



From Documentary to Digital: The Role of the National Film Board of Canada in Transnational Knowledge Transfer, Twentieth–Twenty-First Century

John W. Bessai

Independent scholar

john@bessai.com

ORCID: 0009-0003-2755-6623

This article examines the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) as a state-supported cultural institution that enables transnational knowledge transfer through public-facing media. It traces how NFB productions circulate interpretive frames across borders and across media forms, connecting Cold War cultural diplomacy, participatory documentary practice, and twenty-first-century interactive storytelling. The analysis centers on three case studies: *Neighbours* (1952), Norman McLaren’s internationally circulated anti-war short aligned with postwar peace discourse; *Winds of Fogo* (1970), produced through the *Challenge for Change* milieu and linked to community development practice through the “Fogo Process”; and *Circa 1948* (2014), an interactive historical project that stages memory work through navigation, interface design, and archival assemblage. Methodologically, the article uses close institutional reading and hybrid thematic analysis across film texts, production contexts, and official documentation, supported by interpretive reflection on how form shapes public engagement. The findings show that the NFB’s public-service mandate takes procedural form through circulation infrastructures, participatory address, and interface governance, while the Canadian aporetic condition remains visible in the institution’s ongoing negotiation of national authority, uneven development, and contested belonging.

Keywords: National Film Board of Canada, transnational knowledge transfer, cultural diplomacy, Challenge for Change, participatory documentary, interactive digital storytelling

Introduction

The Canadian government founded the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) to “interpret Canada to Canadians and the world.”¹ That mandate placed film at the center of the NFB’s public work.² Over the following decades, the NFB built

1 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 34–35.

2 Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema*, 30, 79–81.

and sustained public infrastructure that moved cultural and informational material across borders. This article refers to that work as transnational knowledge transfer. The concept draws on scholarship on knowledge circulation that emphasizes travel, translation, and recontextualization as the processes through which ideas acquire new publics and new meanings.³ During World War II, NFB newsreels and propaganda shorts reached large international audiences. In later decades, NFB community-media initiatives and interactive digital productions expanded that circulation through educational programs, festivals, broadcasters, and online platforms. The NFB's institutional record also highlights interlinked governance obligations: international cultural representation and domestic public debate on colonial legacy, plural belonging, and uneven development. Three key concepts guide this article's study of the NFB's evolving role. The first is the notion of art as a public service,⁴ the idea that artistic production can and should serve democratic dialogue and public education, especially when it enjoys state support. This principle was foundational to Grierson's philosophy for the NFB, reflecting his view of documentary film as "a mechanism for social reform, education, and perhaps spiritual uplift."⁵ It continued to define the NFB's mission in subsequent eras, whether through the production of socially relevant documentaries or through today's interactive social-issue projects. The second is Albert Murray's concept of the stylization of experience, which posits that art reframes and stylizes lived reality to reveal deeper truths or provoke new understanding.⁶ The NFB's work often transforms real-world experiences, such as war, community life, and historical memory, into creative narratives or visual metaphors, thereby making complex issues accessible and emotionally resonant for diverse audiences. Third, this article uses *aporia* in its philosophical sense as a name for an enduring problem structure that organizes public reasoning and contested belonging.⁷ I use the term Canadian *aporetic condition* as a term of art specific to this analysis: it denotes a historically situated configuration of tensions that recur in NFB production contexts and reception frames, including settler sovereignty claims alongside Indigenous jurisdiction, federal bilingualism and regional political economy, multicultural recognition alongside racial hierarchy, and middle-power internationalism shaped by proximity to U.S. cultural and

3 Secord, "Knowledge in Transit," 654–55; Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, 1–3.

4 Bessai, "Art as a Public Service," chap. 6, esp. secs. 6.1–6.3 (217–25) and 6.6 (234–36).

5 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 91–94.

6 Murray, *The Omni-Americans*.

7 Derrida, *Aporias*.

security power.⁸ The concept functions here as an interpretive device that links the NFB's mandate, production governance, and circulation infrastructure to the tensions that shape public meaning-making across domestic and transnational publics. Many NFB productions engage these tensions by opening public space for interpretation and discussion, and the article tracks how form and platform organize that work of public address.

To examine the NFB's role as an agent of transnational knowledge transfer across changing media regimes, this article develops three case studies drawn from distinct institutional moments and delivery formats. The first case examines Norman McLaren's *Neighbours* (1952) as an animated work of public pedagogy that circulated through NFB distribution and UNESCO-adjacent peace initiatives, linking aesthetic innovation with Cold War cultural diplomacy. The second case examines *Winds of Fogo* (1970), directed by Colin Low, as a Challenge for Change-era participatory documentary practice organized through community screening, feedback cycles, and locally articulated priorities, which structured knowledge exchange between *Fogo Island* and wider public-policy audiences. The third case examines *Circa 1948* (2014) as an NFB co-produced interactive historical narrative that uses platform design, spatial navigation, and user choice to organize public history and memory work. Across the three cases, the analysis tracks how mandate language, production governance, and circulation infrastructure structured the movement of peace discourse, community knowledge, and historical interpretation across borders and audiences.

Methodologically, the study uses a hybrid qualitative design that combines thematic analysis with discourse analysis to explain how NFB productions carried knowledge across borders. Thematic analysis identifies recurring social, political, and cultural concerns expressed through narrative structure, characterization, imagery, sound, and institutional framing.⁹ Discourse analysis examines modes of address, narratorial voice, stylistic choices, and distribution rhetoric, and it also considers interface affordances and user pathways in the interactive case to show how each work positions audiences and organizes public engagement.¹⁰ The study operationalizes transnational knowledge transfer as circulation, translation, brokerage, and recontextualization across institutional

8 Bessai, "Art as a Public Service," chap. 1, sec. 1.1.

9 Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 77–101; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, "Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis," 80–92.

10 Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*; Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*.

and media settings.¹¹ Primary sources include NFB institutional records, distribution materials, and project documentation, alongside peer-reviewed scholarship on documentary, participatory media, and digital storytelling. The analysis also applies an interpretive framework developed through dissertation research on the NFB. Crystallization supports this design by treating interpretive insight as multi-perspectival, generated through iterative movement between coding, close reading, and analytic writing.¹² The discourse-analytic component treats mandate statements, production rationales, and circulation records as institutional speech acts that define publics, problems, and responsibilities.¹³

This article aims to contribute to both historical and media studies literatures. It situates the NFB's activities within broader historical currents, including the cultural diplomacy of the early Cold War, the global "participatory media" movements of the 1960s–70s, and the digital revolution of the early twenty-first century. It thus highlights how a Canadian public institution mediated transnational flows of knowledge during each period. It also reflects on the NFB as a lens into Canada's national identity negotiations: how Canada has projected itself internationally (as a peacekeeper, a progressive social experimenter, and a digital innovator) and how it has simultaneously confronted its own social contradictions through art. In doing so, the article illustrates the lasting relevance of Grierson's original mandate in contemporary form, demonstrating that even in the age of apps and VR, the NFB continues to use creative storytelling as a "pulpit" (to borrow Grierson's term)¹⁴ for public enlightenment and engagement, both at home and abroad.¹⁵

Cold War Cultural Diplomacy and Peace Discourse: Neighbours (1952)

In the early 1950s, as the Cold War took hold, the NFB found itself at the nexus of cultural diplomacy and propaganda. After World War II, Canada, a founding member of the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was eager to promote messages of peace and mutual understanding internationally, even as global tensions rose.¹⁶

11 Secord, "Knowledge in Transit," 654–72; Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*.

12 Richardson and St. Pierre, "Writing," 961–63.

13 Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 3–5.

14 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 151–76.

15 Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema*, 13.

16 Global Affairs Canada, "Canada and UNESCO Relations," last modified October 23, 2024.

In Joseph Nye’s formulation, soft power describes the capacity to shape preferences through attraction, cultural credibility, and value projection rather than through coercion. In the NFB context, the term names a practical cultural-diplomacy mechanism: internationally circulating screen works that attach Canada’s public image to peace pedagogy, artistic innovation, and institutional credibility in multilateral settings.¹⁷ A telling example is *Neighbours* (or by its French title, *Voisins*), an eight-minute anti-war film directed by Scottish-Canadian animator Norman McLaren and released by the NFB in 1952. *Neighbours* belongs to the NFB’s animation tradition and advances a documentary public-service purpose through allegory and experimental technique rather than evidentiary reportage. *Neighbours* is often cited as one of the NFB’s most famous and globally influential works, encapsulating how Canada communicated its values across borders during the Cold War. *Neighbours* presents an allegorical peace parable staged through pixilation (stop-motion animation of live actors). Two neighbors begin in convivial proximity until a single flower appears on the boundary between their homes. Rivalry over possession of the flower escalates into ritualized violence that destroys both households. A closing injunction (“Love your neighbour”) frames the parable as a public moral address aimed at conflict prevention and civic restraint. The film’s production and reception highlight the NFB’s transition from wartime propaganda to postwar cultural diplomacy, leveraging innovative artistic discourse to transfer knowledge and ideals (in this case, the ideal of peace) to international audiences.

Historical and Institutional Context

By 1952, the NFB had weathered significant changes. Its founding Commissioner, John Grierson, resigned in 1945 amid controversy during the onset of Cold War anti-communist sentiment.¹⁸ A social democrat with suspected leftist sympathies, Grierson had been instrumental in aligning the NFB with international efforts for peace and understanding, notably by helping shape UNESCO’s early communications agenda.¹⁹ After leaving the NFB, Grierson served as UNESCO’s first Director of Mass Communications (1946–1948),²⁰ reflecting the close ties between the Film Board’s ethos and UNESCO’s mission

17 Nye, *Soft Power*, x–xi, 5–11.

18 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 23–27.

19 Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema*, 134.

20 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 53–54.

of “building peace in the minds of men.” Grierson’s presence at UNESCO signaled Canada’s commitment to international cultural collaboration: he even conceived the UNESCO Courier magazine to disseminate ideas globally.

In the late 1940s, Canadian officials and Western partners began pressing the NFB to align its public messaging with emerging anti-communist priorities. The Board emphasized democratic ideals and civic unity, and it used measured political framing that aligned with Canada’s postwar alliances.

Norman McLaren developed *Neighbours* within that institutional environment. McLaren, who had joined the NFB in 1941 at Grierson’s invitation, was by 1952 the Board’s best-known animator and a figure of international renown. He was an ideal emissary for Canadian cultural diplomacy: artistically innovative, politically passionate, and able to communicate without words. A self-described pacifist (and one-time communist), McLaren was deeply moved by the global events of the time.²¹ As he later recounted, his inspiration for *Neighbours* came from direct transnational experience: “I was inspired to make *Neighbours* by a stay of over a year in the People’s Republic of China... Then I returned to Quebec, and the Korean War began. I decided to make a really strong film about anti-militarism and against war.”²² This remarkable statement reveals how McLaren served as a conduit of knowledge between worlds. Having witnessed the hopeful early days of Mao’s China (which, he noted, “reinvigorated” his faith in humanity) and then seen the outbreak of the Korean War, he channeled these observations into an artistic plea for peace. In effect, McLaren’s personal knowledge transfer (from East Asia back to Canada) paved the way for the NFB’s transmission of a peace message to global audiences via *Neighbours*.

The NFB granted McLaren wide latitude for formal experimentation, and NFB leadership recognized the soft-power value of his animation work. The NFB produced *Neighbours* through its animation program in Studio Unit B under producer Tom Daly. Canada participated militarily in the Korean War under United Nations command, and McLaren framed *Neighbours* as a universal pacifist parable with cross-cultural reach. That framing aligned with UNESCO’s peace-education orientation and its emphasis on intercultural understanding. McLaren also maintained active ties with UNESCO during this period. In 1953, he joined a UNESCO-sponsored mission to India to train local filmmakers in animation and to support health-education media production. (He had earlier done similar

21 Ropchan, “The Career of Norman McLaren.”

22 Green, “Norman McLaren’s *Neighbours*.”

work in China in 1949 under UNESCO auspices.)²³ These missions exemplify transnational knowledge transfer in a literal sense (Canadian film expertise spreading to other countries) and underscore the NFB's role as a facilitator of international dialogue through media. With its universal theme and absence of spoken language, *Neighbours* was an ideal product of this milieu. It could easily cross linguistic and cultural barriers and was actively circulated worldwide by the NFB and UNESCO-related networks.

Stylization of Experience: Allegory and Innovation in Neighbours

The content and form of *Neighbours* are highly stylized, and this contributed to its impact. The film is essentially an allegorical fable. Two friendly neighbors live side by side in peace until a small flower grows on the border between their yards. They quarrel over possession of the flower, the conflict escalates absurdly into violence, and by the end, each man has murdered the other's family and destroyed his home, all over a single flower. The final shots show both men dead and the coveted flower growing on their graves, as a caption in multiple languages implores, "Love your neighbour."²⁴ The simple parable starkly conveys the futility and destruction of war. The stylization here serves the message. McLaren employs a childlike, almost Chaplinesque veneer (two pipe-smoking men in a slapstick tussle), but he subverts it with shocking brutality in the second half.²⁵ McLaren stages *Neighbours* in a comic, silent-film register and then drives the narrative toward a brutal conclusion. The sudden shift produces a jolt that fixes the film's ethical claim in the viewer's memory. The sequence also illustrates Albert Murray's concept of the stylization of experience. McLaren takes an abstract political problem (war between neighboring states) and renders that problem as a legible, stylized micro-drama. He builds the micro-drama around two men who escalate a dispute over a single flower into lethal violence. That deliberate simplification concentrates attention on escalation, possessiveness, and retaliatory logic, and it communicates war's irrationality through form, pacing, and action.

Technically, *Neighbours* was groundbreaking. McLaren used a technique he dubbed pixilation, which is stop-motion animation of live actors.²⁶ The technique

23 Dobson, "Norman McLaren: His UNESCO Work in Asia," 27–33.

24 National Film Board of Canada (NFB), *Neighbours (Voisins)*, film, 1952 (NFB film page).

25 Ropchan, "Career of Norman McLaren," 42–49.

26 NFB, *Neighbours (Voisins)*, film page (notes pixilation).

gives the film a surreal, frenetic quality.²⁷ McLaren's pixilation defamiliarizes ordinary movement and turns gesture into a moral performance, intensifying the parable's civic address. The technique supports a public-service purpose because it compresses complex political conflict into a form that circulates across linguistic settings through image, rhythm, and action.

As a film without spoken language, *Neighbours* relies on stylized images, rhythm, and music to convey its anti-war message across linguistic boundaries and to circulate its civics lesson through international exhibitions and educational contexts.

International Reception and Knowledge Transfer

Neighbours achieved an extraordinary level of international reach for a Canadian short film. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary (Short Subject), a category that reflected the Academy's nonfiction-short taxonomy at the time; the film itself uses animated allegory to stage a peace argument.²⁸ The film also earned high-profile praise as "the most eloquent plea for peace ever filmed" in the words of contemporary critics.²⁹ The United Nations and UNESCO circles embraced the film.³⁰ It was exactly the kind of cultural output envisioned to foster a "better understanding of one another," denouncing violence and appealing for peace.³¹ In 1956, *Neighbours* was one of the films widely used in peace education contexts on the theme of peaceful coexistence.³² In 2009, UNESCO added *Neighbours* (1952) to the Memory of the World Register, a designation that signals the film's continuing international significance.³³ The UNESCO nomination document praised the film as an "anti-war parable" produced in response to the Korean War and noted its universal accessibility and impact.

Quantitatively, the film was among the NFB's most widely distributed works. By the late 1980s, *Neighbours* had been booked for some 108,000 screenings

27 UNESCO, *Memory of the World* nomination dossier: "Neighbours" (1952, Norman McLaren), 2009.

28 Ohayon, "Neighbours: The NFB's Second Oscar Winner."

29 Ropchan, "The Career of Norman McLaren," 43.

30 UNESCO/Audio-Visual Preservation Trust of Canada, *Memory of the World Register Nomination Dossier: "Neighbours" (1952, Norman McLaren)* (2009).

31 UNESCO, *Memory of the World nomination dossier: "Neighbours" (1952, Norman McLaren)* (2009).

32 Dobson, "Norman McLaren: His UNESCO Work in Asia," 25–34.

33 UNESCO/Audio-Visual Preservation Trust of Canada, *Memory of the World Nomination: "Neighbours" (1952)* (2009), Part A (Summary), Part B (Context/Significance).

worldwide, making it the most popular NFB film to date.³⁴ While initially produced for theatrical and festival audiences, it eventually was shown in schools, community centers, military training contexts (as an anti-war lesson), and on television around the globe. Each screening was an instance of knowledge transfer: the film sparked discussions about conflict resolution and tolerance. Notably, during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, *Neighbours* experienced revivals at peace rallies and on television as its message resonated anew.³⁵ In this way, the NFB's cultural product became part of international dialogues on war and peace well beyond its Canadian origins.

It is also instructive to consider the modes of knowledge transfer here. *Neighbours* carried Canada's "middle power" perspective (implicitly advocating for peace and negotiation) into the hearts of foreign publics without the overt imprint of Canadian nationalism. Cold War-era propaganda cartoons often carried explicit state messaging. *Neighbours* presents a humanistic pacifist parable with few national markers, and that openness invites broad audience identification. That aesthetic and ethical framing supported Canada's international cultural image by associating the country with peace pedagogy and artistic autonomy. Within Canada, the film also entered domestic discussion about foreign policy and alliance politics, and it conveyed a public preference for an international role grounded in restraint, mediation, and cultural initiative. Canada participated in UN military action in Korea, and *Neighbours* circulated as a state-funded pacifist parable. This juxtaposition clarifies the Canadian aporetic condition in this article's sense: an institutional form of public messaging that projected peace-oriented civic values while Canada participated in Cold War security alignments. The NFB managed this tension by framing *Neighbours* in universal terms and distributing it through networks that treated peace education as a transnational public good.

In summary, *Neighbours* exemplifies the NFB's Cold War-era role in transnational knowledge transfer through cultural production. The film's allegorical discourse stylized a pressing global experience (the spiral of violence) into a simple artistic experience that traveled across the world. It aligned with UNESCO's peace discourse and enhanced Canada's diplomatic toolkit, essentially serving as cine-diplomacy. As one historian of the NFB noted, the Board's early films were "more than propaganda; they were interventions in the global

34 Evans, *In the National Interest*, 71.

35 Ohayon, "Neighbours: The NFB's Second Oscar Winner."

public sphere.”³⁶ *Neighbours* was indeed an intervention, one that used the power of art as a public service to prompt people everywhere to think about peace. With this film, the NFB showed that a publicly funded animated allegory could circulate across borders and languages while communicating a humanitarian lesson. *Neighbours* also signaled an institutional commitment to formal experimentation that continued across subsequent decades as the NFB pursued public dialogue through new collaborative practices. The next case study examines community-centered filmmaking and the participatory knowledge practices that emerged through the Fogo Process.

*Participatory Documentary and Community Knowledge:
Winds of Fogo (1970)*

By the late 1960s, a period of global social upheaval and reassessment, the NFB had undergone a profound shift in its approach to documentary. Internally, Canada was confronting social inequalities and regional disparities, while externally, the ethos of development and participatory communication was gaining traction worldwide. In this context, the NFB launched the influential *Challenge for Change* (CFC) program in 1967 (known in French as *Société Nouvelle*), which aimed to use film as an agent of social change and to empower marginalized communities to tell their own stories.³⁷ CFC’s designers also organized the program as an interagency initiative and placed “film utilization” at the center of its operating logic, linking production to circulation strategies that could move community testimony into policy-facing discussion.³⁸ Scholarship on CFC also identifies multiple agendas that shaped the program’s governance and evaluation, including liberal social policy aims, McLuhan-inspired communications thinking, and left political commitments that treated media practice as a site of social intervention.³⁹ The *Société nouvelle* stream also mattered as a distinct institutional and public-sphere formation, and it expanded the program’s significance beyond a single-language national story.⁴⁰ CFC emphasized participatory media practices and community-defined priorities, and it treated knowledge production as a

36 Evans, *In the National Interest*.

37 Druick, “Meeting at the Poverty Line,” 337–53.

38 Wiesner, “Media for the People,” 73–99.

39 Druick, “Meeting at the Poverty Line,” 339–42.

40 MacKenzie, “*Société nouvelle*,” 325–36.

shared process structured through filming, screening, and facilitated discussion.⁴¹ Janine Marchessault frames the program's turn to amateur video as a reconfiguration of authority and participation, and she connects access claims to questions of agency and distribution.⁴² One of the earliest and most celebrated initiatives of *Challenge for Change* was the Fogo Island project (1967–1968), a series of community-based documentary shorts made in collaboration with residents of Fogo Island, Newfoundland.⁴³

From this project emerged *Winds of Fogo* (1970), a 21-minute film directed by veteran NFB filmmaker Colin Low.⁴⁴ *Winds of Fogo* serves as a case study of the NFB's participatory turn and its implications for transnational knowledge transfer. While the film itself takes the form of a poetic documentary produced after the initial process films, it serves as an epilogue-like portrait of the island, drawing directly on the practical knowledge generated by the wider Fogo initiative through sustained community engagement.⁴⁵ The Fogo Island collaboration generated a cycle of short films designed for local screening and feedback, and the National Film Board of Canada presents this cycle as an early instance of using film in community economic development.⁴⁶ In the *Challenge for Change* literature, analysts treat the Fogo work as a defining success story that clarified how the program could align local testimony, screening practice, and administrative attention within a single communication workflow.⁴⁷ *Winds of Fogo* shows how residents of a remote Canadian community articulated local knowledge in public-facing media and how the production carried that knowledge beyond the island. Community participants identified local problems, narrated lived experiences, and framed collective priorities through the project's participatory process. The resulting films then circulated through NFB distribution channels to educators, policymakers, broadcasters, festivals, and community organizations. That circulation shared practical insights on community development, cultural resilience, and regional identity with audiences across Canada and beyond.⁴⁸ Corneil's reassessment of the CFC/Société nouvelle legacy supports the claim

41 Wiesner, "Media for the People," 83–88.

42 Marchessault, "Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change," 354–65.

43 National Film Board of Canada, "The Films of Fogo Island."

44 National Film Board of Canada, *The Winds of Fogo* (film page).

45 White, *The Radio Eye*, 57, 60–61.

46 National Film Board of Canada, "The Films of Fogo Island."

47 Wiesner, "Media for the People," 86–87.

48 Crocker, "Filmmaking and the Politics of Remoteness."

that projects such as Fogo continue to function as a reference point for activist documentary practice and institutional memory inside Canadian media history.⁴⁹

The Fogo Process: Participation as Knowledge Exchange

Fogo Island is a small, windswept island off Newfoundland's northeastern coast, historically dependent on the fishing economy. In the 1960s, Fogo's isolated fishing communities were facing severe economic hardship, and government officials on the mainland were considering resettling the island's population elsewhere (as part of a broader push to centralize services and reduce "unviable" settlements in Newfoundland). This scenario set the stage for a remarkable experiment in mediated dialogue. In 1967, the NFB partnered with the Memorial University of Newfoundland's Extension Service (led by community development officer Donald Snowden) to use film as a communication bridge. The project filmed Fogo Islanders discussing their problems, hopes, and ideas for the future and then screened those films for both community members and government policymakers in order to prompt constructive dialogue. The NFB dispatched a crew, including Colin Low and other filmmakers, to live on Fogo and record candid interviews, meetings, and everyday life. The result was a cycle of short films collectively known as the Fogo Island series.⁵⁰ Wiesner situates this work within CFC's broader community development mandate and explains how the program treated screening practices as a practical mechanism for deliberation, accountability, and policy learning.⁵¹

The "Fogo Process" functioned as a participatory media practice grounded in knowledge co-creation. Residents, facilitators, and NFB staff shaped research questions, filming priorities, and narrative emphasis through iterative community discussion and screening.⁵² NFB staff and Memorial University Extension Service collaborators structured a facilitated communication process in which Fogo Island residents shaped the filmed testimony and then used local screenings to articulate priorities to regional and provincial decision-makers.⁵³ NFB staff functioned as facilitators and technical enablers for community communication, and villagers spoke in their own dialect about fishing economies, out-migration,

49 Corneil, "Winds and Things."

50 Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History," 50–54.

51 Wiesner, "Media for the People," 83–88.

52 Ibid., 86–87.

53 Ibid., 86–87.

the need for a cooperative, and inter-village tensions. Each film addressed a specific facet of island life (e.g. a fisherman's cooperative meeting or a family contemplating moving away). The project then screened the films locally to allow different villages to hear each other's perspectives, supporting intra-island understanding. The project also screened the films for provincial government officials in St. John's and for federal policy audiences, enabling policymakers to listen without the confrontation of a face-to-face meeting. Winton and Garrison's analysis of distribution and counter-public formation clarifies how screening networks operate as a political practice, since circulation shapes the publics that gather around a film and the institutional pathways that carry community testimony into administrative decision-making contexts.⁵⁴ This mediated dialogue helped dispel mutual suspicions. It humanized the islanders in the government's eyes and empowered them to articulate solutions rather than remain passive subjects of policy. The Fogo Process is credited with influencing policy outcomes. Instead of mass relocation, for instance, the government supported local cooperative development on Fogo, allowing the community a path to viability. Scholarship also cautions against the claim that the film single-handedly "saved" the island from resettlement while recognizing its role in shaping a more informed policy response.⁵⁵ From a knowledge-transfer perspective, the Fogo project was revolutionary. It flipped the traditional flow. Rather than the center delivering information to the periphery, it enabled the periphery (Fogo) to transfer local knowledge and lived experience back to the center (the government and, by extension, other Canadians). It also facilitated horizontal knowledge exchange among communities (villages learning from one another). The NFB, backed by federal funds, acted as the intermediary and amplifier of this knowledge. This approach aligned with broader trends in the late 1960s of participatory development communication and the War on Poverty programs, making the Fogo Process an object of international interest. The CFC/Société nouvelle record also includes related historical initiatives that placed production capacity in the hands of community participants, including Indigenous film crew work that linked self-representation to organizational training and public address.⁵⁶

Practitioners and scholars later used the Fogo Process as a reference point for participatory communication and community media in international

54 Winton and Garrison, "If a Revolution Is Screened and No One Is There to See It, Does It Make a Sound?," 404–26.

55 Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History," 51–52.

56 Starblanket, "A Voice for Canadian Indians," 38–40.

development settings. Documentation of Anthony Williamson's UNESCO-facing account and later research on "exporting Fogo" connect the approach to training, adaptation, and uptake through development agencies and allied organizations in multiple regions.⁵⁷

Winds of Fogo: A Stylized Portrait of Community Life

Winds of Fogo, filmed in 1969 and released in 1970, differs from the raw "process films" of the initial Fogo series. Rather than a conversation among islanders or an interview about problems, it is a more conventional documentary short that Colin Low made after the main project, depicting a day in the life of a Fogo Island fisherman's family. The film follows fisherman William Wells and his two young sons as they take a rare day off from their fishing nets to sail to the Funk Islands, some 50 miles offshore, to visit a seabird colony.⁵⁸ The camera captures cinema-vérité footage of gannets and egg gathering, intercut with scenes of the boys flying a homemade kite on the windy cliffs.⁵⁹ There is minimal narration or dialogue; natural sounds of wind and sea dominate, with a sparse musical score. In essence, *Winds of Fogo* presents a slice-of-life view of Fogo Island's natural environment and the traditional skills of its inhabitants. The tone is intimate and observational. The film's international circulation garnered formal recognition, including a BAFTA nomination for Best Short Film.⁶⁰

Winds of Fogo followed the project's initial participatory phase and emerged from a subsequent production stage. The filmmakers drew on knowledge developed through sustained engagement with community members, and the film carries that accumulated understanding through its interviews, scene selection, and narrative framing.⁶¹ After months on Fogo, Colin Low knew what details to portray: pride in the island's natural bounty, the rough beauty of daily life, even subtle cultural cues (at one moment, the father offhandedly remarks that the Union Jack would make a better kite than the recently adopted Canadian Maple Leaf flag, hinting at the older generation's lingering ties to tradition and perhaps skepticism of mainland Canadian symbols). These nuances show the "stylization of experience" at work: Low crafted a narrative that encapsulates

57 Williamson, "The Fogo Process"; Charbonneau, "Exporting Fogo."

58 National Film Board of Canada, *The Winds of Fogo* (film page); White, *The Radio Eye*, 60–61.

59 National Film Board of Canada, "The Winds of Fogo," film page.

60 British Academy of Film and Television Arts, "Film Awards 1971: Short Film."

61 Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History," 56–57.

the feeling of Fogo, including the constant wind, the generational knowledge (a father teaching sons how to navigate and harvest seabird eggs), and the isolation and self-sufficiency of the community. By focusing on a non-dramatic, everyday event (an outing to bird islands), the film imparts an understanding of Fogo Islanders not through statistics or advocacy but through immersion in their lived experience.

Winds of Fogo develops a discourse of respect and authenticity through observational choices and restrained narration. The film relies on images, on-location speech, and ambient sound to carry meaning, and it minimizes overt didactic guidance. That approach positions the audience as a witness to community life and local deliberation. The film also reflects the *Challenge for Change* orientation toward participation and accountability. The filmmakers adopt a humble stance and build the film's authority through residents' voices, the rhythms of work, and the island's material conditions. Through that method, the film circulates situated knowledge about Fogo Island's social and economic life with an emphasis on agency, dignity, and community-defined priorities. For Canadian audiences in 1970, seeing this film would transfer the knowledge (and empathy) that the *Challenge for Change* team had acquired on Fogo: viewers on the mainland could appreciate the challenges faced by and dignity of the Fogo Islanders, thereby narrowing the mental gap between urban policymakers or southern Canadians and this far-flung population. Winton and Garrison's account of distribution and counter-publics supports this point by showing how circulation and screening contexts organize the political address of such work.⁶² Newhook's discussion of Atlantic Canadian film culture further supports the reading of the Fogo corpus as a durable historical record that continued to circulate as a reference point for regional memory and documentary practice.⁶³

The international dimension of the Fogo work also operated through parallel channels. Alongside screenings and documentary circulation, Canadian practitioners described and adapted the method in development-communications venues, including published accounts that introduced the "Fogo Island Project" as a model of mediated dialogue and community development. Miller's interview with Cizek frames this legacy as a direct institutional prehistory for later NFB experiments in public engagement, thereby connecting *Challenge for Change's* infrastructures to digital-era contexts of participatory production.⁶⁴

62 Winton and Garrison, "If a Revolution Is Screened..." 421.

63 Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History," 53–57.

64 Miller, "Filmmaker-in-Residence: The Digital Grandchild of *Challenge for Change*," 427–42.

The NFB's institutional role, therefore, expanded from producer to facilitator in the Fogo initiative. NFB personnel shouldered responsibilities that included building trust, coordinating across agencies, and evaluating outcomes in relation to social change and policy learning. This redefinition of practice aligns with Druick's account of a "new moment in government realism," where film took procedural form within social policy problem-solving and administrative attention.⁶⁵ The next section turns to the twenty-first century and *Circa 1948*, where interactive digital media expands the institutional repertoire for participatory public history and carries the stylized presentation of experience into historical memory and urban narrative.

Interactive Digital Storytelling and Historical Memory: Circa 1948 (2014)

In the new millennium, the NFB reinvented itself yet again to remain at the forefront of audiovisual storytelling. With the rise of the internet, multimedia, and interactive technologies, the NFB expanded into the domain of digital interactive documentaries and immersive narratives. Building on its legacy of innovation in film and animation, the Board created a Digital Studio (notably in Vancouver and Montreal) to explore the possibilities of Web-based storytelling, virtual reality (VR), and mobile applications as extensions of documentary art. These projects often continue the NFB's tradition of social engagement and experimentation with form but in radically new formats that make the audience an active participant. One standout example is *Circa 1948*, a 2014 interactive project co-created by internationally acclaimed Canadian artist Stan Douglas and the NFB's Vancouver Digital Studio (led by Loc Dao).

Circa 1948 is a multi-platform digital narrative that includes a mobile app (for iOS) and an immersive installation.⁶⁶ Users enter two reconstructed Vancouver sites from 1948 (the Old Hotel Vancouver and Hogan's Alley) and they explore each location through first-person virtual navigation.⁶⁷ The experience unfolds through spatial movement and triggered encounters, as the user activates short audio scenes linked to specific rooms, street corners, and objects that accumulate into micro-narratives about policing, work, nightlife, corruption, and everyday aspiration in postwar Vancouver.⁶⁸ The sound design

65 Druick, *Projecting Canada*, 27, 158.

66 National Film Board of Canada, "About *Circa 1948*."

67 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), "*Circa 1948*."

68 Farago, "Stan Douglas' *Circa 1948*: 'It's Not a Game, It's a Story,'" April 22, 2014.

introduces dozens of character voices, including police officers, fortune tellers, war veterans, and café owners, and the Docubase project record identifies 45 dialogue scenes across the experience.⁶⁹ Through that interactive architecture, the NFB carries Canadian urban history to international audiences and invites participatory meaning-making on class, race, and redevelopment within Vancouver's postwar landscape.

Circa 1948 also renders postwar urban tensions as lived experience by locating users inside spaces shaped by redevelopment, policing, and uneven opportunity. Hogan's Alley serves as a focal point for Black community presence and later disruption through urban renewal and redevelopment planning, and the project treats that history as part of Vancouver's civic memory. The Old Hotel Vancouver registers institutional proximity and postwar privilege, and the interface invites users to move across these sites. At the same time, they encounter fragments of work, nightlife, corruption, and aspiration that index how governance distributed security and precarity across the city.⁷⁰

Transmedia Collaboration and Concept

The genesis of *Circa 1948* is itself transnational and transmedia. Stan Douglas, known for his complex multimedia art installations, which often deal with history and counter-narratives, initially conceived a project about 1940s Vancouver in the form of a traditional film noir.⁷¹ The NFB, however, encouraged reimagining it as an interactive experience “accessible to all Canadians” via a mobile app, aligning with the Board's public service mandate in the digital age.⁷² This suggestion led to a groundbreaking collaboration: the NFB's digital team contributed technological expertise, such as 3D modelling in Autodesk Maya to recreate Vancouver cityscapes and interactive design know-how, while Douglas and his screenwriting partner (Chris Haddock) crafted the narrative content, characters, and overall artistic vision. The result is a hybrid of art, history, and digital innovation—precisely the kind of cross-disciplinary cultural product that a national institution can incubate.⁷³

69 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), “*Circa 1948*” (45 dialogue scenes).

70 National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948*.

71 “Wikipedia, “*Circa 1948*,” last modified July 2025.

72 Farago, “Stan Douglas' *Circa 1948*.”

73 Rothman, “Vancouver Street View, *Circa 1948*,” April 17, 2014.

Circa 1948 launched in two formats: a personal iOS app experience and a site-based public installation. The installation debuted in the Tribeca Film Festival's interactive program in New York in 2014, and participants navigated the projected virtual environment by moving through the physical exhibition space.⁷⁴ In 2015, the NFB presented the *Circa 1948* installation in Vancouver through Simon Fraser University's Woodward's Cultural Programs, and the exhibition ran at the Woodward's Atrium from September 18 to October 16 before moving to SFU's Surrey campus from October 27 to November 13. The NFB also released the *Circa 1948* iOS app as a free download through the iTunes App Store for iPhone and iPad. App-store distribution extended access to users in multiple countries, and users could navigate reconstructed Vancouver environments and encounter the project's historical voices through individual exploration. The NFB's paired installation exhibition and app release operationalized the Board's public-service mandate to create and distribute distinctive audiovisual works for audiences in Canada and internationally.⁷⁵

Immersive Narrative and Stylization of Historical Experience

Circa 1948 represents a profound stylization of historical experience. Instead of a linear historical documentary or a written history of postwar Vancouver, it provides a simulated environment that condenses many truths of that era into a navigable form. The choice of two locales is symbolic: the opulent Hotel Vancouver (a site of postwar optimism and privilege, albeit fading) versus Hogan's Alley (a site of marginalization, poverty, and unofficial economies). By juxtaposing these, the project highlights the class and racial divides of Vancouver in 1948, effectively dramatizing the social contradictions of a Canadian city on the cusp of modern redevelopment. Hogan's Alley, notably, was Vancouver's Black community hub (home to Black, Italian, Chinese and Indigenous residents). It was razed in the 1960s for urban "renewal." The Old Hotel Vancouver, by contrast, housed mostly white veterans benefiting from state support (temporary lodging) and would soon give way to new cityscapes.⁷⁶ Through user exploration, *Circa 1948* makes these contrasts tangible. For instance, in the game-like interface, one can wander from a deteriorating alley where a bootlegger operates to a

74 Rothman, "Vancouver Street View, *Circa 1948*."

75 Sanchez, "Stan Douglas at SFU Woodward's," October 13, 2015.

76 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), "*Circa 1948*" (Hogan's Alley and Hotel Vancouver populations).

grand ballroom where a veteran's gala is underway, experiencing in fragments how two social worlds coexisted and collided.

The narrative structure is nonlinear and participatory. There is no pre-determined storyline or ending.⁷⁷ As the creators put it, “it’s not a game, it’s a story,” without the objective of winning. Users find up to 45 different story fragments by clicking on illuminated objects⁷⁸ or entering certain spaces. These fragments might be snippets of dialogue (overheard conversations), monologues, or encounters with virtual characters. For example, the user might eavesdrop on a woman searching for her husband’s murderer or a policeman taking bribes.⁷⁹ Each fragment adds a piece to the mosaic of Vancouver’s social reality.

Nevertheless, crucially, the user must assemble these pieces mentally. No single character ties them all together, and there is intentionally no final resolution that wraps up the plot. This fragmented, exploratory discourse forces the audience into an active cognitive role, much as a historian sifts through archives or an anthropologist explores a community. In effect, *Circa 1948* transfers historical knowledge through embodied navigation. The project places the user inside reconstructed spaces and prompts interpretation through spatial movement, overheard dialogue, and encountered objects. This design supports experiential learning, since users assemble historical understanding through exploration, inference, and return visits to key sites. The project also aligns with Albert Murray’s concept of the stylization of experience, because the creators curate Vancouver’s social relations into a coherent sensory field that preserves multiple pathways and unresolved threads that mirror urban life.

The project’s stylized 3D environment and spatialized sound place users inside a navigable story-world, so historical knowledge arrives through embodied exploration and interpretive choice.⁸⁰

Addressing Canadian Aporia and Transnational Audiences

Circa 1948 foregrounds concrete social tensions in postwar Vancouver through figures and spaces that policy and redevelopment regimes often displaced from public memory. The Hogan’s Alley thread stages Black community presence and erasure as a lived urban history shaped by zoning, policing, and redevelopment.

77 Farago, “Stan Douglas’ *Circa 1948*” (“It’s Not a Game... It’s a Story”).

78 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), “*Circa 1948*” (45 scenes of dialogue).

79 Farago, “Stan Douglas’ *Circa 1948*” (murder-mystery/noir motifs; fragmentary clues).

80 Rothman, “Vancouver Street View, *Circa 1948*.”

The work's veterans, workers, and marginal residents carry the pressures of housing insecurity, postwar austerity, and uneven access to institutional care, which the interface renders as fragments that users assemble into a historical understanding.

For global audiences, many of these themes are recognizable (most cities have their “two sides of the tracks,” and postwar transitions were a worldwide phenomenon). However, the distinctly Canadian context (e.g., the mix of Chinese and Indigenous characters in Hogan's Alley) offers specific insights into Canada's social history, fulfilling the NFB mandate to interpret Canada to the world. The interactive format likely broadened the appeal to younger, more tech-savvy audiences who might not watch a conventional historical documentary. It also required no prior knowledge of Vancouver; the environment itself educates the user by discovery. Thus, *Circa 1948* functioned as a transnational knowledge vehicle: a European or Asian user could download the app and, while “playing,” could absorb an understanding of the cultural landscape of a Canadian city in 1948, effectively learning history through simulation.

Importantly, the NFB's handling of *Circa 1948* maintained a public service orientation even in cutting-edge form. The app was free, emphasizing accessibility.⁸¹ The NFB also published behind-the-scenes materials and making-of documentaries⁸² explaining how the project was made, thereby sharing knowledge about interactive production. In interviews, Stan Douglas noted that the project enabled him to explore “our relationship to a reconstructed past” in new ways.⁸³ By supporting an artist of Douglas's caliber, the NFB also ensured that the resulting work was both high art and public education. This dual nature was apparent when *Circa 1948* was featured at Tribeca (an international festival platform that added to Canada's cultural prestige) and then made broadly available to Canadians.⁸⁴ The project exemplifies how the NFB navigates being a cultural exporter (showcasing Canadian stories and innovation internationally) and a nation-building institution (helping Canadians engage with their own history, including its dark corners).

Circa 1948 advances NFB knowledge-transfer mechanisms through networked distribution and participatory engagement at scale. The iOS app and the installation package offer historical interpretation and interactive design in

81 Farago, “Stan Douglas' *Circa 1948*.”

82 National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948: Press Kit*.

83 Rothman, “Vancouver Street View, *Circa 1948*.”

84 National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948: Press Kit*, 2–3.

software that travels through app ecosystems, download servers, and exhibition infrastructures. Digital delivery enables rapid cross-border access and supports updates, reinstallation, and reuse across sites and devices. The project positions the NFB as a digital publisher with international reach, and it extends the Board's public-service circulation into online environments where users encounter Canadian public history through networked interaction. Users effectively become co-creators of the experience because each user's path through the story is unique. In my analysis of NFB digital projects, I treat such interactive works as platforms for engagement, dialogue, and reflection.⁸⁵ That platform function aligns with Ian Angus's concept of emergent publics, meaning publics that take shape through participatory communication and shared action within a shared communicative environment.⁸⁶ For instance, *Circa 1948* sparked discussions online and at exhibits about Vancouver's history and the medium's potential. In this way, the NFB's digital turn transfers knowledge and sustains new public spheres that often extend across borders where that knowledge is debated and expanded.

Immersive Knowledge Production and Canada's Digital Identity

Circa 1948 clarifies how the NFB projects Canada's cultural identity in digital form.⁸⁷ The NFB's investment in interactive documentary practice, including *Higbrise* and *Bear 71*, helped establish Canada's standing in global digital storytelling networks and professional fields.⁸⁸ The NFB's Digital Studio work also generated cultural capital through institutional association with innovation in a lineage that critics and historians of Canadian screen culture connect to earlier international recognition for animation and documentary form. Projects such as *Higbrise* and *Bear 71* link technical design to Canadian public questions, including urbanization, ecological governance, and surveillance, and they circulate those questions through interactive interfaces that reach international audiences.⁸⁹

Circa 1948 asks users to assemble meaning from partial scenes, overheard voices, and situated objects, and that interface practice enacts a democratic

85 Bessai, "Art as a Public Service," chap. 6.

86 Angus, *Emergent Publics*, 7–12; National Film Board of Canada, *Imagine, Engage, Transform—A Vision, a Plan, a Manifesto 2013–2018*, 6–7.

87 National Film Board of Canada, "NFB Interactive."

88 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), "*Circa 1948*."

89 Ingram, "Ravishing Vancouver *Circa 1948*," 33–78; Joel McKim, "Stan Douglas and the Animation of Vancouver's Urban Past"; MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), "*Circa 1948*."

epistemology grounded in co-created interpretation. *Circa 1948* extends the participatory ethos associated with the Fogo Process by locating interpretive labor in audience navigation and user-driven compositional choices within the story-world. Scholarship on NFB public-service media frames this kind of interactive work as sustaining dialogic public engagement and supporting emergent publics that form around shared interpretive practice.⁹⁰ In practical terms, *Circa 1948* engaged the public through ancillary events, such as workshops and talks with historians about Hogan's Alley, held at the exhibition. Thus, it was not a solitary app experience; it stimulated communal discussion.⁹¹

In conclusion, *Circa 1948* demonstrates the NFB's adaptation to the digital, networked age while reinforcing its longstanding themes: an artistic, stylized portrayal of reality (the stylization of experience) used to spur public engagement with deeper social questions, i.e., art as a public service. It also highlights the continuity of addressing the Canadian aporia, here, the ghosts of social inequality in a prosperous era and, by implication, the continued quest for an inclusive, honest national narrative. Transnationally, it shows how a nation's cultural agency can produce works that cross borders (through digital distribution) and speak to global audiences about both local specifics and universal issues. As a case study, *Circa 1948* encapsulates the NFB's role in transnational knowledge transfer in the twenty-first century: using cutting-edge storytelling to share Canadian stories and values (critical self-reflection, multicultural awareness, technological innovation) with the world, and inviting the world to partake in that storytelling process interactively.

Conclusion

From the Cold War through the turn of the millennium, the NFB's shift from documentary practice to participatory filmmaking and then to interactive digital media reveals a sustained institutional commitment to storytelling as a vehicle for cross-border knowledge circulation. An analysis of *Neighbours* (1952), *Winds of Fogo* (1970), and *Circa 1948* (2014) traces how the NFB repeatedly adjusted its techniques and platforms while sustaining an ethos of film and media as a public service that supports cultural dialogue.

90 Bessai, "Art as a Public Service," chap. 6.

91 *Vancouver Observer*, "SFU Woodward's Transports Audiences with Hidden Pasts, Digital Futures Festival," September 22, 2015.

Each case study traces one segment of the NFB's evolving practice of transnational knowledge transfer. *Neighbours* situates the NFB within early Cold War cultural diplomacy, where the Board supported Norman McLaren's experimental animation as an internationally legible form of public communication. McLaren constructed a peace parable through stylized allegory, pantomime performance, and dialogue-free narration that audiences across linguistic contexts could follow without mediation. The NFB circulated the film through international cultural circuits that included festivals, institutional screenings, and educational distribution, and that circulation associated Canada with peace discourse and intercultural understanding. *Neighbours*, therefore, exemplifies state-supported knowledge transfer through film: the production carried a public ethic of nonviolence to international venues, secured major accolades, and contributed to global conversations on conflict and its human costs.⁹² In making *Neighbours*, the NFB also navigated Canada's aporetic position as an ally yearning for peace in the midst of a war, cleverly projecting that image through art. The film's enduring global legacy underscores how a creative work, supported by a public institution, can outlive its immediate context to educate and inspire future generations worldwide.

Winds of Fogo and the wider Fogo Process established a participatory practice that carried local voices into policy arenas and public debate. Through *Challenge for Change*, the NFB worked as a mediator and facilitator, and community members shaped films that circulated among villages, officials, and national audiences. The films conveyed place-based knowledge in an accessible cinematic form and created a repeatable method for dialogue and decision-making. Memorial University's Extension Service and NFB collaborators then shared this method well beyond Newfoundland. Donald Snowden and colleagues tested the approach across the Canadian Arctic and Alaska and took it to Africa and Asia, including intensive training with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad in 1984. The method's spread shows how a Canadian public-media partnership generated a social innovation (community media for problem-solving) that traveled across borders and institutions. Scholars who document the Fogo Process and its diffusion note its durable influence on participatory video and communication for development.⁹³

92 UNESCO, *Memory of the World Register Nomination Dossier: "Neighbours"* (2009); Ropchan, "The Career of Norman McLaren," 43.

93 Crocker, "Filmmaking and the Politics of Remoteness"; Williamson, "The Fogo Process: Development Support Communications in Canada and the Developing World"; Huber, "Communicative Aspects of

In *Circa 1948*, the NFB entered the digital arena, continuing its vanguard position. This project confirmed that even in an era of video games and VR, a public cultural institution can produce cutting-edge works that are intellectually and aesthetically ambitious yet widely accessible. In the case of *Circa 1948*, the project's interactive nature made knowledge transfer an immersive, participatory process: users worldwide engaged with Canadian history by actively exploring and constructing the narrative themselves.⁹⁴ This approach is well-suited to addressing complex historical and social issues (in this case, shining light on a neglected chapter of urban history) because it allows multiple perspectives and encourages users to confront contradictions (wealth vs. poverty, official vs. unofficial histories) firsthand. The NFB's foray into interactive storytelling has also been collaborative and interdisciplinary (blending art, technology, and history), reinforcing that such knowledge creation thrives in a public-sector space where experimentation is encouraged in the service of cultural exploration. As a result, Canada, through the NFB, continues to export not only stories but also values and practices: openness to confronting the past, inclusivity of diverse narratives, and innovation in public engagement. These are salient in a world in which many nations grapple with the challenges of presenting their histories honestly and harnessing new media for the public good.

Across the three cases, the NFB's knowledge-transfer mechanism moves through distinct institutional forms: allegorical public pedagogy in the early Cold War, mediated community deliberation in *Challenge for Change*, and networked, user-directed exploration in the digital era. Each form reconfigures audience address and participation while sustaining the institutional aim of art as a public service organized around public understanding and public discussion.

In summary, the NFB's movement from documentary to digital functions as an institutional history of public communication and civic pedagogy. The record shows a state-funded studio refining how it addresses domestic publics and international audiences through storytelling practices that invite attention, recognition, and interpretation. The three case studies (an animated allegory on war and peace, a community-grounded film shaped by the Fogo Process, and an interactive work that stages urban memory through nonlinear navigation) illustrate transnational knowledge transfer as a practical outcome of form,

Participatory Video Projects," 8–10; Snowden, "Eyes See; Ears Hear"; Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History."

94 MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase), "Circa 1948," 2014; Jason Farago, "Stan Douglas' *Circa 1948*: 'It's not a game, it's a story,'" *Guardian*, April 22, 2014.

access, and institutional mandate. This trajectory also demonstrates how public cultural production can sustain an international conversation through shared narrative reference points and durable circulation pathways. The NFB's case, therefore, contributes to a global commons of ideas by distributing stories that organize historical understanding, amplify situated knowledge, and support civic dialogue across borders.

Bibliography

- Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. "Neighbours." Oscar Awards Database. Accessed January 11, 2026. <https://awardsdatabase.oscars.org/>
- Angus, Ian. *Emergent Publics: An Essay on Social Movements and Democracy*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2001.
- BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts). "Film Awards 1971: Short Film." Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://awards.bafta.org/award/1971/film/short-film>
- Bessai, John W. "Art as a Public Service: The National Film Board of Canada's Role in Shaping Democratic Dialogues and Societal Transformation." PhD diss., Trent University, 2024.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
- Charbonneau, Stephen. "Exporting Fogo: Participatory Filmmaking, War on Poverty, and the Politics of Visibility." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 220–47. doi: 10.13110/framework.55.2.0220
- City of Vancouver. "Hogan's Alley." Accessed January 11, 2026. <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/hogan-s-alley-mou.aspx>
- Corneil, Marit Kathryn. "Winds and Things: Towards a Reassessment of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle Legacy." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 389–403. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Crocker, Stephen. "Filmmaking and the Politics of Remoteness: The Genesis of the Fogo Process on Fogo Island, Newfoundland." *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 2, no. 1 (2008): 59–75. <https://www.shimajournal.org/issues/v2n1/g.%20Crocker%20Shima%20v2n1.pdf>
- Derrida, Jacques. *Aporias*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

- Dobson, Terence. "Norman McLaren: His UNESCO Work in Asia." In *Animation—Art and Industry*, edited by Maureen Furniss, 25–34. New Barnet, Herts: John Libbey Publishing, 2012.
- Druick, Zoë. *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board of Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2007.
- Druick, Zoë. "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*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 337–53. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Evans, Gary. *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada, 1949–1989*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Farago, Jason. "Stan Douglas' *Circa 1948*: 'It's Not a Game, It's a Story.'" *The Guardian*, April 22, 2014.
- Fereday, Jennifer, and Eimear Muir-Cochrane. "Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 1 (2006): 80–92. doi: 10.1177/160940690600500107
- Gittings, Christopher E. *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Global Affairs Canada. "Canada and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)." Government of Canada. Last modified October 23, 2024. Accessed January 11, 2026. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/unesco/index.aspx?lang=eng
- Green, Andrew. "Norman McLaren's *Neighbours*." *Gwallter*, October 28, 2018. <https://gwallter.com/film/norman-mclarens-neighbours.html>
- Huber, Bernhard. "Communicative Aspects of Participatory Video Projects: An Exploratory Study." Master's thesis no. 1. Uppsala: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Department of Rural Development Studies, 1999. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:400519/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Ingram, Susan. "Ravishing Vancouver *Circa 1948*: Life Writing and the Immersive Translation of Noir Aesthetics." *Imaginations* 11, no. 3 (2020): 33–78. doi: 10.17742/IMAGE.VT.11.3.3
- Low, Colin, and Donald Snowden. "The Fogo Island Project." *UNESCO Courier* 22, no. 8 (August 1969): 12–17.

- MacKenzie, Scott. "Société nouvelle: The Challenge to Change in the Alternative Public Sphere (1996)." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 325–36. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Marchessault, Janine. "Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change (1995)." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 354–65. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Meier, Allison. "Artist Stan Douglas Resurrects Postwar Vancouver in an Interactive App." *Hyperallergic*, March 30, 2015. <https://hyperallergic.com/197851/artist-stan-douglas-resurrects-postwar-vancouver-in-an-interactive-app/>
- Miller, Liz. "Filmmaker-in-Residence: The Digital Grandchild of Challenge for Change (Interview with Katerina Cizek)." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 427–42. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- MIT Open Documentary Lab (Docubase). "Circa 1948." Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://docubase.mit.edu/project/circa-1948/>
- Murray, Albert. *The Omni-Americans: Black Experience and the White American*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970.
- National Film Board of Canada. *Circa 1948*. Project page. Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://collection.nfb.ca/interactive/circa-1948-web-site>
- National Film Board of Canada. "Circa 1948 (Application)." *NFB Collection*. Accessed January 11, 2026. https://collection.nfb.ca/interactive/circa_1948
- National Film Board of Canada. *Circa 1948: Press Kit*. 2014. http://opendoclab.mit.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Circa-1948-Presskit_Tribeca_-LR.pdf
- National Film Board of Canada. "NFB Interactive." Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/>
- National Film Board of Canada. *Neighbours (Voisins)*. Directed by Norman McLaren. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1952. Film (8 min.). https://collection.nfb.ca/film/neighbours_voisins
- National Film Board of Canada. *The Winds of Fogo*. Directed by Colin Low. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1970. Film (20–21 min.). <https://collection.nfb.ca/film/winds-of-fogo>
- National Film Board of Canada. "The Films of Fogo Island." Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://collection.nfb.ca/film/films-of-fogo-island>

- National Film Board of Canada. *Imagine, Engage, Transform—A Vision, a Plan, a Manifesto 2013–2018*. Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada, 2013. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/nfb-onf/documents/pdfs/strategic-plan-2020-2023/anciens-plans/NFB_Strategic%20plan_EN_2013-2018.pdf
- Nemtin, Bill, and Colin Low. “Fogo Island Film and Development Project.” Planning and Research Division report, early 1968. *National Film Board of Canada Archives*, file no. 4335, A-96, “Fogo Island Project.”
- Newhook, Susan. “Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History: The Fogo Island Film Project of 1967 and the ‘Newfoundland Renaissance.’” *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2 (2010): 48–69. https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/acadiensis/2010-v39-n2-acad_39_2/acad39_2art03.pdf
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.
- Ohayon, Albert. “Neighbours: The NFB’s Second Oscar Winner.” *NFB Blog*, February 27, 2011. <https://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2011/02/27/neighbours-the-nfbs-second-oscar-winner/>
- Raj, Kapil. *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Richardson, Laurel, and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre. “Writing: A Method of Inquiry.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed., 959–78. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005.
- Ropchan, Walter. “The Career of Norman McLaren.” *Cinema Canada* 9 (August–September 1973): 42–49. <https://cinemacanada.athabascau.ca/index.php/cinema/article/view/212/285.html>
- Rothman, Lily. “Canada’s Ghosts in the Machine.” *Time*, April 10, 2014. <https://time.com/58879/stan-douglas-canadas-ghosts-in-the-machine/>
- Rothman, Lily. “Vancouver Street View, Circa 1948.” *Time*, April 17, 2014. <https://time.com/66406/vancouver-street-view-circa-1948/>
- Sanchez, Oscar L. “Stan Douglas at SFU Woodward’s.” *The Peak* (Simon Fraser University), October 13, 2015. <https://the-peak.ca/2015/10/stan-douglas-at-sfu-woodwards>
- Secord, James A. “Knowledge in Transit.” *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004): 654–72. doi: 10.1086/430657
- Snowden, Donald. “Eyes See; Ears Hear.” *SD Dimensions* (FAO Sustainable Development Department). Posted July 1999. Accessed September 17, 2025. <http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/SUSTDEV/CDdirect/CDre0038.htm>

- Starblanket, Noel. "A Voice for Canadian Indians: An Indian Film Crew (1968)." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 38–40. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- UNESCO and Audiovisual Preservation Trust of Canada. *Memory of the World Register Nomination Dossier: "Neighbours" (1952, Norman McLaren)*. Ottawa, 2009. PDF. https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/canada_neighbours.pdf
- UNESCO. "Neighbours (Animated, Directed and Produced by Norman McLaren, 1952)." *Memory of the World*. Accessed January 4, 2026. <https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world/neighbours-animated-directed-and-produced-norman-mclaren-1952>
- Vancouver Observer. "SFU Woodward's Transports Audiences with Hidden Pasts, Digital Futures Festival." September 22, 2015. <https://www.vancouverobserver.com/culture/art/sfu-woodwards-transports-audiences-hidden-pasts-digital-futures-festival.html>
- Waugh, Thomas, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, eds. *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- White, Jerry. *The Cinema of Canada*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- White, Jerry. *The Radio Eye: Cinema in the North Atlantic, 1958–1988*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009.
- Wiesner, Peter K. "Media for the People: The Canadian Experiments with Film and Video in Community Development (1992)." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 73–102. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Williamson, H. Anthony. "The Fogo Process: User-Oriented Communication Systems and Social Development: The Canadian Experience." Paper presented at the UNESCO Meeting on Planning and Management of New Communication Systems, Paris, 1973.
- Williamson, H. Anthony. *The Fogo Process: Development Support Communications in Canada and the Developing World*. St. John's, NL: Don Snowden Centre for Development Support Communications, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988. <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/server/api/core/bitstreams/8616375f-b571-475e-b451-afc13f50fb18/content>

- Williamson, H. Anthony. "The Fogo Process: Development Support Communications in Canada and the Developing World." In *Communication in Development*, edited by Fred L. Casmir, 270–88. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1991.
- Winton, Ezra, and Jason Garrison. "‘If a Revolution Is Screened and No One Is There to See It, Does It Make a Sound?’ The Politics of Distribution and Counterpublics." In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, 404–26. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2010.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer, eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2009.