB was formed. A month later the committee launched a new production/distribution program that would provide marginalized people with an opportunity to “talk back” through filmmaking.¹⁸ It was called Challenge for Change.

The architects of Challenge for Change had two aims. Firstly, CFC would interpret social issues to people who did not have the resources or the education to understand them. CFC members believed that the capacity of film to communicate emotion was particularly suited to this task. “Unorthodox ideas are much more likely to be accepted if presented on emotional as well as intellectual grounds,” the committee explained in its proposal. “Many of those to whom ideas must be communicated are semi-literate. Film is the ideal way to reach them.”¹⁹ Secondly, Challenge for Change would provide a “voice to the voiceless.”²⁰ For Low, Kemeny, and the other representatives disenfranchised groups facing seemingly insoluble circumstances could use movie camera to record their experiences. CFC believed that handing filmmaking technologies over to the subject would “cultivate debate,” “disassemble hierarchies,” and stimulate

¹⁸ NFBA, Challenge for Change file, “Challenge for Change: Proposal for an Action-Program of Film Activities in the Area of Poverty,” January 16th 1967. p. 1.

¹⁹ NFBA, Challenge for Change file, “Proposal for a Program of Film Activities in the Area of Poverty and Change,” February 16, 1967. p.1.

²⁰ Ibid.

community empowerment.²¹ CFC was optimistic that the program, which “derived its dynamism both from the vitality of the citizens and from the commitments of the Challenge for Change/ Société Nouvelle team,” would be “an original and effective instrument of democracy.”²²

One of the first projects to emerge out of the politically ambitious CFC was Colin Low’s Fogo Island experiment, a series of twenty-six short films about the inhabitants of a fishing community in Newfoundland.²³ Unable to ply their trade as fishermen, the islanders were told by the government that they had to relocate to the mainland. The occupants were not in favour of the government’s edict. To help facilitate a dialogue between the disgruntled Fogo residents and the federal government, Low interviewed the islanders. The interviewees talked about their hopes, their fears, and their ties to the fishing industry. Low also encouraged them to comment on the filmmaking process itself. The Fogo Island residents had strong opinions about how they were being presented. During the interviews, the islanders told the NFB filmmaker how he should edit the footage. When the interviews were screened for the residents, Low filmed their responses, creating a series of *vérité* feedback documents.. The “Fogo Island process” was a watershed moment for Challenge for Change. The program began as a sociological

²¹ NFBA, Challenge for Change file, “Challenge for Change Program: A Report Prepared by the National Film Board of Canada, December 11, 1967. p 1.

²² NFBA, Challenge for Change file, “Challenge for Change,” December 18, 1973. p.2.

²³ The idea for the project originated in 1965, prior to the start of Challenge for Change, when Donald Snowden, then Director of the Extension Department at Memorial was discouraged by the urban focus of the Economic Council of Canada’s “Report on Poverty in Canada.” Snowden, who had been involved in other NFB projects about the North, wanted to show Canadians how rural Newfoundlanders felt about poverty and resettlement. In 1967, Snowden discussed his ideas with Low and introduced him to the Memorial University’s Fogo Island field officer Fred Earle. Low credited Earle with sparking his interest in the project.

project on the issue of poverty, but the film series demonstrated that cinema could be used to examine a variety of social issues from the ground up. CFC quickly expanded its scope to include other political topics such as sexism, racism, and environmental concerns.

In 1969, Challenge for Change merged with the NFB's French program, Société Nouvelle. Together, the programs developed "self-examination projects" with small communities. CFC lent Portapak Sony video cameras and live-sync sound equipment to local groups and taught them how to use the lightweight technology.²⁴ Citizens began making short films about their discontentment with large institutions, including the government, and their disinclination to fight systemic inequalities. The most radical films to come out of this experiment were documentaries made by indigenous people. In *These Are My People* (1969), filmmakers Willie Dunn, Roy Daniels, and Michael Kanentakeron Mitchell documented the negative impact the white man and his policies had on the people living at Awkesasne (St. Regis Reserve).²⁵ *You Are on Indian Land* (1969), which was also directed by Michael Kanentakeron Mitchell, recorded the dramatic protest by the Mohawk on the International Bridge between Canada and the United States. Mitchell hoped that by filming the demonstration he would draw attention to his people's political grievances.²⁶

²⁴ Video technology was cost-effective and it provided an instantaneous record of what was being filmed.

²⁵ Noel Starblanket, "A Voice for Indians: An Indian Film Crew," *CFC/SN newsletter*, issue no. 2 (Fall 1968) p. 2.

²⁶ *You Are On Indian Land*, produced by George C. Stoney, NFB, 1969.



Fig. 4.1 Still from *You Are On Indian Land* (1969), directed by Michael Kanentakeron Mitchell

The first five years of Challenge for Change were a commercial and critical success. In 1971 the Departments of Agriculture, National Health and Welfare, Labour, Regional Economic Expansion, Central Mortgage and Housing, and Indian Affairs and Northern Development, contributed funds to CFC.²⁷ The budget for the program at this stage was \$1.4 million, half of which was supplied by the NFB and the other half by the federal departments. By 1972, CFC had produced fifty-one movies, and showed them on 4,000 screens, to over two million viewers. In 1975, though, the program began to stagnate. As Gary Evans explains, “the whole enterprise had grown so routine with the proliferation of bureaucracy that the full committee was left sitting on its hands with

²⁷ A representative from each contributing department, as well as six representatives from the NFB, comprised the committee, which was chaired by member of the Privy Council office.

nothing to do.”²⁸ The committee reluctantly extended funding to CFC in 1978 with the stipulation that the program would be terminated if governmental representation fell below four departments. Challenge for Change limped on, but for many inside the NFB the program felt staid and unimaginative. After thirteen years, in 1980, budget cutbacks and institutional changes finally killed CFC.

Whether or not Challenge for Change was effective in providing a “voice for the voiceless” is up for debate. John Grierson, the NFB’s cantankerous founder, considered the program to be “impractical,” “juvenile,” and “provincial.”²⁹ The ex-commissioner complained that CFC was contradictory to the original mandate of the NFB because it did not promote “Canada in the making.”³⁰ Colin Low, by contrast, believed that the program was a crucial step in “incorporating media into the democratic process.”³¹ CFC filmmakers Dorothy Todd Hénaut and Bonnie Sherr Klein (mother of activist and writer Naomi Klein) concurred, claiming that the video experiment “accelerated perception and understanding and therefore accelerated action.”³² Boyce Richardson, the director of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* likewise believed that CFC was an effective instrument in fostering discourse between ordinary Canadians and the government amidst a “turbulent period.”³³ “Information is not just the government informing the people of what it is doing, but a loop which includes the response: the people must inform government of what they

²⁸ Evans, 175.

²⁹ Grierson quoted in Evans, 172. See also: Colin Low, “Grierson and Challenge for Change,” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* ed. Waugh, Baker, Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); John Grierson, “Memo to Michelle about Decentralizing the Means of Production,” in *CFC/SN Newsletter* no. 8 (spring 1972).

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Low, 17.

³² Dorothy Todd Hénaut and Bonnie Sherr Klein, “In the Hands of Citizens: A Video Report” in *CFC/SN newsletter* no. 4 (Spring-Summer 1969), 5.

³³ NFBA, Challenge for Change file, Boyce Richardson, “Film in the Service of the People,” n.d. p. 1.

think,” Richardson explained.³⁴ For the journalist-turned-filmmaker, CFC helped facilitate this “loop.” CFC was an “anomaly, but a glorious one,” Richardson concluded.³⁵

With the exception of John Grierson, NFB filmmakers generally viewed the Challenge for Change experiment as a triumph. Film scholars, however, are more ambivalent about whether or not Challenge for Change fulfilled its mission to stimulate social change.³⁶ In the edited collection *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, the editors describe CFC as a “glittering chunk of the heritage of both Canadian arts and Canadian democracy, with its bold artistic experimentations and its political dreams of transformation.”³⁷ But not every contributor is as celebratory of CFC as the editorial staff of the book. Zoe Druick, who has written extensively about the NFB, argued that the Liberal mandate of the federal government shaped CFC. The role of the State in the creation of the program caused dubious and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ There are scholars who believe CFC was an important moment in Canadian documentary cinema. In his book *In the National Interest*, Gary Evans thought that Challenge for Change gave the public a means to “vent their frustration and anger,” an act “important to democracy’s health.” (175) Evans goes on to claim that CFC allowed progressive filmmakers to use their art to help marginalized groups take charge of their own destinies and “aspire to an equitable social structure in a complex bureaucratic society.” (175) Evans further explains that CFC’s legacy can be assessed in other contexts. Although the program ended in 1980, filmmakers like Bonnie Sherr Klein went to New York to preach the “media to the people” movement. Other filmmakers used the ideas and resources of CFC to form the Film Board’s short-lived Environment studio E in 1974. (176). In his analysis of Low’s Fogo Island series, Jerry White, believed that CFC was “an aesthetically open-minded, socially engaged vision for Canadian cinema at a crucial time in Canadian history. Jerry White, “The Winds of Fogo,” in *The Cinema of Canada* ed. Jerry White (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 79. Film scholar Farbod Honarpishesh similarly believes that CFC films like *You Are On Indian Land* (1969) met their objective of inspiring dialogue between confliction groups. Farbod Honarpishesh, “You Are On Indian Land,” in *The Cinema of Canada* ed. Jerry White (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 89.

³⁷ *Challenge for Change*, 4.

contradictory outcomes.³⁸ Filmmakers may have claimed that the CFC was a platform for opposition, but it was mostly concerned with collecting data about Canadian populations and monitoring political debate.³⁹

Druick's analysis on the historical context of CFC is compelling but it overlooks several examples where filmmakers explicitly challenged the goals of the welfare state. The government was not just concerned with battling poverty or creating social security initiatives, such as Unemployment Insurance and the expansion of the National Housing Act, it was also invested in other projects: assimilating First Nations people into Canadian society, managing natural resources and so forth. The strategy of the federal government to make indigenous peoples full-fledged Canadian citizens was an extension of Prime Minister Trudeau's vision for a "just society." CFC films such as *Ballad of Crow Hunter*, *Our Land is Our Life*, and *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* unambiguously opposed this vision. The filmmakers and their subjects (often they were the same) criticized the schemes of the state to integrate aboriginals into mainstream Canadian society. They also challenged the view that subsistence survival was primitive and a problem that needed to be fixed through education and modernization programs.

Like Druick, Janine Marchessault is also critical of CFC. In her essay "Amateur Video and Challenge for Change," Marchessault contends that the program embodied a "technological determinism," which conflated "new communication technologies with

³⁸ Zoe Druick, "Meeting at the Poverty Line: Government Policy, Social Work, and Media Activism in the Challenge for Change Program," in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* ed. Waugh, Baker, Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 344.

³⁹ NFB historian D.B. Jones argues that CFC reflected the Liberal's twofold policy to democratize and regionalize culture, a strategy whose objective was to integrate the periphery into mainstream Canadian life. D.B. Jones *Movies and memoranda: an interpretative history of the National Film Board of Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Film Institute, 1981), 171-2.

democratic participation.” The NFB’s social experiment was not tenable because it was established on two contradictory impulses: liberalism (which sought to preserve the common good) and the CFC’s aims (to guarantee pluralism).⁴⁰ This ideological confusion inhibited local communities from actually defying the status quo. As a result, Challenge for Change instituted “access without agency.”⁴¹ In fact, the interactivity that video allegedly delivered actually perpetuated a form of “self-surveillance.”⁴² CFC “diffused action” and limited the potential for “the explosive effects of difference,” Marchessault concludes.⁴³

I want to step back from the debate whether Challenge for Change was successful in creating political change, and simply acknowledge that the program did more than any other production unit to encourage alternative visions of citizenship. The participatory ethos of Challenge for Change countered the objectification of earlier ethnographic methodologies and dismissed the colonial aesthetics of auteurism. This had a profound effect on narratives about indigenous people and the environment. It enabled Boyce Richardson, Tony Ianzelo and the Cree hunters of Mistassini to make a documentary about the James Bay landscape. The conflict between the Cree and the province of Quebec epitomized the helpless position in which marginalized groups often found

⁴⁰ Janine Marchessault, “Amateur Video and Challenge for Change,” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* ed. Waugh, Baker, Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 365.

⁴¹ Ibid. 354.

⁴² Ibid. 360.

⁴³ Ibid. 360. Film scholar Scott Mackenzie agrees with Marchessault’s analysis. In his article “Société nouvelle: Challenge to Change in the Alternative Public Sphere,” Mackenzie notes that “the conceptualization of the creation of public voice, and its actualization were two different issues.” Scott Mackenzie, “Société nouvelle: Challenge to Change in the Alternative Public Sphere,” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* ed. Waugh, Baker, Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 326. CFC had a lot to say about how and why people should change, but it did very little to create opportunities for citizens to mobilize off camera.

themselves. CFC believed that a film about Cree hunting culture would generate sympathy for the Cree and simultaneously show indigenous and non-indigenous audiences the complexity of their ecological and spiritual relationship with nature.

The James Bay Project and the Origins of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*

On April 30th, 1971, Quebec premier Robert Bourassa unveiled his plans for the “project of the century,” a multi-billion dollar hydroelectric enterprise that would increase the power output of the country by a third. Standing in front of a three-paneled screen at the Québec Colisée in Quebec City, Bourassa explained to his rapt audience that the province would divert and dam three major rivers flowing into James Bay - La Grande, Great Whale, and Rupert. Harnessed by the technological prowess, the powerful rivers would generate a whopping 10,300 megawatts of electricity for the province alone. But the development was more than just a quest for more energy. According to Bourassa, the James Bay project was “the key to economic and social progress,” “political stability,” and ultimately, the “future of Quebec.”⁴⁴ The timing of the project was important. The premier of the Liberal party was not exactly popular in the 1971. He had not fulfilled his promise that he would bring one hundred thousand jobs to Quebec and he looked weak during the October Crisis.⁴⁵ To conciliate his voters, Bourassa looked to the North. As a young and competent technocrat who embraced the new Quebecois policy of nationalism, the confluence of rivers and lakes at James Bay signaled a bright future for Quebec.

⁴⁴ Carlson, 207.

⁴⁵ Especially in comparison to Prime Minister Trudeau, who had invoked the War Measure’s Act against the Front de liberation du Québec

Of course, the space targeted for development was not empty. There were approximately 10,000 Cree and Inuit living in the James Bay region at the time of the announcement. And they were not thrilled with the project. The inhabitants loudly protested the hydroelectric schemes of the province, claiming that the project would destroy their homeland and their way of life. La Grande may usher in a new era of independence, but for the Cree, the project would destroy their livelihood. Damming lakes and rivers would flood their hunting grounds. The deluge of water would inundate the wetlands of the region and annihilate important beaver and waterfowl habitats.⁴⁶

With help from the Arctic Institute of North America, the Cree gathered at the village of Mistassini on June 28, 1971 to their options. It was the first time in modern history that the Cree met as a regional political body. Together, the elders from the villages decided to ask Indian Affairs to intervene. “Only the beavers have the right to build dams in our territory,” the elders explained in a letter to the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien.⁴⁷ The Cree waited for the federal government to respond, but nothing came. On April 18 1972, the elders decided to file a permanent injunction that prohibited the Quebec government from proceeding with the project. After months of hearings and legal jockeying about who had rights and who did not, Mr. Justice Albert H. Malouf agreed to grant the injunction to the Cree. The decision by the judge was overturned a week later by the Supreme Court, but judge’s verdict forced the Quebec government to take the Cree

⁴⁶ See: Harvey A. Feit, “Hunting and the Quest for Power: The James Bay Cree and the Whitemen in 20th Century” in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience* ed. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 181-223. Ronald Niezen, “Power and Dignity: The Social Consequences of Hydro-electric Development for the James Bay Cree,” *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30 no. 4 (November 1993) 512.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Richardson, 84.

more seriously in any future development projects. To improve relations with the Cree, the province offered to settle. The hunters, unsure of how to proceed, returned to the village of Mistassini to discuss the offer. Finally, in August 1974, the Cree accepted the proffered settlement. It was officially approved in November 1975 in a contract that became known as the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

The legal battle between the province of Quebec and the James Bay Cree articulated the fundamental differences in their notions of environment and place. It pitted a hunting culture that saw the James Bay wilderness as a complex and mysterious web of beings, against a dominant culture that viewed nature as a homogenous object that could be used for economic profit.⁴⁸ One of the challenges the James Bay Cree faced in the ongoing debate over “whose land?” was the court’s limited understanding of the Cree’s conceptualization of the James Bay wilderness. To determine whether or not the Cree actually had rights to the land, government lawyers pigeonholed the aboriginals’ hunting culture into western narratives of science, progress, and ownership. In the eyes of the court, hunting was just an occupation rather than an activity that was both physical and spiritual. The fullness of the Cree life was reduced to statistics, graphs, and charts. As Boyce Richardson observes in his book *Strangers Devour the Land* (1976), Bourassa and his gang of lawyers spent months trying to get the Cree to admit they were “more white than Indian,” that they used “ski-does and ate Kentucky Fried Chicken.” They insisted on asking the wrong questions such as “How much?” “How many?” “Where’s the

⁴⁸ As anthropologist Harvey Feit notes, the Cree’s idea of an intelligent order is analogous to that of ecological scientists who see nature as an organic system. Feit, 4.

boundary?” “What’s the address?” It was, as Richardson puts it, “a dialogue of the deaf.”⁴⁹

Frustrated by the limitations of the court system, the Cree looked for other ways to communicate the breadth and depth of their relationship with the land. One way was through the cinema of Challenge for Change. With the help of Boyce Richardson and Tony Ianzelo, the Cree hunters were able to articulate, and more importantly visualize the depth of their relationship with the land. Richardson and Ianzelo made two documentaries in support of the Cree: *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and *Our Land is Our Life*. The first film documents the lives of three Cree families as they establish a winter hunting camp near James Bay in northern Quebec. The second film, *Our Land is Our Life*, records the Cree’s final meeting in the village of Mistassini, in which the hunters ponder the government’s settlement offer from the province and reflect on the hydroelectric project’s possible impact on their culture.

Boyce Richardson and Tony Ianzelo were well suited for this project. Ianzelo was one of the first filmmakers to work with Indian Film Crew (IFC) trainees at the National Film Board in the 1960s.⁵⁰ Unlike Ianzelo, Richardson was not a trained filmmaker. He was a journalist. Richardson was born in New Zealand and worked in Australia, India, and England. He moved to Canada in 1957 and began writing for the *Montreal Star*. While at the *Star*, Richardson penned a series of articles on native rights and the ecological effects of northern development. Richardson left the newspaper and became a freelance journalist. He was still interested in the life of northern peoples and he needed

⁴⁹ Richardson, 23.

⁵⁰ Ianzelo had worked on Michael Mitchell’s *You Are On Indian Ground* (1969).

the freedom to go about as he pleased. His most important work in this period was about the James Bay Cree and their fight against the hydroelectric project. Richardson spent time with the locals, learning about the different ways in which the Cree lived off the land. The journalist quickly realized that large-scale development would destroy the subsistence culture of the Cree. But what could they do? “Never before in Canadian history had so politically powerless a group tried to stop so huge a scheme,” Richardson wrote concerning the bleakness of the Cree’s situation.⁵¹

In the summer of 1972, Robert Courneyer, chairman of the Challenge for Change interdepartmental committee and a civil servant in the Privy Council, suggested that Richardson make a documentary about aboriginal rights.⁵² Richardson was interested and began thinking about the project while he visited the Cree in northern Quebec. The journalist discovered that the “Indians felt strongly about the need for such a film.”⁵³ They wanted a documentary that presented their “arguments and feelings about the land” to “the dominant society.”⁵⁴ Richardson approached the NFB to see if they would be interested in a film about the impact of La Grande on Cree culture in James Bay. The idea was simple: Philip Awashish, a young university-trained Cree from the village of Mistassini, would travel from community to community interviewing his people about the hydroelectric project. Awashish would then show the footage to other Cree in James

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Before he made *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* Richardson directed *Job’s Garden* (1973), a documentary about Job Bearskin and his wife Mary. For the journalist-turned-filmmaker, the Bearskins’ lives exemplified the Cree’s profound understanding of humans’ role on this earth.

⁵³ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Assimilation Blues Film Notes,” Boyce Richardson, n.d.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Bay.⁵⁵ In addition to explaining to white people the significance of the landscape, Richardson was optimistic that the film would also encourage the Cree to protest the province of Quebec.⁵⁶ The producers of Challenge for Change were excited about the film proposal. The project was exactly the kind of movie the CFC was interested in. It would generate sympathy for the Cree way of life, and provide the Cree with an opportunity to broadcast their grievances against colonialism. The federal government was less enthused about the film idea, however. According to NFB historian Gary Evans, “there were powerful forces in Ottawa (in the Prime Minister’s office, some believed)...who did not want the subject [of the James Bay project] broached from a political point of view.”⁵⁷ In a memo to his superiors on the CFC committee, Richardson complained that the Privy Council did not approve of the film because of “political pressure from the highest level.”⁵⁸ While the reasons behind the government’s opposition to the proposed documentary are not revealed in any internal NFB documents, it can be speculated that the federal government did not want to further antagonize Quebec during this period of political turmoil.

Although the “vibrations were bad”, Richardson continued to work on the film.⁵⁹

In an interview with scholar Michelle Stewart, the filmmaker explained that he and executive producer Colin Low managed to “outsmart the feds” by pitching an alternate

⁵⁵ Boyce Richardson “Doctorate for Philip Awashish” in *The Nation*, September 11, 2009
<http://www.nationnews.ca/doctorate-for-philip-awashish/>

⁵⁶ There had never been a formal political meeting between the villages. Cree hunters had been frequently in touch through their hunting season, but none of this took the form of formal political gatherings

⁵⁷ Evans, 170.

⁵⁸ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Memo “Boyce Richardson to Interdepartmental Committee, Challenge for Change,” December 2, 1973. p. 1.

⁵⁹ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Assimilation Blues Film Notes,” Boyce Richardson, n.d.

project, which they described as a series of “anthropological documents.”⁶⁰ One of the films (*Cree Hunters of Mistassini*) would examine the Cree’s attitudes toward the land.⁶¹ On the surface the documentary seems to conform to the wishes of the government. It does not discuss the social impact of colonial projects like La Grande. Such commentary only “reinforces everybody’s prejudices,” Richardson opined.⁶² The film has no climax, no “cut” to a wide-shot of a flooded forest, or Bourassa bragging about the awesome power of the province’s obscene hydroelectric project. Instead, it concludes with the Blacksmith family packing their meager belongings for their journey south after another successful hunting season. The narrator simply remarks that the James Bay hydroelectric project is underway. And then, the documentary fades to black. The ambiguous ending mirrors the uncertainty of the Cree’s future.⁶³

Despite its seemingly apolitical format, the documentary was thoroughly revolutionary. In fact, Richardson declared that this seemingly benign ethnographic approach was better at making “an immensely powerful political point” than the heavy-handed approach of *Our Land is Our Life*, which was “full of heavily ironic juxtapositions designed to irritate right-wingers.”⁶⁴ By showing how important the land

⁶⁰ Richardson quoted in Michelle Stewart “Cree Hunters of Mistassini: CFC and Aboriginal Rights,” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* ed. Waugh, Baker, Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 182. Michelle Stewart argues that *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* was an important moment in NFB history because of its “commitment to aboriginal rights and representation.” (180). The film was a “testimony to the value and significance of Cree hunting life and to the possibility of meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.” (189)

⁶¹ During the production of the film, Richardson suggested that it was ultimately a “compromise” between the National Film Board and Richardson. Four films were green lighted for production under the rubric of Native People in Canadian society.

⁶² NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Notes from a Conversation with the Filmmakers” n.d. p. 1.

⁶³ There was no “beating the audience over the head” Richardson would say, just a “plain statement of the facts.” Richardson quoted in Stewart, 183.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

was to the Cree, the film tacitly asks, “how could anyone think of creating huge man-made lakes, or damming and diverting the ancient waters from which the Cree had received their sustenance since time immemorial?”⁶⁵ To understand this radical message, we need to unpack the film in greater detail.

Cree Hunters of Mistassini: A Radical Perspective on Ecological Relationships

Although Richardson had made only a single previous film (*Job's Garden*, 1973), the former journalist successfully draws the spectator into the world of the Cree. Richardson presents James Bay as an isolated habitat, where human and non-human beings have thrived together in relative harmony for “at least three thousand years.” In contrast to earlier Film Board documentaries about wilderness spaces, which generally depict the landscape as an object that should be dominated, or as a Platonic ideal, Richardson suggests that the James Bay region is a complex world from which humans make their living and take their meaning. A map of northern Quebec, superimposed on an aerial shot of the landscape, provides further context to this environmental and cultural reality. The wilderness looks impenetrable. It is surrounded by lakes and winding tributaries that cut through the forest from every possible angle. But even from this airborne perspective, the viewer can see that James Bay is an abundant landscape teeming with life. This idyllic moment is disrupted when Richardson acknowledges that this landscape is one of contest and colonial assimilation. The “white man” has begun to challenge the aboriginal’s claims to this land, Richardson explains in a voice-over.

⁶⁵ Boyce Richardson “Doctorate for Philip Awashish” in *The Nation*, September 11, 2009
<http://www.nationnews.ca/doctorate-for-philip-awashish/>

The rest of the documentary takes place at the hunting grounds of Sam Blacksmith, an old trapper and tallyman from the village of Mistassini.⁶⁶ The narrator tells us that Sam Blacksmith has been hunting on his 1,200 square acres of territory for approximately thirty years. After the opening aerial sequence, the film cuts to a long, uninterrupted scene in which the Cree families are introduced – the Blacksmiths, the Jollys, and the Abrahams. The subjects smile nervously at the film crew as the camera frames them in a style that is reminiscent of a family portrait. As Stewart observes, the uneasiness of the Cree in this moment is an “awkward” reminder that the filmmakers (and us, as viewers) are interlopers.⁶⁷



Fig. 4.2. Still from *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974), directed by Boyce Richardson

⁶⁶ The village of Mistassini is a small settlement originally established as a summer meeting place where the people would gather during the warm months of summer to catch fish, hunt caribou, trade their furs etc. Even in the 1960s, the village was little more than a collection of tents and huts around the Hudson’s Bay trading post and the Anglican Church. Through the 60s, government policy was to urbanize native people in villages, even those living off the land. The outside world came to Mistassini through provincial roads and power grids.

⁶⁷ Stewart, 185.

Upon first glance, it appears that Richardson and Ianzelo have represented the Cree as exotic subjects from a mysterious and unexplored world. Indeed, the image of the semi-nomadic hunters anxiously peering at the camera evokes the colonial aesthetics of early twentieth-century ethnographic documentaries. This kind of “orientalist” reading of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*, however, ignores the context of the film’s production and the agency of the subjects themselves. The reflexive film work of Richardson and Ianzelo was consistent with the CFC’s poststructuralist critiques of objectivity and enlightenment, which assumed that the observer was more knowledgeable and therefore superior. On several occasions after the film was released, the two filmmakers remarked about their involvement in the filmmaking process. Richardson and Ianzelo asked the Cree for permission to make the film with their help. This was the Cree’s film, not theirs. Indeed, Richardson was quick to note in several interviews that it was Sam Blacksmith and the other Cree participants who allowed the crew (and therefore us as viewers) to witness their hunting traditions. Before the film went into production, Blacksmith vetted Richardson and Ianzelo to see if the filmmakers could handle the rigors of bush life. After several meetings with the documentarians, Blacksmith decided that the men could visit his camp and make their movie.⁶⁸ Blacksmith saw an opportunity and did not just permit them because they seemed competent. In the documentary, Blacksmith concedes that he invited them to “show the reality and quality of Indian life.”⁶⁹ Richardson would later explain that “[Blacksmith] knew that one way to resist the project was to let people see what was involved in their way of life. [He] understood this film was to be seen by

⁶⁸ Richardson, 201

⁶⁹ *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974)

thousands on television.”⁷⁰ The old tallyman was conscious of performativity and saw filmmaking (and more broadly, the NFB) as a valuable resource that he could exploit for political and cultural purposes.

The political consciousness of Sam Blacksmith is an important element in the environmental discourses of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*. Until the 1960s, colonial perspectives generally characterized NFB films about indigenous peoples and their relationship to nature. Doug Wilkinson’s description of the Inuit in *Land of the Long Day* (1952), for example, was almost entirely shot from his Southern perspective. The Inuit subjects silently perform for the camera while Wilkinson, (or worse, a voice-actor) translates the significance of what is happening onscreen. *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*, though, is not an ethnographic record of Cree ecological principles or arcane rituals as observed by strangers. It is the hunter’s voice (and perspective) that testifies to the value and significance of Cree hunting life. The film itself is a visual and narrative expression of the Cree worldview sanctioned by the hunters themselves.⁷¹ The Cree’s authorship influenced the style and aesthetic structure of the CFC documentary. The Cree families dictated the pace of the documentary during post-production when they visited the director at his editing suite.⁷² According to Richardson, the Cree wanted to make sure that he was communicating their views about the land and culture accurately and respectfully.⁷³ A rough cut of the documentary was shown to the families in 1973 and

⁷⁰ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Notes from a Conversation with the Filmmakers” n.d. p.2.

⁷¹ Film scholar David MacDougall argues that the question of authorship is complicated in films of advocacy. The filmmaker is “always under instruction,” and the “ultimate meaning of the film remains with the film’s subjects.” David MacDougall, “Whose Story is it?” *Visual Anthropology* 7 no. 2 (1994), 2.

⁷² NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Notes from a Conversation with the Filmmakers” n.d. p. 1.

⁷³ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Assimilation Blues Film Notes,” Boyce Richardson, n.d.

again in March 1974. Each time the film was shown, the Cree translated key interviews and provided Richardson with feedback on certain sequences, especially scenes pertaining to food preparation and hunting rituals.⁷⁴

For the Cree, the most important aspect of their identity that they wanted to convey in the documentary was their relationship with the James Bay environment. On a practical level, the land they hunted on provided the hunters and their families with nourishment. The rich abundance of flora and fauna in James Bay sustained them even during the punishing winter months, September through April. But the land was so much more than this. The wilderness was also a place of great spiritual importance. Activities such as hunting, trapping, and fishing were closely defined and regulated by the Cree's belief in the supernatural.⁷⁵ Each time Blacksmith and the other Cree hunters entered the forest they encountered a world of spiritual beings and forces. The beaver, the bear, the grouse, and the moose each had their own personalities and temperaments. So too did the wind and the trees.

The Cree's attitudes and beliefs quite clearly diverge from normative representations of nature, and especially those of the state. Unlike the province of Quebec, which wanted to simplify the wilderness into a productive environment, the Cree embrace the complexity of the ecosystem.⁷⁶ Blacksmith and the other Cree argue in the film that each unique organism was physically and spiritually linked.⁷⁷ In once scene,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Claude Peloquin and Fikrit Berkes, "Local Knowledge, Subsistence Harvests and Social-ecological Complexity in James Bay" *Human Ecology* no. 37 (2009) 535.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ They have embraced what Gavin Van Horn and John Hausdorffer call "wildness." *Wildness: Relations of People and Place* ed. Van Horn and Hausdorffer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Blacksmith leaves the bones of a bear on top of a makeshift platform so the dogs cannot “violate them.” “Because nothing can be hidden from the bear,” Blacksmith and the other hunters treat the animal with respect. “If the bear knows he is not well respected” it will become very difficult to hunt him again.”⁷⁸ The smallest disturbance in the land could have an enormous impact on the hunter’s success, or a person’s survival.⁷⁹ Richardson explains in the narration that Blacksmith and the other hunters have to constantly contend with the capriciousness of the spirits. Any display of impertinence or carelessness could cause them to be resentful and therefore unwilling to give themselves up.

The Cree’s perception of the James Bay environment as a place of mutable personal beings and complex relationships is an important aspect of the Cree’s ecological worldview, and an essential aspect of the film’s radical subtext.⁸⁰ Since animals were more than just simple beasts, the hunter receives their life with gratitude and humility.⁸¹ He does not dominate it, or exploit it without thinking of the consequences. This show of respect was not just an ethical obligation, but one tied to the Cree belief in the web of life. In the film, the hunters kill a pregnant moose and then immediately perform a ritual. The moose was unable to fulfill her role as a mother, so the hunters “give a little of the life of the mother to the calf.”⁸² After cutting a piece of flesh from the dead cow, Blacksmith opens the jaws of the aborted calf and carefully places the meat in the mouth of the

⁷⁸ *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974)

⁷⁹ Claude Peloquin and Fikrit Berkes, 533.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 534.

⁸¹ The Cree hunter must track the presence of the animals by “looking.” He looks for tracks, spoor, feeding areas etc. *Nitao*, the root of the Cree term for hunting, fishing, and trapping, is closely related to the concept of going to fetch something. Feit, 3.

⁸² *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974)

animal. The ritual is meant to honor the moose so it would “continue to flourish.” “This is always done,” Blacksmith explains gravely to the camera.⁸³

The Cree’s understanding of how humans should interact with nature is an obvious counterpoint to the high modernism of Quebec. According to the Cree, the land is given to them by the spirits and was passed down from generation to generation. As scions of the land, the hunters were required to take care of it as though it were a garden.⁸⁴ They maintain the James Bay landscape by balancing harvest and growth in a pattern analogous to modern land management practices.⁸⁵ In an onscreen interview, Blacksmith tells Richardson that the hunter “may leave the ground alone for a year or two so there will be something there when we return. The [beaver] becomes scarce if we hunt every winter.”⁸⁶ The difference in the resource extraction habits between the Cree and the state are striking, and likely not lost on the people watching the documentary. Bourassa’s hydroelectric project proposed to take from the land without restraint. By contrast, Blacksmith and the hunters believe that nature has its limits and that it needs to be managed accordingly. Indeed, the subjects of the film constantly reiterate to the filmmakers that they are only stewards of the land, not its owner. Blacksmith informs that the area he lives on was given to him “after the old man who hunted on it died.” Since then, he has toiled on the land as a trapper, a fisherman, and a hunter for thirty years. But this did not mean he was its ‘Master.’ “A man who lives by hunting cherishes the land. A man who lives by hunting truly respects the land. A man who owns the land really cannot

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Richardson, 121.

⁸⁵ Feit, 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid. According to Feit, Cree rotate fishing and hunting grounds, which diffuses the pressure of hunting over space and time. They “rest it.”

because he dies,” Blacksmith concludes.⁸⁷ The Cree’s emphasis on harmony and stewardship suggest a deep bond with the land. While the system of ownership somewhat resembles the legal idea of property, there is something else that also ties the Cree to the land, makes it their own. In the film it becomes clear that the Cree have a cultural and spiritual union with the wilderness that supersedes the Quebec government’s legal definition of property and ownership.

Cree Agency and Ethnographic Cinema

Although *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* respects the ecological wisdom and humility of Cree hunting culture, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge some of the documentary’s limitations.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most conspicuous problem with the film is that the directors sometimes resort to an image of the ecological Indian. In the documentary, Richardson romanticizes the Cree community for surviving in the isolated wilderness “without accidents, illnesses, or quarrels.”⁸⁹ Such representations as we saw in Chapter 2 were commonplace in films about the Inuit, and demonstrate the enduring status of indigenous people as icons of a prelapsarian past.

There are other issues as well. Geographer Graeme Wynn criticizes Richardson and Ianzelo for contriving certain scenes in the documentary for dramatic purposes.⁹⁰ In an effort to create an exciting picture of bush life, the filmmakers transported several of

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Stewart, 187.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Graeme Wynn, “Forward,” in Hans Carlson, *Home is the Hunter* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), xvii

the Cree hunters to different parts of James Bay so they could photograph a moose kill.⁹¹ The documentarians also flew in nails and other building supplies so the Cree could build a hunting lodge that accommodated the film crew and their gear.⁹² On a practical level, these decisions made filming in the bush easier, cheaper, and more engaging. But as Wynn notes, this decision also reaffirms a colonial way of representing indigenous peoples. Even in the progressive *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* the filmmakers sometimes reverted to tropes that satisfied audience inquisitiveness about the exoticness of indigenous people.

It is true that CFC's insistence on community collaboration never fully obliterated the institutional (and ideological) biases of NFB filmmakers. Even CFC films about native rights rendered their subjects as quaint and alluringly alien. For the most part, though, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* avoids this kind of (mis)representation. The Cree in the documentary are clearly prepared for the challenges of a modern society. Blacksmith shows the cameraman that he uses "white man's technology" to survive the wilderness. Snowmobiles, chainsaws, and bush radios are common features in the hunting camp of the Cree. The difference between Cree and modern Canadian society, however, is that the people of Eeyou Istchee use technology carefully and with purposefulness. "Hunting values always places skill above superfluous technology," Ronald Niezen explains.⁹³

⁹¹ Richardson, 273.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Niezen, 515.



Fig. 4.3. Still from *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974)

The Cree also demonstrate their adaptability and resiliency to colonial assimilation in the documentary by assuming the cinematic means of production. Blacksmith, for instance, is cognizant that filmmaking can help the Cree communicate their ties to the James Bay landscape, and help their cause against the government. This agency anticipates the historical analysis of Hans Carlson, whose investigation of the James Bay Cree accounts for both continuity and change in Cree life, especially in their encounters with modern Canada. Carlson writes, “contact was not so much a moment in time as an ongoing process through which two culturally different peoples began to live with and speak to and about one another.”⁹⁴ *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* shows viewers how the hunters appropriated certain aspects of Western culture so it could continue to live a traditional life in the James Bay landscape. Significantly, the Cree use modern technologies such as filmmaking to exhibit the vibrancy and vitality of their own traditional ways of living.

⁹⁴ Carlson, 17.

Post-film impact

While scholars such as Zoe Druick and Janine Marchessault claim that the Challenge for Change program only provided its subjects with an illusion of political agency, the legacy of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* demonstrates that certain films used NFB cinema as a springboard for political action and self-determination.⁹⁵ For the James Bay Cree, the production and distribution of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* was a major moment in their confrontation with the state. The film not only rallied the Cree to return to the bush, it also encouraged the Cree to unify against the government of Quebec and protest its hydroelectric project.

Before the documentary was released, the programmers at Challenge for Change described how *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* might be used to help the Cree challenge the claims of Bourassa. A proposal states:

Clearly, there is a need for an effective means of communication so as to improve the chances of the affected Indian population to become fully aware of the effect of the project on their lives. Then there is a need to bring these people together to form a common front to defend their rights and have a voice in the decisions affecting their lives. The aim of the James Bay Communications project would be to fill those needs for communication between the Indians, and subsequently between Indians and Southern decision-makers. With the help of WTR equipment in the hands of Native social animators, information can be rapidly disseminated, exchanges of views with and between the communities aided, and awareness of problems and possible solutions can be accelerated. The Cree will then be in a position to communicate with the Southern Quebec Indians, with the James Bay Corporation and the Quebec Government, and with Ottawa and can use videotape as one possible means of supporting their views.⁹⁶

To ensure the documentary had maximum political effect, the NFB released the film during the court case. In a 1974 memo, Challenge for Change filmmaker Ian Ball,

⁹⁵ Zoe Druick, "Meeting at the Poverty Line: Government Policy, Social Work, and Media Activism in the Challenge for Change Program;" Janine Marchessault, "Amateur Video and Challenge for Change."

⁹⁶ NFBA, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* file, memo, "The James Bay Communications Project," n.d..

explained to the regional distribution coordinators that “the negotiations between James Bay residents and the PQ government [were] underway.” Ball recommended to distributors they “expose the film as widely as possible” while the Cree negotiated with the province.⁹⁷ The NFB acted quickly. Between April and June of 1974, the NFB screened *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and its companion, *Our Life is Our Land* for sixty-one Cree communities in James Bay and southern Quebec. Challenge for Change used “animators” to promote the film and facilitate post-screening discussions with Cree audiences.⁹⁸ The CFC animators had three tasks: “to stimulate a reflection on the life, the culture, and the situation of the Indian; to sensitize Quebecers to the problems of the Indians and to the questions surrounding the economic development of the North; and to contribute to a growth in the solidarity between Indian groups by exposing the similarities of the kind of life they lead.”⁹⁹ Mark Zanis, a distribution coordinator with the NFB further urged the distributors to learn all the details about the hydroelectric project and its potential impact on Cree culture. He warned them to be prepared to answer questions like, “When did we consent to bargaining away our natural resources?” Zanis also instructed the animators to remind “audiences that the Cree allowed filmmakers to participate.”¹⁰⁰ This was not just a movie about the Cree, but rather a film *authorized* by the Cree.

⁹⁷ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Ian Ball to Lynne Williams and regional distribution coordinators, March 17, 1974.

⁹⁸ Challenge for Change films were primarily distributed to regions that had been marginalized by a country whose power and influence was highly concentrated in the urban South. NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, L. Renaud-Roberts to Regional Distribution Coordinators, “Memo,” October 1, 1974.

⁹⁹ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Mark Zanis, “NFB distribution Plan,” September 24, 1974.

¹⁰⁰ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Distribution Kit for Cree Hunters,” n.d. p. 2.

The James Bay Cree responded strongly to the film after it was shown. Cree audiences watched the documentary and understood what was being said about life in the bush on a cultural and symbolic level. They got the references and the metaphors. They laughed at the jokes that were made at the filmmakers' expense and nodded when the Cree hunters talked about the "old ways."¹⁰¹ A travelling report from aboriginal filmmaker Michael Mitchell, who toured across James Bay with the film, noted that the response by the Cree to the documentary was "overwhelming."¹⁰² In another report from a screening on Kipawa Reserve in Quebec, an animator reported that the crowd was "enthusiastic" about the film.¹⁰³ After the documentary was shown, the audience talked extensively about it "for hours."¹⁰⁴ According to the animator, spectators from the reserves recognized Sam Blacksmith and the other hunters in the film, which generated even more buzz for the documentary.¹⁰⁵ In a film screening that took place at Chief Billy Diamond's home at Rupert's House, Cree elders were moved to tears. They were overjoyed after seeing their own people "speaking publicly about what they feel about the land."¹⁰⁶ One Indian trapper in attendance agreed with its portrayal of hunting life. "What they say is very true."¹⁰⁷ "Are they planning to make more films about life in the bush?" he inquired.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini File, B. Petabwano, "Report on the Screening of Our Life is Our Land and Cree Hunters of Mistassini at Rupert's House and Eastmain in Quebec," 1975.

¹⁰² NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Michael Mitchell, "North American Indian Travelling College – Report of Screening of National Film Board's Films," p.2.

¹⁰³ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, "Kipawa Reserve (Quebec) report," December 22, 1974. p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, B. Petawabano, "Report on the Screening at the Rupert's House and Eastmain in Quebec," 1975.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.



Fig. 4.4. Still from *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1974)

The film made a tangible impact on Cree culture. In his PhD thesis, film scholar Rick Moore argued that the documentary “aided the Cree in the battle against hydro-Quebec.”¹⁰⁹ The archival record certainly substantiates this view. The film, which was distributed throughout northern Quebec, motivated a larger number of James Bay Cree to return to the land and reestablish their ties with the James Bay landscape. In his animator’s report, Mark Zanis explained that the documentary “revived memories of what that life was like in the wilderness.”¹¹⁰ He went on to report that a number of Cree returned to the bush after seeing Richardson’s films. “Many of the Cree trappers

¹⁰⁹ Rick Moore, *Canada’s challenge for change: documentary film and video as an exercise of power through the production of cultural reality*, PhD diss. University of Oregon, 1988.

¹¹⁰ NFBA, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* file, Mark Zanis, “Animator’s Report,” 1974. See also: NFBA, *Challenge for Change* file, “Challenge for Change report on Cree Hunters,” November 29, 1974. P.1.

announced they were going to make plans to return to the bush in the winter,” Zanis explained. Cree families from the villages followed suit and “packed their belongings for the winter hunt.”¹¹¹ The documentary also aided the Cree’s resistance to the damming project. Before the announcement by Bourassa, Cree political life had generally been organized through family-based hunting communities. Rarely did Cree interact with other Cree from outside their villages. After the hydroelectric project was declared, Cree hunters from all over James Bay began to meet collectively to determine how they could oppose the hydroelectric project. Zanis further reported that the *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and *Our Land is Our Life* generated interest in the court case, and encouraged the Cree to attend the briefing in Fort George with their lawyers.¹¹² Richardson and Ianzelo similarly claimed that the documentary encouraged the semi-nomadic hunters to negotiate a small reduction on the scope of the project and to receive some financial compensation.¹¹³ While a settlement was not an ideal outcome for the Cree, it did allow them to determine their future in certain respects. As Chief Billy Diamond noted to the *Montreal Gazette*, the Cree were “very reluctant to sign the agreement,” but realized that by settling, “the rights and the land are protected as much as possible from white man’s intrusion and white man’s use.”¹¹⁴ “It guarantees that we can continue to live in harmony with nature,” Diamond added.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Boyce Richardson and Tony Ianzelo, “Report on Cree Hunters,” September 24, 1974.

¹¹⁴ Linda Diebel, “The Aftermath: “Natives Settle for 150 Million,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 16, 1974 p.1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Cree Hunters of Mistassini also influenced the environmental subjectivities of non-indigenous people. According to NFB employee Rick Dale, audiences in Ontario made a strong connection between the documentary and the media coverage of the Berger hearings around the Mackenzie Valley pipeline and the Indian blockade of a B.C. railway. “In all these events, the lifestyle, talents, and rights of our Indians were brought to the consciousness of non-natives. The Indians are making all kinds of waves. It is in this milieu that the Challenge for Change films are at their best – audiences want to know what’s going on and why,” Dale reported.¹¹⁶ After seeing the film, the Anglican Church exclaimed that it wanted the provincial government to halt all northern development until land claims had been settled.¹¹⁷ In the *Montreal Star*, film critic Joan Irwin praised the film for giving her a “clear view of real life of the North American Indian.” The documentary convinced her that the government should “leave in the Cree’s hand, the huge tracts of wilderness land they need and tend so carefully.”¹¹⁸ A film review in *The Booklist* praised the movie for its visual subtlety and reasonable views of Cree life. The movie “uses superbly restrained cinematography,” which never forces one to be conscious of “technique.” Richardson frames the narrative elements with a “minimum of visual bias, allowing one to discover each element for oneself.” It also “avoids the easy approach of stimulating the audience’s response by placing the Indians in a pathetic context, asking for pity rather than encouraging respect.”¹¹⁹ In a screening in Montreal, the predominately white audience remarked that the movie was “powerful.” An hour-long

¹¹⁶ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, Rick Dale, “National Film Board, Challenge for Change, “Animator’s Report, Ontario region,” June 27, 1975.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Joan Irwin, “Film Explains Life of Cree,” *Montreal Star*, July 2, 1974.

¹¹⁹ “Cree Hunters of Mistassini Film Review” in *The Booklist*, November, 1975.

discussion that was held after revealed that people in the crowd asked for suggestion on what they could do help the Cree cause.¹²⁰

Conclusion

In the first two decades of the National Film Board, NFB filmmakers generally represented nature as a resource to be managed and exploited by the government. Films about the Canadian landscape embodied a state way of seeing. In the 1960s, this instrumentalist (and nationalist) discourse began to change. Larry Gosnell, Bill Mason, and Christopher Chapman argued that Canadian nature was not uniform; it was intricate and its value was similarly multifaceted. They also contended that human-induced changes to the environment resulted in unintended consequences that affected local ecosystems and human health. While their films challenged normative attitudes about the environment, they were conspicuously white-centric. Wilderness preservation and ecological protection were generally portrayed as white, middle-class issues. There was no mention of the ways in which environmental destruction affected marginalized groups, or how non-white ecological perspectives could help encourage a more holistic way of thinking about nature. *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and *Our Land is Our Life* were the first NFB films to posit an environmental ethic that incorporated indigenous viewpoints.

¹²⁰ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Notes from a film showing in Montreal,” November 20, 1974.



Fig. 4.5. Tony Ianzelo on the Set of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* (1971)¹²¹

In *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and *Our Land is Our Life* Richardson used *cinéma vérité* aesthetics to exhibit the vibrancy and vitality of the Cree's culture. The filmic strategy of Boyce Richardson, which is characterized by a "Direct Cinema" ethics of self-reflexivity, acknowledges that nature and its various meanings cannot be known comprehensively. This repudiation of "disciplined detachment" produced a more sensitive, and socially and ecologically conscious film. Unencumbered by the burdens of objectivity, Richardson was able to directly challenge "fixed" claims about indigenous culture, the environment, and the role of the state in the ecological relationships of the public.

This filmmaking strategy also created a space in which the subject could talk back, or indeed, shape the discourse of the film. Indeed, Blacksmith and the Cree hunters

¹²¹ Carolyn Weldon, "Photo Friday: Cree Hunters of Mistassini," NFB, January 27, 2017. <http://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2017/01/27/photo-friday-cree-hunters-mistassini/> accessed on March 3, 2017.

exposed the cultural issues at stake by showing the simplicity of their way of life. La Grande would have tremendous social, spiritual, and psychological consequences for the James Bay Cree who relied on the land for sustenance. Although the Cree do not discuss the impact of the hydroelectric project in the film, it is apparent through their articulations of their worldview that their ecological relationship with the wilderness would quickly dissolve. The province argued that La Grande would boost employment in Cree villages, but it did not consider the devastating effects the dam would have on aboriginal culture. As Graeme Wynn notes in his review of the film, for Sam Blacksmith and the other Cree hunters, La Grande was not just a matter of bulldozers and dams; it was “a terrible and vast reduction of [their] entire world.”¹²² The land would not be treated with respect and the Cree would be left with nothing. For Richardson, this was a tragedy. The land was their very being. “Nothing, neither jobs nor money, meant more to [the Cree] than their land,” the information sheet for the documentary informs.¹²³ “You can’t just run a road in and say, ‘we’ll need some gas stations along the way and the Indians can run the gas stations. No Indian in James Bay has asked for gas stations,” Richardson remarked in an interview.¹²⁴

Although a number of critics have questioned the progressive aims of CFC, the post-filmic impact of *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* and *Our Land is Our Life* shows that NFB documentaries catalyzed social change. After the two NFB documentaries were shown, a number of Cree from small Quebec villages were inspired to return to the bush

¹²² Matthew Come Coon quoted in Graeme Wynn, “Northern Exposures,” *Environmental History* 12 no. 2. (April, 2007) 389.

¹²³ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Information Sheet,” n.d.

¹²⁴ NFBA, Cree Hunters of Mistassini file, “Notes from a Conversation with the Filmmakers,” n.d.

and reestablish their ties with the land. The environment may have changed, but the Cree were eager to assert their presence in the James Bay wilderness. This clearly illustrates how CFC films instigated political change, and more broadly, how NFB environmental discourses shaped audience subjectivities. While it was the goal of the government to teach audiences how to think and behave towards nature, there were instances where filmmaking challenged the hegemony of the state, and persuaded viewers to similarly protest high modern schemes.

Conclusion

Cinema matters. Through moving pictures, we experience (and negotiate) the entangled world around us.¹ As Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner note in their book about cinematic landscapes, it is an “inescapable truth” that filmmaking contributes to the “imagining and definition” of the natural world.² In examining the documentary cinema of the National Film Board, we can begin to grasp the different ways institutions, ideologies, and individuals help spectators interpret and interact with the environment. NFB films in particular reveal the role the Canadian government plays in this cultural process. My dissertation tracks the various representations of nature in NFB documentaries, from early wartime films depicting the exploitation of the country’s natural resources, to “environmental” documentaries of the 1970s, which challenge the notion that nature exists for the benefit of humankind. My intention was to investigate the ways the government co-opted the art of cinema to broadcast political views about the meaning of nature.

What was the value/meaning of nature as determined by the state? Firstly, it saw nature as a convenient symbol in which it could unite Canadians under a banner of national identity. Employing nature in this way was not new, of course. Nature has long been a part of the country’s nationalist rhetoric, in part because regardless of where nature

¹ Stephen Rust and Salma Monani, “Introduction: Cuts to Dissolves – Defining and Situating Ecocinema Studies,” *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt (New York: Routledge, 2013,) 1.

² Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner *Cinema and Landscape*, ed. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 24.

is, it seems to always embody the type of ideals so central to Anglo-Canadian nationalism – ruggedness, industriousness, adventurousness and so forth. Politicians and other nationalists described the land as a shaper of history and national character. Images of the land in NFB cinema were no different. They perpetuated the myth that nature was the defining feature of the nation.³ Films from *Canadian Landscape* (1940) to *Canada: The Land* (1972) have suggested that modern Canada was chiseled out of raw nature, and its people molded by the weathered contours of the landscape. NFB films such as *Song of the Mountains* (1947), *The enduring Wilderness* (1963) and *Epilogue* (1971) travelled through primordial wilderness spaces to remind Canadians of their supposed birthright. Here, in the raw wilderness (still preserved in national parks), spectators were awakened to their past lives as voyageurs in the impenetrable bush, forging a national destiny one beaver pelt at a time. Film after film, the NFB proclaimed that national identity was made manifest in the brute reality of geography. Even filmmakers who contested official discourses about the exploitation of natural resources and government-sponsored management strategies, participated in the state-sponsored (and romantic) construction of national identity. Bill Mason and Christopher Chapman each argued in their own ways that to preserve the wild was to preserve the country's heritage in its most robust and virginal state. This depiction of nature was freighted with ideological baggage, of course. Although it was a convenient way of “interpreting Canada to Canadians,” this seemingly harmless display of national identity was exclusive, and worse, racist. Wilderness as seen

³ Despite the Board's decision to move the NFB HQ to Montreal in 1956, and despite its efforts to establish regional studios in the 1970s, francophone, aboriginal and local voices about homeland were generally overshadowed by an emphatically Anglo-Canadian idea of nationhood.

in films like *The Enduring Wilderness* was never empty and it was certainly not a place of innocence. A spectacularly diverse population of indigenous peoples once inhabited these environs. Where were they in NFB films about the natural environment then? In some cases, Aboriginal peoples were sketched into the landscape by NFB filmmakers, used as trappings in a primitive mise en scene. More commonly, their presence was completely ignored.

Nature was envisioned in other ways that supported the nation-building goals of the state. Images of natural resource exploitation were also important in the construction of national identity. Depictions of an ordered and well-managed landscape framed nature as a national resource that united its citizens from coast to coast. Every Canadian could have a hand in unleashing this natural wealth through hard work and state-management strategies. Nature transformed was a potent (and timely) symbol of national progress and postwar economic development.

The state's definition and meaning served other political goals as well. In the 1940s and 1950s, NFB filmmakers relied on a consistent aesthetic and ideological schema to convey governmental discourses about the utility of the natural world. Documentaries such as *Timber Front* (1940) and *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (1943) implied that the true worth of nature is in boards per feet and grain tonnage. Instrumentalism was a common theme in these films. Wartime films encouraged Canadians to exploit resources widely because those commodities were needed to help the country win the war. Postwar agricultural films produced by Evelyn Cherry for the Agriculture Production Unit likewise encouraged Canadians to utilize the natural plentitude of the country. These

government- sponsored films, clearly informed by the objectives of the welfare state, taught farmers how to modernize their farms through science and technology. If agrarians did not approach the soil with knowledge and expertise, they would risk ecological and economic devastation. As the narrator of *Canadian Wheat* (1944) explains, the modern farmer must not only “consider the effects of soil and weather conditions” when he plants his crops; he also needs to consult the agricultural specialists working at the government established plant-breeding program. Only then can the farmer be confident that their wheat harvest meets Canada’s “high export standards.”⁴

The technocratic language of controlling or fixing nature in films like *Canadian Wheat* highlights another important state-centred theme in NFB cinema. One of the key arguments that I make is that NFB films also supported the state’s high modern ideology, what James Scott defines as “a sweeping, rational engineering of all aspects of social life in order to improve the human condition.”⁵ NFB documentaries supported the efforts of the state to “get a handle on its subjects and their environment.”⁶ Images of modern farming technology, airstrips in the North, or crops dowsed in chemical pesticides, paralleled the state’s logic that nature should be rendered passive and then transformed. As the narrator of Roman Kroitor’s *The Great Plains* (1950) boasts, “by applying his work and ingenuity to them, the land at first thought barren has been put to man’s use.”⁷ Film Board documentaries endorsed the state project to reduce an “exceptionally

⁴ *Canadian Wheat Story*, produced by J. Stanley Moore, NFB, 1944

⁵ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 88.

⁶ *Ibid.* 2

⁷ *The Great Plains*, produced by Tom Daly, NFB, 1950.

complex, illegible, and local” environment, and create a “standard grid” that could be “centrally recorded and monitored.”⁸ In short, transformed and made productive.

National Film Board cinema did not just promote the logic of the state, however. Documentary filmmaking itself was a key technology in the ongoing project of the government to rationalize the environmental and social spaces of Canada. In documentaries about the North, for example, film technology rendered the landscape in ways that could be understood, approximated, and inevitably colonized. The camera collected valuable information about the geological and biological features of the landscape, visual data that tacitly justified the development and exploitation of northern spaces. Filmmaking assisted the government in two ways: by abridging the complexity of northern environs and by naturalizing state authority. As NFB film crews travelled through the North with their all-seeing technology, they claimed intellectual and physical space for the federal government.

If we were to stop here, however, the story would be incomplete. Representations of nature were not as monolithic as one might think. As Philip Rosen writes, “the concept of national cinema is always implicated in a dialectic of nation and anti-nation.”⁹ While there was a strong current of population management in NFB discourses about nature, there were surprising moments of ideological conflict between filmmakers and their government sponsors. The second part of this dissertation investigated how NFB filmmakers contradicted or challenged state policy. In the 1960s, the Film Board became

⁸ Scott, 2.

⁹ Philip Rosen, “Nation and Anti-Nation: Concepts of National Cinema in the ‘New’ Media Era,” *Diaspora* 5 no. 3 (1996), 391.

more liberal in its interpretation of its mandate. Consequently, filmmakers began challenging state-authorized perspectives about the symbolic and economic value of the environment. The work of Larry Gosnell epitomized this new wave of environmental filmmaking. Despite political pressure from the Department of Agriculture, Gosnell made a film that challenged technocratic solutions. *In Poison, Pests, and People* (1960), Gosnell argued that humankind's efforts to reshape the landscape through the use of pesticides were myopic and destructive. Humanity's exertions to stimulate agricultural productivity and transform the land resulted in unintended consequences, namely the poisoning of local ecosystems and human bodies. Bill Mason's documentaries on wolves (*Death of a Legend* (1971) and *Cry of the Wild* (1972) similarly castigated the management practices of state institutions. According to Mason, the conservation goals of the Canadian Wildlife Service embodied a blind faith in the technocratic and the modern. Their efforts to control nature, to fix it, would inevitably destroy that which was wild. In his documentaries, Mason pleaded for a more ecologically conscious understanding of human and non-human relationships.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, NFB filmmakers used programs like Challenge for Change to ask more provocative questions about the destructive relationship between humans and nature. Society's desire for industrial growth and technological solutions to problems relating to pollution and scarcity was problematic and manifested itself in a number of harmful ways. Furthermore, NFB filmmakers contended that this high modern way of seeing nature disturbed harmonious relationships between people and nature. The most significant documentary to make this claim was *Cree*

Hunters of Mistassini (1974). Unlike earlier films about indigenous people and nature, the documentary privileged the subject's environmental cosmology. In the film, the Cree explain to the viewer that wilderness was more than an economic resource, or a beautiful place where humans were only visitors; it was a home where human and non-human beings lived together in harmony. The James Bay landscape provided the Cree and all other living things with physical strength and spiritual purpose. This representation of nature was further noteworthy because it directly countered the province of Quebec's high modern assessment of the land. Under Robert Bourassa, Quebec envisioned a modern and productive landscape, where massive dams would generate millions of watts in hydroelectric power. This scheme, however, had terrible consequences for the James Bay Cree who called this wilderness "home." *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*, more than any other film up until this point, protested the state's vision of nature.

We must be careful, however, to label NFB cinema in 1960s and 1970s as a radical departure from early NFB cinema. Indeed, I have tried to show that governmental discourses were still present in NFB documentaries throughout this period. David Bairstow's *River with a Problem* (1961) is a prime example of how environmental documentaries still promulgated a State authorized vision of nature. Even Bill Mason, a filmmaker whom many people regard as one of Canada's most vocal environmentalists, was beholden to the whims of the state. Governmental influence persisted through the 1970s and into the 1980s in the form of sponsored films. Conservation films like *This is an Emergency* (1979), *Protection for Our Renewable Resources* (1979), and *The Future is Now* (1979) were all produced at the instigation of the federal government during the

energy crisis. The state was also instrumental in the creation of Studio E, a short-lived film unit devoted to making environmental pictures. Studio E produced a series of environmental advocacy films including anti-nuclear film *No Act of God* (1978) and Martin DeFalco's *Class Project: The Garbage Movie* (1980). In spite of its seemingly radical aesthetic, the films of Studio E were fairly benign and supported the policy of the state to intervene in environmental education. Along with feminist productions of Studio D, Studio E films were an important aspect of the NFB's efforts to "reflect the cultural maturity" of Canada in the 1980s.¹⁰ This cultural maturity, at least in terms of Studio E, was defined and managed by state narratives about citizenship, duty, and the limits of nature as delineated by governmental institutions.



Fig. 5. 1. Still from *Class Project: The Garbage Movie*, directed by Martin DeFalco (1980)

¹⁰ NFBA, "Government Film Commissioner's Report," *Annual Report*, 1979-80, 6.

My dissertation begins in 1939 and ends in 1974, with the production of the Challenge for Change film, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*. Boyce Richardson's documentary struck me as a good place to finish because it articulates so many of the themes I discussed throughout the project. Firstly, it reveals that NFB films were negotiated texts, which competed with and sometimes confounded the official attitude and policy of the government. Despite the ongoing presence of the state in the production process, filmmakers were able to use the camera to depict the contradictions and of local social and ecological environments. The traditional life of Cree hunting culture was fundamentally different than the colonial experiences of the state, which saw nature as a frontier to be subdued and transformed. Secondly, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* illustrates the different ways filmmakers used the technology and grammar of cinema construct a certain kind of picture of nature. The cinema verité aesthetics of Tony Ianzelo and Boyce Richardson effectively places the viewer within the cultural and ecological reality of Cree life. Contrast this with the works of Christopher Chapman, who used a combination of contrast lighting and wide-frames to represent the sublimity of Canadian wilderness spaces, or Evelyn Cherry, who relied on expository filmmaking to teach Canadian farmers how to modernize their farms. In each case, the form of the film - its aesthetics and narrative devices - supported its content. Lastly, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* demonstrates the political impact NFB films had on the extra-filmic world. For Cree audiences, the film reminded them of their traditional homeland and their spiritual relationship to the James Bay environment. Other NFB documentaries more directly

instructed spectators how to conserve nature and how to use methods proscribed by the state to protect valuable natural resources.

Where my project ends, hopefully new investigations will begin. There is still an interesting story to be told about the litany of environmental documentaries produced by the National Film Board in the 1980s and 1990s. The construction of nature in this period was influenced in remarkable ways by developments in media technologies and the emergence of new funding sources and distribution channels. By the early 1980s, private film and television industries had exceeded the production output of the NFB. Moreover, the creation of Telefilm (1984) and smaller programs such as Ontario Development Film Corporation helped finance the projects of young, independent filmmakers. These new avenues provided directors with creative license and radical filmmaking opportunities previously unavailable to them. Film scholar Peter Steven observed in 1993 that this independent documentary cinema opposed mainstream media and “differ[ed] entirely from the prescriptive plans to develop better informed citizens, as set out by John Grierson at the National Film Board.”¹¹ Inspired by the rise of identity politics, documentarians began exploring alternative ways to express subjectivity and difference. For some independent filmmakers the NFB represented everything that was wrong with the mainstream. Still, a number of indie filmmakers saw the NFB as a platform to contest the status quo from within. In the 1980s and 1990s, the NFB increasingly promoted a style of non-fiction cinema that was individualistic and autobiographical in nature.¹² The

¹¹ Peter Steven, *Brink of Reality: New Canadian Documentary Film and Video* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993), 8.

¹² Druick, 164.

Board's mandate to improve diversity and representation emboldened women and aboriginal filmmakers to make documentaries about their real-life experiences in ways many spectators had never witnessed. This kind of subjectivity begs interesting questions about the nature of cinema, and indeed, the cinema of nature. An eco-critical/historical investigation of this period of non-fiction filmmaking can reveal new perspectives on the complex ways cinema, nature, and government institutions intersect.

Another avenue worth exploring is one that Nadia Bozak discusses in her book *The Cinematic Footprint*. Bozak rightfully asserts that “ecology, by its very definition, is unrestricted; it is impossible to say where nature stops and culture begins, or vice versa.”¹³ There is much to explore along this ecological continuum in film history. Environmental historians should find ways to tell the story of nature and how it pushes back against the lens of the camera, shaping the images that dance across our television and computer screens.

In 2012, the Conservation Party slashed the National Film Board's funding by 6.7 million dollars and eliminated seventy-three jobs.¹⁴ The budget cuts not only decimated the production staff at the NFB, it also crippled the ability of the institution to maintain its extensive archive, which contained films, photographs, and thousands of pages of production notes. Thanks to the outstanding work of André D'Ulisse, the head archivist at

¹³ Nadia Bozak investigates this very relationship in *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights Camera, Natural Resources* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 15.

¹⁴ Guy Dixon, “Budget Cuts? The National Film Board is not Afraid,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 16, 2012, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/budget-cuts-national-film-board-is-not-afraid/article4100642/> (accessed November 18, 2017).

the Film Board, I was able to dig through piles of film material and related documents without too much difficulty. But there were still gaps. Despite the best efforts of the Board to preserve archival material, production notes and other historical clues were sometimes missing or misfiled. It occurred to me while I was sifting through boxes of films scripts and shot lists that it is crucial we preserve these filmic records. The production notes, memos, scripts, and budget sheets contain important details about the filmmaking process; they shed light on how filmmakers interacted with their subjects, the environment, and the governmental bodies who sometimes sponsored their movies. More generally, the films of the NFB, most of which are available online now, are historical texts that reveal much about Canada's past, including how it narrated the history of the country.

This dissertation is one example of the stories we can tell using NFB as historical documents. I have used them in three different ways: to provide a new historical perspective on Canadian environmental history by showing how the state was an active participant in the cultural construction of nature; to posit a new way of thinking about the NFB by demonstrating the extent to which nature and environmental issues were a part of its cinema; and lastly to give historical context to evolutions in environmental attitudes in Canada by suggesting that NFB films simultaneously reflected and helped precipitate ideas about the environment. There are a number of other ways NFB films can be employed within a scholarly and popular context. For more stories about the National Film Board to be told, it is essential that we protect our archives and cultural institutions.

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