

Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World

**by
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Abstract

Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World, is a three-part documentary podcast series that examines the methodologies and approaches to making social change through documentary film and interactive digital creations. Is media an effective tool for creating social change? How do we measure it? By examining work from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) that was created over three unique eras, I look at the changing face of social impact with regards to documentary film and media production and in relation to broader social movements. Beginning with some of the early ground-breaking documentary work created during the Challenge for Change program (1967-1980), then moving to some of the seminal work created by Studio D (1974-1996), which was the world's first feminist documentary film studio, and finally, examining documentary creation and dissemination today, *Projecting Impact* sheds light on the important work of the NFB, the people who've created it, and the social change the work has made in the world. Despite tectonic shifts in technology over the past fifty years, I also discover that the unique distribution system employed by the NFB in its early days has surprising contemporary parallels, as do the thoughtful approaches of some of the key NFB creators in addressing social movements and inequality. Today, the NFB continues to be deeply invested in making work that has the potential to create social change. I contend that in this media morass in which we live, the metrics with which we measure social change require a rethink. Acknowledging the NFB's many significant contributions to Canadian society over its first eighty years, traditional metrics cannot capture the full scope of this impact and so, as I argue, the NFB should accept more diverse, community-based measures of uptake and influence.

The three podcasts can be found here:

Episode 1 Repairing the World

https://soundcloud.com/teri-s/t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_1_repairing_the_world-1

Episode 2 Second Wave

https://soundcloud.com/teri-s/t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_2_second_wave

Episode 3 Down the Rabbit Hole

https://soundcloud.com/teri-s/t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_3_down_the_rabbit_hole

Keywords: National Film Board of Canada; Canadian documentary film; Challenge for Change; Studio D; social change; social impact

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Introduction

Over the course of working on my Master's degree through the Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) program, I fell in love with sound. This was not my intention, as historically, though I'd developed a healthy respect for those who dealt life's stories in aural emissions and sonic surges, I had an abject fear of "editing tape." However, as I felt my heart and head cracked open in the privileged setting of the GLS classroom, something shifted for me. I was consuming podcasts as a way to "wind down" when I needed a break from reading, thinking and writing, and I found myself drawn more and more to the nuanced perspectives that well-produced audio could bring to any subject. This began to influence the work I was generating as I read my way through dozens of texts and articles, and before I knew it, I had fallen head over heels with the promise that sound offered. Specifically, I came to understand the potential in using audio documentary to explore ideas that were directly related to the academic coursework I was doing. My burgeoning interest in audio documentary storytelling provided a counterpoint for me on a professional level as well: it presented an alternative to the world of documentary cinema which is where I hang my hat on a daily basis as a producer in the BC & Yukon Studio of the National Film Board of Canada.

What follows is a synopsis of the audio-related work I did over the course of my studies (which will help provide an understanding of how I chose my thesis approach); the central inquiry of my thesis; the rationale for the podcast platform; the methodology; the background for my research; and an overview and summary of my findings. This will provide the rationale for my non-traditional approach to a Master's project, and the academic context for *Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World*.

My Academic Journey in Podcast Production

Over the course of my GLS studies, I created a total of six documentary audio projects, that all contributed in some way to my thesis project:

1. First, it was critical to understand the form of podcasting in the context of contemporary listening trends, and to place it along a historical timeline that begins with radio;
 - For a directed studies course with Dr. Zoë Druick, I created a podcast called *Aural Fixation: The Rise of the Documentary Podcast*, in which I examined the history and intersection of documentary form in cinema, television and radio; the narrative and aesthetic forms specific to documentary podcasting; how and where we listen to podcasts in everyday life with particular emphasis on the impact that mobility has on listening habits and the political economies of new digital forms. Working towards a theorization of podcasting as a form of both creative and scholarly communication, this project enabled me to create a rich tapestry of audio and theoretical exploration that sought to break down the act of listening. As Gemma Corradi Fiumara revealed in *The Other Side of Listening: A Philosophy of Listening*, against a tradition that has endorsed the power of discourse where we mistake “warring monologues for genuine dialogue... the other side of language [is] listening” (1). Susan Douglas furthered this discussion in *Listening In* when she said: “We can passively hear, but we must actively listen” (9). This is echoed in Kate Lacey’s *Listening in and Listening Out*, in which she connects the material history of listening to the idea of listening as a form of public engagement. “Listening ... bridges both the realm of sensory, embodied experience and the political realm of debate and deliberation” (8).
2. Next, I wanted to explore the idea that audio is an inherently cinematic medium;
 - Dr. Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s GLS course offering *Filmed in the City* provided an opportunity for me to explore how podcasts are reinventing

documentary cinema. For this class, I created a documentary podcast called *Hearing Cinema: How Narrative Podcasts are Reinventing the Cinematic Documentary*, which argued for the inherently visual nature of audio documentaries. Through my research period, I was able to source a plethora of material on the history and impact of radio, but I discovered that there was a paucity of academic writing about podcasting. (Since that time, there has been an upswing in academic writing about podcasts.) Though radio may be a departure point for discussing podcasts in the academic milieu, radio and podcasts are two distinct forms, primarily because of the way in which they are disseminated and received: we can “time-shift” or move around the timeline of a podcast, and podcasts are generally listened to through headphones and transmitted directly into the ear, while radio frequently functions more as aural wallpaper without the “time-shift” option (Berry). During my research I learned that academics posited that radio writers in the 1920s and 30s created a new form of oral literature when they wrote for the medium (Miller). Extrapolating on this idea, I proposed that podcast writers and producers are creating a new kind of *cinema*. This exploration became particularly useful in approaching my thesis project, because I was interested in creating an audio work that was also able to mine the rich visual cinematic legacy of the work of the National Film Board through the use of audio clips, sound effects and the creation of a collage of sound devised to help situate the listener along a historical timeline, and within the context of the work itself. Susan Douglas wrote about the cinematic nature of sound with regards to the early days of radio in which hearing was, “in many ways, better than seeing” because, unlike movies, radio dramas weren’t confined to a screen, weren’t subject to any theatrical artificiality, and allowed the listener to create three-dimensional images (30).

3. Using a community-based research approach elicited strong interviews with all of my subjects;
 - In the fall of 2017, I enrolled in Dr. Mary-Ellen Kelm’s *Mental Health, Activism and History: Community Based Research*. Working with Vancouver-based community historians from pioneering mental health

advocacy agencies, I created a sound tapestry interweaving people's personal stories in an immersive audio environment that sought to recreate the experience of a 1970s community-based drop-in centre. Interviewing community historians underlined the importance of oral history:

... with its power to enrich how we interpret the past, [it] offers an important instrument in the historian's tool box. In particular, interviews have greatly enhanced scholars' ability to document the life stories and experiences of groups left out of traditional history books. (DeBlasio 65)

4. Finally, I wanted to create a more visceral listening experience through the inclusion of authentic location-based recordings I had collected during my research period, so that the environmental sounds would become a narrative element in the podcasts. In his thesis about sound pioneer Imbert Orchard, Nathan Clarkson said that *location-based recording* specifically helps connect "listeners to the world in ways never before experienced through sound." (33)
- The final audio piece I did during my program of GLS study was for Dr. Gary McCarron upon our return from field school in Spain, in which we were exploring La Convivencia - the reputed peaceful coexistence of Jews, Muslims and Christians in Andalusia during the middle ages. During our studies, I traveled with recording gear knowing that I wanted to create some sort of sound project, but uncertain how it would evolve. I recorded hours of location-based sound over the course of the three-week trip, and it was during the editing process that I really came to understand the importance of location sound in facilitating storytelling and narrative exploration. Australian Professor, Siobhan McHugh, discusses the fact that immediacy and accessibility partly account for audio's broad demographic. "But it is audio's qualities as a 'medium' that delivers its singular impact" (McHugh 143). Or in the words of Walter J. Ong, 'Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer' (71).

My thesis project, *Projecting Impact*, marks the culmination of my academic exploration, and pulls together the research trajectory I've been on since 2016 when I started in the GLS program. This project seeks to occupy the space between documentary film analysis, social activism, and academic theory about digital technology and new media.

The Inquiry

Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World is a three-part documentary podcast series that examines the methodologies and approaches to making social change¹ through documentary film and interactive digital creations. Is media an effective tool for creating social change? How do we measure it? By examining work from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) that was created over three unique eras, I look at the changing face of social impact with regards to documentary film and media production in relation to broader social movements. Beginning with some of the early ground-breaking documentary work created during the Challenge for Change program (1967-1980), then moving to some of the foundational work created by Studio D (1974-1996), which was the world's first feminist documentary film studio, and finally, examining documentary creation and dissemination today, *Projecting Impact* seeks to shed light on the important work of the NFB, the people who've created it, and the social change the work has made in the world. Today, the NFB continues to be deeply invested in making work that has the potential to create social change and, in this regard, it was critical to hear directly from some of the early NFB creators, in order to build a historical and socio-cultural context for weighing "outcomes" and "impacts". Based on the collective wisdom of my interview participants, whose voices we hear in the podcasts, I contend that in this media morass in which we live, the metrics with which we measure social change require a rethink. Acknowledging the NFB's many significant contributions to Canadian society over its first eighty years, traditional metrics cannot capture the full scope of this impact and so, as I argue, the NFB should accept more diverse, community-based measures of uptake and influence. In short, social impact cannot be measured by numbers alone.

¹ "Social change", or "social impact" refers to the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of a community.

The Platform

I considered how I wanted to execute and deliver my research. While a paper might have sufficed, it seemed to me that a media inquiry would benefit from the use of actual media as a tool for knowledge mobilization. In short, it made sense to talk about media *using* media. Though podcasting may have been perceived as a rogue form since its inception in 2004, it has made the slow and steady climb into the ivory towers where it is now used as a pedagogical tool by students to express ideas and further arguments, and as a way to “offer a vital supplement to textual content by giving scholars insights into how they view their own work” (Wrather 144). Podcasting may not yet have been fully theorized as a unique and fruitful genre of new media storytelling in terms of function and form, but there has been an increase in scholarly writing about the form, and in the use of it as a pedagogical tool. For example, The Scholarly Podcasting in Canada project is a collaboration between Hannah McGregor, an assistant professor of Publishing at Simon Fraser University, and Siobhan McMenemy, a senior editor at WLU Press. Their immediate goal has been to figure out a model of peer review that could be applied to a podcast, and they’ve been using Dr. McGregor’s own podcast, *Secret Feminist Agenda*, as a test case. In short, two inter-related arguments can be made for telling stories in acoustic spaces: “(1) Podcasting stretches the tendencies and capacities of academics toward multi-sensorial forms of inquiry and (2) it connects academics with broader publics” (Harter 126). Furthermore, as Harter argues in “Storytelling in Acoustic Spaces”:

Podcasting actualizes contemplative spaces for inventing other realities. The aesthetic worlding of possibilities is a first step in acting on a belief that conditions can be changed. As such, it aligns well with the goals of engaged scholarship, broadly understood as campus and community collaborations that develop actionable knowledge in response to salient challenges (127).

More recently, Anna Williams, a student at the University of Iowa, delivered her PhD dissertation (*My Gothic Dissertation: an intertextual analysis of Gothic fiction and modern-day graduate education in the humanities*), as a podcast series. “Mixing voice, music, and sound, I dramatize scenes from the novels and incorporate analysis through my narration. The real-life “Grad School Gothic” stories are drawn from personal interviews.” Her dissertation is a spirited, and contemporary approach to new methods of

pedagogy, resulting in an accessible and thoroughly engaging thesis which expands modes of scholarly communication beyond the page.

In summary, throughout the course of my studies in GLS, I have explored the increasing popularity of audio documentaries. I have written about them and I have created sound projects that seek to break down the act of listening. I feel strongly that this media-centric investigation of social impact in the past and present work at the NFB needs to be told using media in the telling of it.

Additionally, the form of audio documentary literally allows me to make space for the voices of those who have contributed to the discourse about films by the NFB, as well as the creators of the documentaries themselves. The stories shared by the creators, in particular, provide a personal lens through which both the work, and the impact of the work, are discussed. Because the audio stories come from the creators themselves, the listener is brought closer to their experiences, thereby enabling a more empathetic connection to the material. Martin Spinelli considers the idea of trust and empathy as artistic material in his 2019 book, *Podcasting: the audio media revolution*. He unpacks the idea of empathy in an interview with Gimlet Media founder, Alex Blumberg:

What happens when you're listening to somebody but you don't see them is that their words are real, their words are the words of somebody else but because you don't see them you create a visual around those words... And that actual creation makes what they are saying literally a part of you. And so, what I think that does is that it allows audio to be a good vehicle for empathy because when you hear somebody talk...they become a part of you in a certain way... So I think that's really a superpower of audio...it can actually be a vehicle for empathizing with other people. (72)

By embracing the stories spoken by my subjects, and weaving their words with authentic location-based sound, plus audio clips from the documentary projects themselves and soundscapes created specifically to facilitate the storytelling, I am creating what Trish FitzSimons has referred to as 'braided channels' (or 'braided voice'), in which documentary voice is a braided form of "stranded singularity in which 'coming to voice' ... includes the input of many individuals." (131)

I hope that through the creation of these three episodes, I can offer a unique means of accessing and understanding how the work of the NFB continues to project impact.

The Background

I was specifically interested in contrasting the work that emerged during two formative periods at the NFB with work that has been created in the recent past. Specifically, I looked at the strategies that were employed during the creation of the Challenge for Change Series (1967-1980) and throughout the history of Studio D (the NFB's feminist filmmaking wing, 1974-1996). I contrasted those with the strategies and approaches that have been embraced over the past decade by creators and producers from NFB studios across the country. For many years, the lens of the NFB has focused on the production of marginalized narratives – stories that highlight underrepresented voices including those of women, First Nations and Indigenous communities, rural communities, and people with disabilities. I was interested in digging into some of those stories and examining how they were made and the impact they had.

Though the NFB has been creating documentary work since 1939, it wasn't until 1967 with the advent of the anti-poverty program, Challenge for Change (CFC) that the NFB formally embraced the idea of creating social change. The original objectives for CFC were:

1. To improve communication between individuals and groups in all segments of society who are concerned with or affected by poverty and social change.
2. To create a greater understanding and awareness among people of the causes of poverty and what it means to be poor.
3. To explore and promote new ideas and new approaches which are being used or which could be used to combat poverty and to evaluate the effectiveness of traditional approaches.
4. To provoke social change by changing attitudes which hinder the development of equal opportunities for everyone and inhibit their meaningful participation in society (Waugh 74-75).

In considering how to approach this work, I was interested in combining personal narratives from the filmmakers and producers who have created work with the NFB, and

historical information about the NFB. I began by amassing a list of filmmakers, producers and employees of the NFB who were key to the initiatives and time periods discussed, as well as historians who could speak to the particular histories of any given program. In order to keep the scope of the project manageable, I kept interviewees to central figures only.

By illustrating the process of social movement storytelling (which finds leverage in community-based screenings) as activist training grounds, I contend that the real-world impact of narrative, issue-based documentary film cannot rely on commercial distribution metrics as an indicator of success. Rather, these films play a specific role in building social movements by creating solidarity, hope and a sense of urgency to help overcome isolation, self-doubt, inertia, fear and apathy (Roburn 2528). The documentary projects at the centre of my thesis are those created by the National Film Board of Canada, whose mandate is to reflect Canada to Canadians and the rest of the world through documentary film, interactive work, and animation. This mandate is indicative of the institutional voice of the NFB, and positions the work within the specific context of building social movement storytelling.

The Process

Creating a richly-layered audio project was a complex endeavour, involving multiple steps:

1. The project began with a research period that involved watching documentary films from the NFB's extensive collection, and reading both academic and non-academic texts about documentary filmmaking, contemporary media, and the NFB. Pertinent notes were pulled from the texts as reference points during interviews. Film clips that helped illustrate or challenge documentary methodologies were noted.
2. Simultaneously, I created a master list of potential interview subjects including: filmmakers who had worked with the NFB and to whom I had access; documentary film historians and teachers; cultural workers and theorists; NFB archivist librarians; and the NFB's own documentary producers. The list was long, but once I started checking availability, a natural culling took place. Interviews were scheduled over a period of 14 months. I recorded over 20 hours of interviews with 17 interview subjects: Colin Browne, Marie Clements, Gary Cristall, Zoë Druick, Tracey Friesen, Dorothy Henaut, Bonnie Sherr Klein, Sharon McGowan, Rob McLaughlin, Terre Nash, Albert Ohayon, Marc St. Pierre, Baljit Sangra, Mo Simpson, Shirley Vercruysse, Michelle van Beusekom and Anne Wheeler.
3. The interviews were structured around the specific relationship each interviewee had to the NFB or a specific project or historical area of expertise. Each interview began with the inquiry: "how do you define social change"? Each interview was structured based on the interview subject's history with and relationship to the NFB. Where applicable, we discussed the making of specific films and the outcomes of those projects with specific regard to creating social change, and how that change was manifest.

4. Interviews were staggered over the course of a year, beginning with a trip to Montreal, where the NFB's headquarters is housed. Interviews were completed using the best practices I have learned while working at the NFB. Participants were required to sign a participant release and NFB ethical guidelines were upheld and respected. The interview subjects were the most qualified candidates to speak to the themes I wanted to explore, in that they are the producers, writers and directors of the very work I wanted to address, or the scholars and librarians who have a deep knowledge about the NFB's history.
5. Academic reading and the viewing of films continued, and all interviews were transcribed. This was a time-consuming but necessary process that I have undertaken on all of my documentary audio projects to date.
6. Transcripts were printed, enabling the creation of "paper cuts", or "paper edits" which were maps of potential scenes or episodes laid out on paper prior to "cutting tape." This process was critical to the mapping out of a narrative journey. The paper edits were laid out on a historical timeline, and research ensued around other historical events that had an impact on how the films were conceived, executed and disseminated.
7. Location sound, potential sound effects and music selections were collected and filed for possible use during the editing process.
8. The editing process began, involving the cutting of interviews, the shaping of the story and the addition of elements such as sound effects or music. This process took me substantially longer than anticipated, in part because I had 20 hours of interviews, and access to dozens of films.
9. Finally, I turned my focus to writing this supplementary essay that lays out the basic methodology of my thesis project and provides the context for the work.

Omissions

There are omissions in this three-part series. It's impossible in a time-based medium to provide a comprehensive overview of any subject, so I want to acknowledge some of the omissions in this series. First of all, I was unable to secure an interview with anyone from The Indian Film crew, or with the NFB's Indigenous Cultural attaché, the prolific Abenaki filmmaker, Alanis Obomsawin. I acknowledge that one could create an entire episode focusing specifically on those voices. Also, though the NFB runs both an English Program and a French Program, I chose to focus on the work of the English Program as my capacity for conversation and comprehension in French is limited.

Background: The National Film Board of Canada

The NFB is an agency of the Federal Government of Canada that has been producing documentary film and auteur animation since 1939. From its activist history with Challenge for Change (1967-1989) a national participatory community-based filmmaking project in which documentary films were used to promote community collaboration and create change, to Studio D (1974-1996), the first state-funded feminist filmmaking studio in the world, to the digitization and online offering of the NFB's collection in 2010, the National Film Board has successfully worked towards creating social change in Canada.

The NFB's impact can be measured in particular through the success of the Challenge for Change Series, *The Fogo Process*. A 2017 CBC Radio Ideas episode, "How Filmmakers and Fishers Saved Fogo Island," explored the impact of this series of documentary shorts directed by Colin Low in 1967. As community members across Fogo Island saw films from neighbouring (and often dissenting) communities, a system of collaboration emerged that enabled members from remote communities to develop a dialogue to deal with the loss of the traditional inshore fishery. This process allowed them to hold on to their homes, despite the impending threat of resettlement.

Studio D was the birthplace of such works by women filmmakers as the Oscar winning films, *I'll Find a Way* by Beverly Shaffer (1977), *If You Love This Planet* by Terre Nash (1982), and Cynthia Scott's *Flamenco at 5:15* (1983). In the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal and the subsequent fallout about the film industry, *Time Magazine* ran a story in its online publication about Studio D in December 2017 called "Filmmaking Has a Gender Problem. Here's What Happened When Canada Tried to Solve It". In it, Matthew Hays states:

I still screen all of these films in my classes whenever I can. They remain vital, fresh and pertinent, and in many cases were films made by first-time directors. They prove that when a space is carved out for women to pursue filmmaking, they can succeed on their own terms, and create cinema that is distinct, powerful and every bit as full of creative ideas as films made by men. (Hays)

Though Studio D closed its doors due to funding cuts after two decades, it clearly remains of enduring interest. University of Calgary Professor Rebecca Sullivan is

currently at work on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) project dealing with “strengthening the feminist lens on social, political and cultural issues in Canada through lessons learned from Studio D” (Sowa).

Over the past twenty-three years, the NFB has been the recipient of several rounds of budget cuts, the most severe cut occurring in 1996 when the operating budget was cut 32%, forcing staff layoffs and the closure of many departments. Another round of cuts took place in 2012 when the budget was cut 10% (Kelly). However, despite shrinking resources, The NFB remains a major producing force in the Canadian media landscape creating documentary films such as: *Stories We Tell* (2012), *What Is Democracy?* (2018), *A Better Man* (2017), *Beauty* (2017), *The Road Forward* (2017); interactive projects such as: *Welcome to Pine Point* (2011), *Bear 71* (2012), *East of the Rockies* (2018) and animated projects such as: *The Mountain of SGaana* (2017), *Hedgehog’s Home* (2017), *Animal Behaviour* (2018) and *Window Horses* (2016). These films have traversed the world, winning accolades and collecting awards, and stand as a testament to the viability and vitality of the NFB as a media producer.

As the NFB approaches its 81st year of content production, I was interested in asking if and how the organization has shifted its approach in content creation to uphold its mandate to help make social change in the face of radical shifts in ways we consume media. According to Karina Aveyard in “Film Consumption in the 21st Century”:

Film consumption has changed dramatically over the past 30 years. Opportunities for movie viewing outside cinemas have expanded significantly in domestic and mobile spheres spurred on by advances in digital technologies and improvements in Internet speed and connectivity. This has made it possible for films to be watched in more places than ever before – from traditional film theatres to the temporary sites of film festivals and other pop-up cinemas, domestic spaces such as living rooms and bedrooms, in transit in planes, trains, buses and cars and many more situations in between.

The abundance of viewing platforms and the transitory nature of how we consume media has also had an impact on the average attention span of viewers. A recent *Time Magazine* article noted that: “The average attention span for the notoriously ill-focused goldfish is nine seconds, but according to a new study from Microsoft Corp., people now generally lose concentration after eight seconds, highlighting the effects of an increasingly digitalized lifestyle on the brain” (McSpadden).

I'm interested in considering the impact this has had on production approaches at the National Film Board of Canada. In "Changing Paradigms of Media Landscape in the Digital Age," Vineet Kaul argues that:

Digital technologies have fundamentally altered the nature and function of media in our society, reinventing age-old practices of public communication and at times circumventing traditional media and challenging its privileged role as gatekeepers of news and entertainment.

By contrasting past work with present work, I was able to look at the ways in which the NFB has responded to the changing face of media consumption.

Of equal importance to me was exploring the ways in which documentary stories are told, and how storytelling techniques and styles have changed over the decades. For example, no longer does the NFB rely on an authoritative "Voice of God" to lead us through a documentary story. Rather, the NFB is interested in what is referred to as POV documentary films - films that represent the filmmaker's point of view. The body of work produced by the NFB could be considered choric voice which "aids consideration of documentary voice not as an expression of any single individual, but rather as a collection of braids, albeit often and arguably ideally with a director's perspective forming the main channel at the centre of the braid" (FitzSimons). In short, a "braided voice", a term coined by Trish FitzSimons, is one of the things that is central to most contemporary NFB documentaries. I'm interested in looking at the evolution of documentary storytelling techniques at the National Film Board. As Bill Nichols argues in "The State of Documentary": "It is worth insisting that the strategies and styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film, change; they have a history."

Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World

Episode One – Repairing the World

Episode One is called *Repairing the World*. This phrase came from an interview with filmmaker Bonnie Sherr Klein in which she talked about her studies in classical rabbinic literature. *Tikkun olam* (the Hebrew meaning ‘world repair’) has come to connote social action and the pursuit of social justice, which seemed to perfectly mirror the study I am undertaking of the NFB’s history with creating social impact.

Repairing the World begins by looking at the NFB’s ground-breaking work under the Challenge for Change (CFC) program (1967-1980). This program blossomed in response to the civil rights movement that was unfolding in the USA. I wanted to set the stage by establishing what was happening in North America in 1967, which was when Challenge for Change came into being. The opening sequence functions as a kind of aural tapestry that will help the listener understand the larger context in which CFC was born. It was the time of the Viet Nam war, and the consciousness-raising movement that was happening South of our border resounded here in Canada.

While *The Fogo Process* is often cited as one of the most successful projects under Challenge for Change, I was interested in pointing to some of the lesser known, but still successful projects made under that banner. These include the films: *Some People Have to Suffer* (also referred to as *The Surrey Project*), *VTR Rosedale* and *VTR St. Jacques*.

During my research, I discovered that, while there had been a lot written about the women who worked with the NFB’s Studio D, there was little written about the women filmmakers who participated in Challenge for Change, so it became important to me to talk to some of those filmmakers including Dorothy Henaut, Bonnie Sherr Klein, Sharon McGowan, Mo Simpson, and Anne Wheeler. I also discovered that there were many stories and films from Canada’s Western region that hadn’t been included in broader histories of the NFB (which tend to be fairly centralist). Some of those stories are included here. The real focus of the episode is on the filmmakers who were making work for Challenge for Change, as well as on NFB knowledge keepers, and hence, my

interview subjects for Episode One are: Colin Browne (former SFU film lecturer, documentary filmmaker), Gary Cristall (historian, cultural worker), Dorothy Henaut (documentary filmmaker), Bonnie Sherr Klein (documentary filmmaker), Sharon McGowan (documentary filmmaker and UBC professor), Arthur Ohayon (NFB archivist), Marc St. Pierre (NFB archivist), Mo Simpson (documentary filmmaker), Michelle van Beusekom (former Executive Director of the NFB's English Studio), and Anne Wheeler (filmmaker).

Episode Two: Second Wave

Studio D was the feminist studio of the NFB, dedicated to creating films by, for, and about women. Started in 1974, which was the International Year of the Woman, Studio D was the only feminist film studio in the world. It produced work between 1974 and 1996 when it was closed due to funding cuts. In terms of approach and methodology, Studio D arose from the Challenge for Change program, and was firmly rooted in the flourishing feminist movement that was unfolding in Canada.

Many people recount the experience of a 16-millimeter projector being pushed into a classroom, community hall, or a church basement, and threaded with an NFB film. The click and flicker of the projector is an indelible mark for many of us, representing our first experience with documentary film. For me, growing up in Newfoundland, it marked a special occasion, in which we were catapulted into another reality. The NFB's unique distribution system had been established decades earlier, involving an army of NFB projectionists heading into communities with 16 mm projectors in the back of their station wagons to show NFB documentary films to small (and large) communities across the country. This kind of high touch distribution was an effective way of creating a shared sense of community, and of raising awareness about Canadian issues and stories. The US-based National Sexual Violence Resource Centre mounted a campaign in 2018 which used the banner "Awareness Plus Action Equals Social Change." I would argue that this slogan, though simple, embodies the essence of how social change happens. *Second Wave* focuses on the women who were making the work, and the impact it had through community screenings (*Not a Love Story*), and through both traditional and non-traditional wide release distribution strategies (*If You Love This Planet*).

Beginning with the creation of Studio D, and the context in which it was born, I look at some of the work that was created under its banner. Studio D founder, Kathleen Shannon contended that big changes come from small gestures. Bonnie Klein talks about one of her films that's emblematic of the work of Studio D. *Patricia's Moving Picture* is a short documentary about one woman who'd fallen between the cracks of the women's movement, and by giving voice to an invisible sector of society, this film captures the essence of Studio D, which was giving voice to women.

Terre Nash talks about her experience of directing the Oscar-winning short documentary *If You Love This Planet*. Bonnie Klein also directed one of the most well-known films from Studio D, *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1982).

Interview subjects for this episode are: Colin Browne (documentary filmmaker and former SFU Professor), Zoë Druick (SFU Professor), Dorothy Henaut (documentary filmmaker), Bonnie Sherr Klein (documentary filmmaker), Sharon McGowan (filmmaker and UBC professor), Terre Nash (documentary filmmaker), Albert Ohayon (NFB archivist), Moira Simpson (documentary filmmaker) and Michelle van Beusekom (former Executive Director of the NFB's English Studio).

Episode Three: Down the Rabbit Hole

It's 2020. We are now inundated with documentary content: short-form documentaries pop up daily in our Facebook feeds, feature-length documentary films are released theatrically, platforms such as Netflix offer a plethora of documentary series and feature length films that can be watched at any time of day or night, and, most recently, according to *WIRED Magazine*, audio documentaries in podcast form have exploded in terms of popularity (Salmon).

The challenge for many documentary filmmakers has become how to successfully engage communities and inspire social change and dialogue. Thirty-eight years after the NFB's Challenge for Change project, the National Film Board of Canada continues to engage in content creation that, at its core, embraces social change. One of the first cultural producers to offer most of its collection for online streaming in 2008, the NFB has been at the forefront of digital content production. The creation of a Digital Studio in 2008 dedicated entirely to the creation of interactive content and virtual reality

positioned the NFB as an innovator, which is evidenced in the many awards the Digital Studio has collected over the years for its work.

The digital era in which we live has changed both the way we tell stories and how we consume them. First and foremost, we are inundated with media which comes at us on multiple platforms. The impact of multiple digital platforms on content creation has opened up discussions about discoverability and metrics. Furthermore, digital platforms have enabled the creation of non-linear content, that has created unique relationships with viewers that linear content cannot: *God's Lake Narrows* identifies the user's location through accessing their IP address, and determines their proximity to the closest Reserve; *The Test Tube With David Suzuki* asks users a question and then uses the keywords from their answer to troll Twitter for real-time tweets dealing with the same words to illustrate the concept of exponential growth.

Virtual reality has had a surprising result in terms of distribution because the high touch one-on-one user experience is reminiscent of the early days of NFB distribution in which a projectionist would make their way into communities with a 16 mm projector in the back of a station wagon and screen a film for (sometimes) only a handful of people in a church basement.

Along with interactive content, augmented reality and virtual reality, the NFB also continues to produce point of view documentary whose sole purpose is to engage Canadians in conversation. As several of my interview subjects say, social change doesn't necessarily happen in large sweeping movements, rather, it begins with conversation.

Interview subjects for this episode are: Marie Clements (documentary filmmaker), Zoë Druick (SFU professor), Tracey Friesen (former Executive Producer, NFB BC & Yukon Studio), Rob McLaughlin (Executive Producer NFB Digital Studio), Baljit Sangra (documentary filmmaker), and Shirley Vercruyssen (Executive Producer, NFB BC & Yukon Studio), and Michelle van Beusekom (former Executive Director of the NFB's English Program).

Each of the subjects from the three episodes acknowledged that the NFB has successfully created social impact with its work over the years, however there was no consensus about a singular method of measuring social change. In other words, it's

possible to acknowledge that specific projects, such as the 27 short films that made up *The Fogo Process*, were instrumental in creating change (in the case of *The Fogo Process*, the films established a dialogue that prevented resettlement from taking place). But how is it possible to measure the impact of the thousands of conversations initiated after community screenings of *Because We Are Girls*, except to acknowledge that conversations about sexual abuse had previously been few and far between in South Asian communities? In the early 80s, *If You Love This Planet* was seen by one in five Canadian schoolchildren and inspired then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's World Peace Tour to reduce nuclear arms (Lacey, Liam). This is a distinct indication of creating change. Yet not every film enjoys these kinds of visible (measurable) metrics. Rather, much of the work of the NFB is moving towards making social change one conversation at a time. In the words of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg: "Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time" (Blackman).

Conclusion

Projecting Impact: How the NFB Continues to Change the World is a three-part documentary podcast series that examines the methodologies and approaches to making social change through documentary film and interactive digital creations. In this work, I've used the burgeoning form of podcast production to illuminate the National Film Board's current and historical relationship to social change. This inquiry was inspired by advances in podcasting that position them as legitimate civic function in their own right, outside of radio, or cinematic audio narratives.

By examining work from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) from three unique eras, I am able to look at social impact with regards to media production and in relation to broader social movements. Beginning with some of the documentary work created during the Challenge for Change era (1967-1980), then moving to the work of Studio D (1974-1996), and finally, documentary creation and dissemination at the NFB today, *Projecting Impact* sheds light on the work of the NFB, the people who make the work, and the viable social change the work continues to make in the world. Despite tectonic shifts in technology over the past fifty years, I discovered that the unique distribution system employed by the NFB in its early days has surprising contemporary parallels, as do the thoughtful approaches of some of the key NFB creators in addressing social movements and inequality. Today, the NFB continues to be deeply invested in making work that has the potential to create social change. I contend that because of the media morass in which we live, the metrics with which we measure social change require a fresh look. In the face of the significant contributions the NFB has made to Canadian society over the years, traditional metrics alone cannot capture the full scope of this impact. Consequently, the NFB should accept more diverse, community-based measures of uptake and influence because, ultimately, change begins with a simple conversation.

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Appendix:

Supplemental Files

Description:

This paper is complementary to a three-part documentary podcast series that examines the methodologies and approaches to making social change through documentary film and interactive digital media. The podcasts focus on documentary work of the National Film Board of Canada, with regard to the social impact that resulted as a direct result of the films, videos and interactive projects. Each episode focuses on work that was created in a specific era, or through a specific program of the NFB, including Challenge for Change and Studio D.

Filenames:

[t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_1_repairing_the_world_rev - 2020-07-17, 12.58 PM.m4a](#)

[t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_2_second_wave.m4a](#)

[t_snelgrove_thesis_episode_3_down_the_rabbit_hole.m4a](#)