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**“RETURNING THE GAZE”: REAPPRAISALS OF THE GRIERSONIAN  
DOCUMENTARY IN LIVESAY AND MARLATT**

**Tania Aguila-Way**

Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Faculty of Arts  
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### Abstract

In 1969, Dorothy Livesay affirmed that, beginning in the 1930s, the Canadian long poem had evolved into a new genre by following the “experimentations” originally made by John Grierson – father of the British documentary movement and NFB film commissioner – in film (“Documentary Poem” 269). Echoing the well-known Griersonian assertion that documentary film should “interpret Canada to Canadians,” Livesay also attached a special nation-building value to the Canadian documentary poem by stating that its methods and conventions “subtly [...] cast light on the landscape, the topography, the flora and the fauna as well as the social structure” of Canada (269). Prompted by Livesay’s statements, and by the current lack of scholarship examining the Griersonian heritage of her documentary poetry, this thesis performs a critical examination of the points of continuity between the Griersonian tradition of nationalist filmmaking and the Canadian documentary poem as Livesay defined it. Drawing on key Canadian film policy documents of the modernist era and on close readings of seminal documentary texts by the National Film Board, I trace the ideological maneuvers and narrative practices that the Griersonian documentary traditionally deployed in order to fulfill its mandate of interpreting Canada to Canadians, foregrounding the representational gaps and disturbances underpinning these conventions. I then examine the extent to which these conventions penetrated Livesay’s own documentary project, highlight the efforts she made in order to transcend the limitations of her original format. In an effort to chart the aesthetic and political ramifications of this representational struggle, in a concluding section I explore the ongoing reappraisal of the Griersonian documentary tradition in key postmodern documentaries by Livesay and another prominent Canadian documentary poet, Daphne Marlatt.

**A mis padres, Jesus y Gabriela, por luchar tanto por nosotras  
Y a mi abuelita Lucy, por su valor, fortaleza, y apoyo incondicional**

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## Introduction

In May of 1938, the government of Canada invited John Grierson (father of the British documentary movement and former director of the British government's film production unit) to survey the state of its existing film program, which had been steadily declining due, among other reasons, to the economic collapse of several provincial film units during the Depression as well as the Canadian public's growing preference for Hollywood films over domestic productions. Grierson's landmark report (tabled on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1938) criticized the tired initiatives of the existing Government Motion Picture Bureau and advanced the following recommendations for the re-invigoration of Canada's state-sponsored film production program: that all government filmmaking activities should be consolidated under the authority of a single administrative body headed by a government film officer, that this new body should channel all of its energy and resources towards the production of films with 'documentary value' (as opposed to Hollywood-style features), and that the government should exploit the potential of film propaganda as a tool for involving audiences in the civic life of the country.<sup>i</sup> Grierson's report received high praise from the Mackenzie King government, and his recommendations were legally enshrined in the *National Film Act* of 1939, which called for the creation of a National Film Board to "promote the production and distribution of films in the national interest and in particular to produce and distribute [...] films *designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations*" (s.9, emphasis added).<sup>ii</sup> Shortly after the creation of the NFB in 1939, Grierson was awarded the title of government film commissioner, and all of Canada's state-sponsored film production and distribution activities were centralized under his control until the time of his resignation in 1945.

During the six years of his tenure as director of the NFB, Grierson not only transformed the organization into a pillar of Canadian national culture (and of the national wartime

propaganda effort in particular), but he also helped establish the documentary genre as the pre-eminent vehicle for achieving the *National Film Act's* mandate of "represent[ing] Canada to Canadians." Central to Grierson's documentary vision was his doctrine that true "documentary value" could only be achieved by establishing a dialectic between the "living fact[s]" of the object or scene under representation and the creative/aesthetic sensibilities of the filmmaker ("Community" 194). As he asserted in an article in which he distinguished the documentary from other modes of realist filmmaking: "my separate claim for the documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is *also* an opportunity to perform creative work" ("First Principles" 147). According to Grierson, the documentary's "creative treatment of actuality" (as he memorably went on to call it) was ideally suited to the specific purpose of capturing the life of the nation because, unlike the merely descriptive methods of the newsreel and other 'lower' modes of realist filmmaking, it added a necessary measure of force and drama to the presentation of socially significant content: "it is important to make the primary distinction between a method that describes only the surface values of a subject, and the method which *more explosively reveals the reality of it,*" he asserted ("First Principles" 148). One might well question (as many scholars already have) the obvious contradiction underlying Grierson's claim that the documentary could subject the "natural materials" of actuality to various "arrangements, rearrangements and creative shapings" while still maintaining its status as a genre of evidential/archival value ("First Principles" 146). However, despite this problematic inconsistency, Grierson repeatedly defended his claim to documentary realism by stressing that a true documentary would always deploy its creative, dramatic, and interpretive strategies *judiciously*, to serve the larger social purpose of providing individuals with a "necessary umbilical" to their nation ("Community" 194). As film historian Douglas Fetherling has pointed

out, Grierson's singular documentary vision "has influenced most subsequent filmmaking in Canada for better or for worse" (51). As this thesis project will make clear, it has also had an important impact on another major field of Canadian cultural production – that of long narrative poetry.

Indeed, in an influential 1969 essay entitled "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," the modernist poet Dorothy Livesay affirmed that, beginning in the 1930s, the Canadian long poem had evolved into a new genre by following the "experimentations" originally made by Grierson when he "used film to document the immediacy of people's lives, be it in the Arran Islands or the London Post office" (269). According to Livesay, this new poetic form – which she dubbed the "Canadian documentary poem" – sought to reproduce the immediacy achieved in Grierson's documentaries by consciously creating "a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" ("Documentary" 267). Further echoing Grierson's conceptualization of the documentary as the 'creative treatment of actuality,' Livesay argued that this dialectical approach could produce a *truthful* – albeit highly personal and lyrical – mode of representing the life of the Canadian nation: "Our narratives reflect our environment profoundly; they are subtly used to cast light on the landscape, the topography, the flora and fauna as well as on the social structure of the country," she memorably asserted ("Documentary" 269).<sup>iii</sup>

Given these statements, it is surprising to find that the subject of John Grierson's influence on Livesay's own documentary vision has remained largely ignored by literary scholarship. Paul Tiessen, who is (to my knowledge) the only critic who has dealt with Livesay's work in relation to the cultural policy climate of the modernist era, has focused almost exclusively on radio broadcasting policy, likely prompted by Livesay's own assertion that the Canadian documentary poem was meant "to be heard aloud, often specifically on the radio" (DC

269). In a recent article on the documentary poem's relationship to modernist audience formations, Tiessen does make some references to film policy; however, these are quite brief and figure only as contextual support for his primary discussion of broadcast policy.<sup>iv</sup> As my thesis will make clear, a detailed consideration of the documentary poem's roots in the *film* policy developments that were spearheaded by Grierson in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is also highly relevant. I propose to examine this relationship in light of a growing re-assessment of the Griersonian documentary as an apparatus of social engineering that promoted the reproduction and legitimization of a hegemonic Anglo-Canadian national imaginary. Extrapolating from critiques advanced against Grierson by film scholars such as Bruce Elder, Brian Winston and Christopher E. Gittings, and drawing on postcolonial theories surrounding the politics and poetics of nation-narration, I will explore how Livesay's early documentary poetry constructs the Canadian nation, paying close attention to how the racialized "Other" figures within these imaginings. Thinking, in this manner, of the documentary poem as a site for the construction of national identity, and prompted by Benedict Anderson's memorable statement that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (*Imagined* 6), I will follow my examination of Livesay's original documentary aesthetic with an analysis of the permutations the genre underwent in the 1960s and 70s with the publication of Livesay's own "Zambia" and Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*. By considering Livesay's and Marlatt's respective adaptations and revisions of the documentary poem alongside its origins in Grierson's work, I hope to begin charting how this genre has served as a terrain for contesting imaginings and re-imaginings of community and nation.

Before describing the individual sections that will comprise my analysis, a few comments about its scope and theoretical framework are in order. As I have already mentioned, Grierson's

definition of the documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality” has been subject to intense scrutiny and debate over the years. Some critics have limited themselves to pointing out the obvious contradictions reflected in this description. Bruce Elder, for instance, asks: “If social utility is the basis for making aesthetic judgments, then what makes realism so important? If fiction is more useful in forging a social unity, then why should one eschew its use?” He then concludes that “Grierson nowhere answered this question, and so the realist and propagandist lines of his thought remain unreconciled” (Elder 93). Other scholars have taken an even more critical approach, highlighting the necessity of questioning the practices (aesthetic and otherwise) that were sanctioned and deployed under Grierson’s problematic definition of ‘documentary value.’ For instance, Brian Winston comments that “the supposition that any ‘actuality’ is left after ‘creative treatment’ can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity” (11). Moreover, although even the most skeptical amongst Grierson’s critics are careful to separate his work from the propagandist excesses practiced by contemporaries like Sergei Eisenstein (*The Battleship Potemkin* [1925], *Ten Days that Shook the World* [1928]) and Leni Riefenstahl (*Triumph of the Will* [1933], *Olympia* [1936]), his aesthetic practices have nevertheless been characterized as ‘authoritarian’ and ‘manipulative’ by many. Elder, for instance, notes that Grierson’s propaganda films exerted a “totalitarian and dictatorial” power over viewers by employing the trickery of framing and montage to limit spectators’ field of view and predetermine the connections they would make based on the material that was being presented to them (95). Winston offers a similar assessment, and even goes a step further by inviting a direct comparison between Grierson’s creative methods and those used by Riefenstahl herself, stating that “all that Grierson proposed as distinguishing marks separating the documentary from other non-fiction films can be seen in Riefenstahl’s documentary work – a

concern for public education and the creative treatment of reality, including manipulative editing of actuality material and reconstruction” (74).

Unlike the aforementioned critics, I am not particularly interested in exposing the Griersonian documentary as a politically manipulative or deliberately exclusionary mode of cultural production, for I am well aware that, as another scholar put it, “the politicizing of [the] documentary was not a Grierson innovation but a world phenomenon, a product of the times” (Barnow 100). Instead, my goal is similar to that expressed by Edward Said when he highlights the necessity of examining systems of representation as ‘discursive formations’ that mobilize a complex web of cultural practices, aesthetic values, and political affiliations. As he writes in *Orientalism*,

...to believe that politics in the form of imperialism bears upon the production of literature, scholarship, social theory, and history writing is by no means equivalent to saying that culture is therefore a demeaned or denigrated thing. Quite the contrary: my whole point is to say that we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting. (14)

Following Said, I will be treating the Griersonian documentary as a discursive formation that has persisted in shaping the ways in which documentary producers within the literary field think about and articulate questions of Canadian national identity. It is in the interest of understanding the far-reaching literary impact of this genre, then, that I am placing its basic assumptions and conventions under sharp critical consideration. This exercise will inevitably lead me to engage with questions of inclusion and exclusion – in other words, to interrogate who lies at the centre and who lies at the margins of the nation-space as it is constructed by the Griersonian

documentary, both in its original format and in its literary incarnations in Livesay's work. It will also lead me to consider questions of historical representation – in particular, to examine how contentious historical events are envisioned and managed in a genre which, at least in its inception, was preoccupied with constructing a totalizing national mythology that represented “what Canadians need[ed] to know and think about if they [were] going to do their best by [their country] and by themselves” (“Policy” 64). However, I should note that, by treating the Griersonian documentary as a hegemonic discourse and then locating possible subversions of the genre in more recent documentary production, I am by no means attempting to create a hierarchy in which contemporary and marginal incarnations of the documentary are to be considered as culturally superior to their modernist counterparts. Instead, I have selected texts that represent key moments in the documentary poem's movement towards a growing awareness of what Homi. K. Bhabha has termed the “interrupted address” of the nation – the idea that, despite their attempt to construct social totalities, national narratives are *internally* fractured by cultural ambivalence and discursive contradictions.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha posits that national narratives construct stable national identities by repeatedly transforming the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life” (209) into signs of national culture and then interpellating readers (or in the case of the documentary film, spectators) to participate in the iterative reproduction of this constructed national imaginary. He further notes that this communal act of “writing [and performing] the nation” relies heavily on the displacement of cultural and racial difference, social antagonisms, and contending or heterogeneous versions of national history. In other words, it is largely through the displacement of otherness that stable nation-spaces are produced. Bhabha notes, however, that despite their attempt to construct stable national imaginaries, texts (or in this case,

documentaries) of the nation *already* exist in an uneasy state of discontinuity. This discontinuity arises from a major inconsistency in the apparatus of nation narration: on the one hand, it asks national subjects to adhere to a *pre-existing* myth of national origin; on the other, it asks them to *produce* the nation by performing the coming together of a national community (208). According to Bhabha, the rupture or gap produced by this internal inconsistency not only de-stabilizes the seemingly horizontal (or homogenous, as he calls it) space of the nation by laying bare the discursive strategies through which it has been constructed, but it ultimately opens it up to interventions by the very marginal voices it has attempted to displace. It is in those moments in which the “double and split time of national narration” makes itself visible, then, that the nation is “alienated from its eternal self-generation [and] becomes a liminal form of social representation, a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogenous stories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations” (212).

Thinking, after Bhabha, of the documentary poem as an internally (and inherently) contested space of nation-narration, and expanding on Gittings’ previous application of Bhabha’s concepts to the field of Canadian national cinema (2001), I will approach the texts under consideration with four key questions in mind: How have the basic visual and structural/narrative conventions that characterized Grierson’s brand of documentary shaped documentary production within the *literary* field? What kinds of representational problems and struggles (or interruptions of the nation) have these conventions given rise to? How do writers who engage with the genre respond to and/or negotiate these complexities, and how do they situate themselves in relation to the contested space of the nation? And, finally, how has the discursive formation we have come to know as the ‘documentary poem’ evolved and been amalgamated with new practices in order to accommodate shifting visions of the Canadian national imaginary and of the role of

documentary as a platform for nation-narration? What I ultimately intend to show through this line of inquiry is that, while within Grierson's documentaries and Livesay's early experimentations with the genre the 'interrupted address' of the nation is revealed *inadvertently*, in more recent incarnations of the documentary poem, poets are increasingly acknowledging – and even self-reflexively playing on – this unsettling phenomenon.

Chapter one situates Livesay's documentary within the context of the seminal film policy developments that took place in Canada between the late 1930s and early 1950s under Grierson's influence. Drawing on a number of film policy documents (most notably, the aforementioned *National Film Act* of 1939 and the Report of the Massey Commission [1951]) and on Grierson's own writings, I foreground what is possibly his most important contribution to Canadian film policy: a valorization of the documentary as a vehicle for constructing a unified sense of community out of an inequitable and variegated national landscape.

In chapter two, I turn to a detailed consideration of three key visual and narrative techniques that the Griersonian documentary deploys in its attempt to construct a stable Canadian imaginary: its reliance on ethnographic conventions that promote an erasure of the racialized Other from the Canadian imaginary, its tendency to gloss over moments of social strife in the interest of creating a teleology of national progress, and its interpellation of audiences to perform the coming together of the nation through the act of spectatorship. After discussing these techniques in relation to two specific Griersonian documentaries, *Of Japanese Descent* (1942) and *Peoples of Canada* (1947), I end by highlighting the inadvertent gaps and disturbances that fracture Grierson's apparatus of nation-narration, thus leaving it open to future revisions and interventions.

Chapter three contextualizes my discussion of Dorothy Livesay's documentaries as Griersonian texts by tracing the aesthetic and sociopolitical factors that led the poet to experiment with the documentary genre and, eventually, to openly identify herself as a literary proponent of the tradition created by Grierson and his contemporaries. Drawing on Livesay's critical writings and on her early documentary radioplays, I argue that the poet aligned herself with the Griersonian tradition in order to legitimize her long-standing effort to use the burgeoning new medium of radio as a platform for the dissemination of her political ideals. More specifically, I contend that John Grierson's documentary legacy supplied Livesay with a precedent for the aesthetically and politically "responsible" use of a mass medium, thereby enabling her to justify her involvement with the radio before a modernist literary establishment that viewed the mass media – and radio in particular – with a high degree of suspicion.

Chapter four examines the representational and ideological tensions that resulted from this cross-media migration. Integrating my critique of the ethnographic and pedagogical biases present in Grierson's work with a close reading of "Call My People Home," Livesay's documentary on the Japanese-Canadian uprooting, I argue that the poet's reliance on the Griersonian model, though useful as a means of artistic legitimization, compromised her manifest aim to create a poetics of social protest. More specifically, I suggest that Livesay's attempt to weave a narrative charged with "political criticism" ("Documentary Overview" 128) of the injustices suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community during the internment is hijacked by residual elements of the pedagogical impulses – and, in particular, the teleological temporal orientation – that characterized Grierson's original model.

Chapter five examines the aesthetic and ideological transformations that the literary documentary underwent in the 1960s and '70s. As I explain at length in the opening sections of

this chapter, this era was marked by pivotal transformations in the world of documentary filmmaking. The cinema verité movement, which emerged in the mid-1960s, took issue with the Griersonian claim to objectivity by acknowledging – and even playing on – the subjectivity of the filmmaker who stood behind the documentary lens. Drawing on Livesay’s 1967 documentary on Northern Rhodesia’s movement towards independence, “Zambia,” and on Daphne Marlatt’s documentary on the people and history of Steveston, British Columbia, I argue that a similar development took place in the literary arena. I suggest that, perhaps influenced by the innovations introduced by cinema verité, both of these poems abandon the attempt to construct an authoritative archival record and highlight, instead, the subjectivity of the documentarian as she struggles to understand the social unrest she is recording. I also explore how, within their metanarrative dramatization of the process of documentation, these texts draw on postmodern notions of historiography to highlight the impossibility of integrating moments of national strife into neat master narratives. I ultimately suggest that, through these complimentary strategies, these texts undercut the status of the documentary as an authoritative platform for nation-building and begin to position it, instead, as a tool for the interrogation of nationhood and nation-narration.

Previous scholarship has failed to assess the repercussions of the obvious interconnections between John Grierson’s nation-building project and Livesay’s own documentary vision. As the following chapters will make clear, this overlap poses serious implications for the construction of Canadian history and identity within the genre we have come to know as the “Canadian documentary poem.” By analyzing how Livesay and Marlatt use – and also abuse – the conventions of Grierson’s original vision within their own work, I will not only illustrate how the documentary poem has functioned as a site for contesting constructions of

national identity, but I will also chart the radical transformations that the genre *itself* has undergone as a result of this process.

## **The Role Of Documentary: Uniting A Country Of “Many Psychological And Geographic Distances”**

Benedict Anderson has argued that nations are not organic realities, but cultural/political artifacts that are imagined into being by projecting a sense of unity and social totality in which geographical distances and variegated social conditions may actually prevail. As he writes in his influential work *Imagined Communities*,

It [the nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] it is imagined as a *community* because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

(6-7)

According to Anderson, given the constructed nature of the nation, the critical agenda of the moment is not to distinguish between different communities on the basis of their “falsity/genuineness,” but rather to interrogate “the *style* in which they are imagined” so as to better understand the discursive strategies through which they have been generated (6). This memorable assertion alerts us to the vital role that genre plays in the construction of national identity.

Scholars of Canadian film and cultural studies have long contended that, in the Canadian context, no genre has exerted a greater influence on our national imaginings than the *documentary*. Douglas Fetherling, for instance, observes that “documentary film has been the primary genre and principal informing device of Canadian cinema just as the documentary aesthetic has been the dominant one in Canadian culture generally” (47). Gary Evans offers a

similar assessment, adding that it is largely thanks to their reliance on the documentary tradition forged by John Grierson and the National Film Board that Canadian filmmakers have not only been able to distinguish themselves on the international stage, earning a “reputation for cinematic originality and excellence,” but have also been able to “provid[e] English Canada [...] with the tools to survive distinct from the monolithic culture of the United States” (ix). But how did the documentary rise to its status as a dominant purveyor of Canada’s national narratives, and what are the implications of this phenomenon for the construction of Canadian identity in *other* spheres of cultural production – more specifically, that of long narrative poetry? The chapter underway addresses this critical question by tracing the discursive, political, and cultural factors that led to the explosion of documentary film-making in Canada in the late 1930s under the influence of John Grierson, Canada’s first government film commissioner. This contextualization is essential to our understanding of the Canadian documentary poem as a nation-building artifact, as it was during this period that the documentary aesthetic became entrenched in Canadian cultural policy as the pre-eminent medium for “representing Canada to Canadians” (*National Film Act* s.9). Integrating close readings of key policy documents of the time (most notably, the *National Film Act* of 1939 and the Report of the Massey Commission, issued in 1951) and of John Grierson’s personal writings on the matter of documentary film-making, I highlight what is possibly his most important contribution to Canadian film culture: a valorization of the documentary as a vehicle for creating what Anderson has termed “horizontal comradeship” amongst Canadian audiences.

By the time John Grierson first arrived in Canada in 1938, he had not only acquired substantial experience directing government-sponsored films (he headed the British government’s film production unit from 1931 to 1937), but he had also developed a full-blown

ideology concerning the social function of documentary filmmaking. This documentary vision hinged on a valorization of this genre as a powerful educational tool that could – and should – be exploited by governments in order to remedy what Grierson believed to be the most pressing social problem of the day: the modern citizen's growing alienation from the collective concerns of his community and nation. Indeed, as several film historians have already pointed out, Grierson was heavily influenced by the ideas that Walter Lippmann expounded in his influential book *Public Opinion* (1922), and shared the philosopher's conviction that the "problems facing society had grown beyond the comprehension of most citizens," and that "their participation [in civic life] had [consequently] become perfunctory, apathetic, meaningless, [and] often non-existent" (Barnouw 85; see also Hardy 14 and Morris 30). As Grierson himself put it in his 1936 essay entitled "Films and the Community,"

... the upshot of recent study [in the field of public opinion] is a sense of the impossibility of pursuing the old liberal individualist and rational theory on which so much of our educational planning is based, and by which individuals were expected to know and understand all the issues of public life. [...] The plain heart of the matter is that life has become too complex for extended apprehension by the individual citizen. Communications have spread and speeded up; and horizons have widened. Invention has made work more complex and the viewpoint of the individual more specialized. (191)

According to Grierson, given the impossibility of making this increasingly complex and jargon-laden world intelligible to the average individual, governments should stop gearing their propaganda efforts towards the production of press campaigns and newsreels. He maintained that the use of such mediums would only add to the already unmanageable excess of information that

the masses were being bombarded with and, consequently, could only serve to exacerbate the “plague of [civic] impotence” that riddled modern society (“Community”191). He thus suggested that, instead of trying to appeal to the masses through rational or informational discourse, governments should appeal to them on a more *visceral* level, using creative and dramatic methods of presentation to “bring the community duty alive” to the people: “the new language of apprehension which must communicate the corporate nature of the community life must in fact be something more in the nature of a dramatic language than a rational one. The process will be one of *interpretation* rather than of record. The quintessence will be more important than the aggregate,” he insisted (“Community” 193, emphasis added).

Grierson would go on to argue that the modern nation’s pedagogical need for an interpretive (as opposed to merely descriptive) language of civic education could be readily filled by the *documentary*, an emergent mode of realist filmmaking that was separate from – and, in his view, far superior to – the non-fictional genres that presently dominated the modern screen (the newsreel being the most prominent among these).<sup>v</sup> According to Grierson, the documentary format was ideally suited to the specific purpose of re-invigorating people’s sense of civic duty because, unlike newsreels, institutional lecture films, and other ‘low’ modes of realist filmmaking, it exploited the creative elements of cinema in order to enhance the presentation of socially significant content. As he wrote in an article on the principles of documentary filmmaking, “beyond the newsmen and the magazine men and the lecturers [...] one begins to wander into the world of documentary proper, into the only world in which [film] can hope to achieve the ordinary virtues of an art. Here we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it” (“First Principles” 146). Grierson contended that the documentary’s unique capacity to establish a dialectic between

the objective facts of the scene under representation and the creative/interpretive resources of cinema enabled it to reveal the quintessence of national life far more truthfully and explosively than any other tool of communication available to modern statecraft (“Community” 146).

Inspired by this conviction, and clearly influenced by what has now come to be known as the hypodermic needle model of media effects (a model of communication based on the assumption that audiences could be readily conditioned by the mass media), Grierson maintained that the documentary’s “creative treatment of actuality” (as he famously went on to call it) could be readily employed to lead audiences through the complex maze of modern reality *and* mobilize their imaginations in the creation of an “organized and harmonious” national future (“Community” 193).

As I have already noted in my introduction, Grierson’s claim that the documentary could subject the “natural materials” of actuality to various “arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings” while still maintaining its status as a genre of evidential/archival value has been fiercely contested over the years.<sup>vi</sup> Grierson himself was well aware of the contradictions underlying his original definition of what constituted documentary value; hence the self-ironizing comment which he offered in the opening lines of his influential essay on the principles of documentary filmmaking: “Documentary is a clumsy description, but let it stand,” he wrote (“First Principles”145). However, notwithstanding the admittedly ‘clumsy’ nature of his famous formulation, Grierson zealously defended his claim to documentary realism, arguing that the genre’s use of dramatic and creative resources was admissible because it served the higher social purpose of awakening people’s hearts and wills to the needs of their communities: “Man does not live by bread alone, nor the citizen by mind alone. He is a man with vanities to be appealed to, a native pride to be encouraged. [...] So we may *usefully* add a [...] dramatic factor to public

education – an uplifting actor which associates knowledge with pride and private effort with a sense of public purpose,” he insisted (“Propaganda” 247, emphasis added). He also stressed that, notwithstanding their reliance on dramatic methods, documentary filmmakers could be trusted never to indulge in any sensationalism or dramatic vulgarity. Indeed, according to Grierson, these kinds of excesses could only succeed in undermining audiences’ sense of social purpose, and should therefore be left to producers of commercial Hollywood-style features (which he viewed as “inconsequential” and escapist [“Policy” 55]). But above all, Grierson repeatedly underscored the notion that the documentary was not an *aesthetic* movement, but a tool of *public service* whose use of creative devices was merely incidental – a practical means to a necessary social end. As he would go on to write in a 1942 article tracing the history and ideology behind his documentary vision,

... the documentary idea was not basically a film idea at all, and the film treatment it inspired only an incidental aspect of it. The medium happened to be the most convenient and most exciting available to us. The idea itself, on the other hand, was a new idea for public education: its underlying concept that the world was in a phase of drastic change affecting every manner of thought and practice, and the public comprehension of the nature of that change vital. (“Documentary Idea” 250)

Ultimately, Grierson’s rhetorical insistence on the primacy of public duty over aesthetic imperatives not only enabled him to legitimize his contradictory (and ethically problematic) definition of the documentary as the ‘creative treatment of actuality,’ but it also allowed him to position the nascent genre as Britain’s pre-eminent tool of social communication. Indeed, Grierson was eventually able to persuade the British government to form a state-sponsored

filmmaking program, which he personally headed from 1931 to 1937, first at the Empire Marketing Board (1931-33) and then at the General Post Office (1933-37). During that time, he not only oversaw the production of such 'socially significant' classics as *Industrial Britain* (1931), *The Face of Britain* (1935) and *Housing Problems* (1937), but he also laid the groundwork for what would soon become a movement of international scope.

As Hardy has pointed out, it wasn't long before Grierson's documentary example "began to have world-wide effect," generating international interest in the kind of state-sponsored documentary film-making that was being produced in Britain (24). The outbreak of the war, coupled with the resulting demand for an effective means of rallying public support for the allied effort, served only to increase the appeal of Grierson's novel "documentary idea" abroad, especially in North America. In Canada, this interest in exploring new possibilities for publicly sponsored filmmaking was exacerbated by the decline of the government's existing film unit, the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau. The CGMPB had been founded in 1918 with the mandate of promoting the development of Canadian trade. For over a decade, the agency had dedicated itself to the production of non-fiction shorts extolling Canada's vast natural resources and growing industry. However, as Gittings explains, "by the mid-1930s the CGMPB was in trouble; the quality of its productions had deteriorated, as had its distribution network, while the onset of the depression first froze [its] budget to \$75,000 and then cut it to \$45,000" (79; see also Magder 50). The domestic production crisis caused by the decline of the Bureau, coupled with the government's growing apprehension over Hollywood's increasing presence in Canadian theatres, prompted a heated national debate over the future of the Canadian film industry. At the heart of the controversy lay the question of whether the Canadian government should continue to gear its public resources towards the production of state-sponsored non-fiction films, or whether

it should re-direct them towards the creation of a Hollywood-style *feature* film industry at home. In 1936, while the government continued to grapple with this predicament, Canada House in London began promoting John Grierson as the candidate best suited to help restore Canada's troubled film production program. After nearly two years of deliberation, in 1938 Grierson was finally invited to Canada with the mandate to survey the state of the CGMPB and draft a plan for the future development of the national film program.

After carrying out an exhaustive review of the federal and provincial governments' film production activities, Grierson arrived at the general conclusion that Canada needed to develop a state-sponsored documentary filmmaking program similar to the one he had previously founded in Britain. He outlined two specific factors that made the creation of such a program the most appropriate course of action in the Canadian context. The first of these was Canada's peculiar condition as a nation that was not only founded on the precarious footing of a bicultural heritage, but also encompassed an incredibly vast and variegated national territory. According to Grierson, with these "geographical and psychological distances" conspiring to bring the Canadian collective asunder, it was imperative that the Canadian government find a vehicle of national expression that could "progressively cover the whole field of civic interest" and dramatize "what Canadians need[ed] to know and think about if they [were] going to do their best by [their country] and by themselves" ("Documentary Idea" 248, "Policy" 64). Not surprisingly, Grierson advanced the documentary film as the medium best suited to achieve this kind of task. Echoing the arguments that he had previously made in relation to the British filmmaking scene, he stressed that, while the descriptive methods employed by the newsreel and other similar non-fiction genres could be readily employed as a means of *informing* Canadian audiences about the everyday facts of public life, they could do little to *inspire* them in the creation of a unified

national future. As to the possibility of using the *feature* format for a national purpose, Grierson was entirely dismissive: in his view, the feature's dramatic excesses could only succeed in taking "people out of themselves [...] in a time killing way," thus exacerbating the public's lack of involvement in the civic life of the nation ("Policy" 53). In short, for Grierson, neither the newsreel nor its more commercial counterpart, the feature film, were suited to the task of bridging the many geographical and cultural divisions that fractured Canada from within. The documentary, on the other hand, not only offered a perfect balance between the informative/descriptive methods of the newsreel and the dramatic/creative elements of the feature film, but it effectively employed this dialectic combination of elements to promote precisely what Canada was most in need of as a young nation "waking up to her place in the world": a strong sense of national unity and purpose ("Documentary Idea" 248).

A second defining characteristic of the Canadian milieu which Grierson invoked as he tried to make a case for the national use of documentary filmmaking was Canada's increasing cultural dependence on the United States. He noted that, in addition to the internal tensions caused by its own territorial and cultural heterogeneity, Canada also had to contend with the external threat of the United States' nascent cultural imperialism. Particularly worrying, in his view, was the increasing popularity of Hollywood films that not only promoted a "silly [and] inconsequential outlook on life" ("Policy" 55), but also encouraged Canadian audiences to identify with images that did not reflect their own cultural identity. As Grierson would write a few years later in his influential 1942 essay "A Film Policy for Canada,"

When it comes to the movies, Canada is a dependency of the United States. When it comes to the expression of popular emotion it is as much a dependency of the United States as it ever, in political terms, was of England. Far [sic] the greatest

part of the film product comes from Hollywood. The biggest chain of theatres is controlled in New York. The newsreels are made up in New York. [...] We can shout as we like about this new nation we are building; we can be as proud as we please about the Canadian 'thing,'; but when it comes to the movies, we have no emotional presentation of our own. We are on the outside looking in. (55)

For Grierson, the answer to the problem of Hollywood's cultural hegemony did not lie in the creation of a feature film industry in Canada. As I have already noted above, he regarded the feature format as an inherently escapist medium that made "big business out [people's] moods of relaxation" and did not concentrate enough on stimulating their "moods of resolution" ("Policy" 63). Always a skillful rhetorician, Grierson bolstered his case against the creation of a domestic feature film industry by reminding the government (and potential private stakeholders) that feature film production was a highly costly endeavour that could only be supported by the type of capital and infrastructure that Hollywood had at its disposal ("Policy" 58). He also noted that, even in the unlikely case that the Canadian establishment could somehow manage to pool the necessary resources, the possibilities for success would be dim: the American market would never accommodate Canadian-made productions, and even local audiences were bound to reject domestic offerings as "poor relations" of their American counterparts ("Policy" 58). Put simply, Canada could never hope to compete with the quality and sheer volume of American productions available in the feature film market. According to Grierson, then, instead of attempting to break into an industry in which it could only hope to occupy a subordinate place at best, Canada should strive to create a *different* kind of national cinema altogether, one that used the documentary as a vehicle for communicating Canada's unique national identity both to Canadians themselves and to potential spectators in other countries: "there has to be common understanding if there is to be

common support. [...] A country is only as vital as its processes of self-education are vital. The film, like the radio, has a contribution to make to the active imaginations of the peoples of Canada," he insisted ("Policy" 67).<sup>vii</sup>

Based on the conclusions he had drawn from his survey of the Canadian filmmaking scene and on his own sense of Canada's particular cultural needs, Grierson proposed three broad initiatives for the re-invigoration of Canada's film production program: that all government filmmaking activities should be consolidated under the authority of a single administrative body headed by a government film officer, that this new body should channel all of its energy and resources towards the production of films with 'documentary value' (as opposed to Hollywood-style features), and that the government should exploit the potential of film propaganda as a means of rallying the citizenry's support for the public causes of the day (Gittings 79, Hardy 25). As Morris explains, Grierson's recommendations "meshed well" with the aims of the MacKenzie King government and the current Canadian socio-cultural climate, and in October of 1938 he was invited to return to Canada as a consultant to help draft a legislation for the advancement of Canadian filmmaking (24). The result was the *National Film Act* of 1939, which established a National Film Board with the mandate to "advise upon the making and distribution of national films designed to help Canadians in all parts of Canada to understand the ways of living and the problems of Canadians in other parts" (qtd. in Canada 51). Shortly after the creation of the NFB, Grierson was designated as director of the new organization, and all of Canada's state-sponsored film production and distribution activities were consolidated under his control until the time of his resignation in 1945. During the six years of Grierson's tenure as government film commissioner, the NFB produced two highly successful documentary series: *The World in Action* and *Canada Today Carries On*. The former was concerned with world affairs that

affected Canada and was geared towards rallying support for the allied war effort; the latter had a much more domestic focus, its central aim being that of describing “the growth and achievement of Canada to the Canadian people” (“Policy” 57). Both series were distributed theatrically and screened in 90 percent of Canadian theatres (Gittings 80). In remote areas where theatrical exhibition was not an option, they were distributed with the aid of a newly established web of itinerant projection circuits (a key Griersonian innovation that I will discuss at more length in the next chapter). By 1944, *Canada Today Carries On* alone reached 2.25 million Canadians through theatrical and non-theatrical distribution (Gittings 80). *The World in Action* not only enjoyed commercial success at home, but it was also widely distributed in the United States, “where it pla[yed] every month to thousands of theatres” (“Policy” 65). In short, the penetration of these two documentary series was such that, by the mid-1940s, they had helped position the NFB as a pillar of Canada’s cultural landscape.

Notwithstanding the undeniable success of Grierson’s scheme for the creation of a Canadian national cinema, his love affair with the MacKenzie King government was short-lived. In 1945, he came under investigation due to allegations that he and his secretary were implicated in the infamous Gouzenko spy scandal. The public relations conflict that ensued (the Conservative opposition seized on the unproven allegations to propagate rumours that the NFB harboured communist spies), coupled with Grierson’s own realization that he had made his contribution to the Canadian filmmaking scene and needed to move on because his documentary vision “could not depend on a single national sponsorship, however strong” (quoted in Hardy 28), led the filmmaker to resign his position as director of the NFB. Shortly thereafter, in October of 1945, Grierson left the country to try to launch an international documentary campaign from the United States. However, despite his departure from Canada, Grierson’s

documentary legacy continued to shape the NFB's productions – and the Canadian cultural climate in general – into the 1950s and beyond. The staying power of Grierson's legacy can be partly attributed to the fact that he had filled the ranks of the NFB with dozens of young filmmakers whom he had personally schooled in the art of producing films with “documentary value.” The success of this strategy was such that, as one chronicler explains, “the Canadian filmmakers whom Grierson had left behind [at the agency] had no difficulty in accepting his legacy: to make films as a matter of public duty as much for the thrill of artistic expression. The calculating Scotsman had insulated the organization well” (Evans 4). Moreover, even though Grierson left Ottawa under a cloud of suspicion, there was no denying that his particular brand of filmmaking had proved invaluable to the allied war effort, and that it could be equally useful to the peacetime nation-building campaign now underway. But perhaps most importantly, Grierson's documentaries had armed Canada with a powerful means by which to combat the ever-increasing influence of Hollywood cinema – a contribution that would take on a particular importance in the late 1940s, when the question of Canada's cultural dependence on its southern neighbour would come to the forefront of the political agenda.

In 1949, growing concerns over the threat of American cultural imperialism led the federal government to establish a Royal Commission on the Development of the Letters, Arts and Sciences (known also as the Massey Commission). The Commission was charged with the mandate to examine and make recommendations upon the state of Canada's cultural industries in light of the pervasive cultural influences originating from “across the border” (13). The resulting report, tabled in 1951, not only reiterated Grierson's former emphasis on the need to use cinema as a vehicle for bridging Canada's many cultural and geographical distances, but it also echoed

his former warnings surrounding the alarming phenomenon of Hollywood's increasing cultural penetration amongst Canadian moviegoers:

The powerful influence of the modern cinema is not a new theme, nor need we here to dwell upon its appeal to eye and ear, an appeal enhanced by the use of colour; we recognize, too, that its influences are all the more powerful because of the passivity with which they are received. We should, however, like to add that *the cinema at present is not only the most potent but also the most alien of the influences shaping our Canadian life*. Nearly all Canadians go to the movies; and most movies come from Hollywood. The urbane influences of Carnegie and Rockefeller have helped us to be ourselves; Hollywood refashions us in its own image. (50, emphasis added)

The members of the Commission were not as optimistic as Grierson had once been about the possibility of counteracting Hollywood's 'insidious' influence with the help of the documentary format alone. They lamented that "the documentary film, for all its popularity and increasing use, still [represented] only a minute fraction of total film consumption in Canada" and that, notwithstanding the NFB's efforts to make films that faithfully represented Canada's identity, Canadians were "still [being] exposed to strange Hollywood versions of a Canada they never thought or wished to see" (58-59). However, for all their concern over the absence of a Canadian alternative to Hollywood films, the members of the commission echoed Grierson's disdain for the feature format, and ultimately conceded that only an organization like the NFB could produce "truly and typically Canadian films" and protect Canada from "excessive commercialization and Americanization" (58). Hence, instead of pushing for the advancement of a domestic feature film industry, the commission proposed a number of initiatives to strengthen

the NFB's existing production and distribution activities, concluding that the organization still had a pivotal role to play as part of Canada's peace-time nation building effort (58). Shortly thereafter, the *National Film Act* was amended to reflect the NFB's new peace-time focus as a platform for domestic nation building. Its official role would now be that of promoting "the production and distribution of films in the national interest and, in particular, to distribute and to promote the production and distribution of films designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations."<sup>viii</sup> This new peacetime mandate not only ensured that the NFB would continue to focus all of its resources on the production and distribution of documentaries, but it also reinforced the genre's status as Canada's pre-eminent vehicle for domestic nation building *and* cultural differentiation vis à vis other nations – the United States in particular – for years to come.

Grierson's documentary vision mobilized a complex network of ideas surrounding the importance of dramatizing socially significant content in order to combat what he and many of his contemporaries (the influential philosopher Walter Lippmann among them) perceived as a modern crisis of civic alienation. When this burgeoning documentary vision was imported to Canada by the Mackenzie King government in the late 1930s, it was combined with nationalist discourses surrounding the necessity of bridging Canada's many cultural and geographical distances in order to rally support for the national war effort. In the late 1940s, when the Canadian government turned its attention away from the war and towards the increasingly pressing question of domestic nation-building, the Griersonian documentary saw yet another transformation: it was now institutionalized as a tool not only for distilling the essence of Canadian life, but also for protecting the integrity of Canadian culture from the threat of external cultural influences, particularly those coming from the United States. This amalgamation of

political and cultural ideas not only gave rise to a full-blown ideology concerning the nation-building potential of documentary cinema, but it also issued in a complex web of visual and narrative conventions. It is with these aesthetic practices – and the power relations they implicitly promoted – that the next chapter will be concerned.

## The Language Of Documentary: Displacing Difference And Social Strife

I have traced the discursive, political and cultural trends that led to the rise of the Griersonian documentary as Canada's dominant tool of national communication in the late 1930s. In order to fully understand the impact of Grierson's legacy, it is imperative that we consider the discursive strategies that his documentaries employed in order to "wak[e] the heart and the will" of the spectator in the service of a national ideal ("Documentary Idea" 250). In this chapter, I examine three specific visual and narrative techniques that the Griersonian documentary deployed in order to inspire a unified national consciousness (and, by extension, to manage those differences and inequalities which might undermine this totalizing vision): first, its reliance on ethnographic conventions that promoted a displacement of non-Western ethnicities from the nation's 'history' proper; second, its use of a progressive national temporality as a means of emphasizing specific aspects of Canadian history; and third, its interpellation of audiences to perform the coming together of the nation through the act of spectatorship. After elucidating how these techniques are deployed in the classic Grierson documentaries *Of Japanese Descent* (1945) and *Peoples of Canada* (1947), I turn to a consideration of the narrative slippages and disturbances that emerge as these documentaries attempt to piece Canada's variegated national landscape into a unified and stable whole.<sup>ix</sup> Drawing on postcolonial theories surrounding the looking relations of documentary cinema and the politics and poetics of nation-narration, I argue that, despite their attempt to construct a hegemonic national imaginary, these seminal documentaries are punctured by momentary glimpses of a phenomenon Bhabha has termed the "interrupted address of the nation" and, consequently, *already* contain the unsettling (but nevertheless generative) seeds of cultural contestation within them. Through this analysis, I aim to foreground both the generic

conventions *and* the representational tensions Dorothy Livesay inherited when she began producing literary adaptations of the Griersonian documentary in the mid-1940s.

It is a well-established fact that Grierson was heavily influenced by the early ethnographic travelogues of American filmmaker Robert J. Flaherty, who recorded life in such ‘remote’ places as the Canadian arctic (*Nanook of the North* [1920]) and the Polynesian Islands (*Moana* 1927). In fact, as Fetherling points out, it was in a review of *Moana* that Grierson first coined the term “documentary” as it relates to film (47). In this review, Grierson praised Flaherty’s ability to capture a “poetic feeling for natural elements [and] for a man when he is part of beautiful surroundings” while still accurately representing the “real” lives of the people inhabiting the exotic locales under observation (“Poetic *Moana*” 49). As suggested by this commentary, Grierson regarded Flaherty’s films as reliable – albeit highly lyrical – records of the communities they portrayed. But perhaps most importantly, Grierson was captivated by Flaherty’s ability to weave powerfully dramatic narratives out of the raw materials of reality. He insisted that this dramatic instinct enabled Flaherty to create sequences that stimulated and enlarged viewers’ minds. As he wrote in reference to *Moana*, “the film time and time again induces a philosophic attitude on the part of the spectator. It is real, that’s why. [...] *Moana*, whom we begin to like during the first reel, is really tortured and it affects us as no acting could. *Moana*’s life is dramatic in its simplicity, its innocent pleasure, and its equally innocent pain” (49). Grierson’s comments regarding the merits of Flaherty’s *Moana* clearly anticipate many of the ideas he would later espouse as part of his own documentary vision, particularly his paradoxical emphasis on the need to use drama and artifice in order to convey truth. Indeed, it is primarily from Flaherty’s doctrine that the filmmaker “often has to distort a thing to catch its true

spirit” (quoted in Rony 116) that Grierson derived his own conceptualization of the documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality.”

Over the years, however, Grierson gradually lost his initial enthusiasm for Flaherty’s brand of filmmaking. In a 1931 essay on Flaherty’s contribution to the documentary movement, he took particular issue with Flaherty’s romantic, almost Rousseauian, fixation with the remote and the “primitive”:

Flaherty, as an individual artist, cannot answer the whole problem [of how to create a national cinema]. He knows his primitives and will do a job for them out of the strength of his affection. He could do a job for English craftsmanship and for the tradition of quality in English work, and for the native solidity in English institutions, and English criticism and character; but he is of a persuasion that does not easily come to grips with the more modern facts of civilization.

(“Flaherty” 142)

Notwithstanding his attack on Flaherty’s choices of subject matter, Grierson still regarded the American filmmaker as the “high-priest of [...] spontaneities” (“Flaherty” 139), and continued to employ variations of Flaherty’s trademark techniques throughout his career. Moreover, for all his protestations surrounding the need to abandon all romantic fixations on the “noble savage” and focus, instead, on the “streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories” of which modern civilization was composed, Grierson was not altogether able to escape the influence of Flaherty’s Rousseauian fascination with the “primitive” (151). Indeed, as I will show through my readings of *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada*, the Griersonian documentary not only relies on representations of the primitive “Other” in order to legitimize its claims to archival authenticity, but it also places these images in direct opposition to notions of

Euro-Canadian “progress” and “civilization,” thus working to displace the Other from the realm of Canada’s “history” proper.

Recent postcolonial film scholarship has taken issue with the looking relations inscribed not only in films like *Nanook of the North* and *Moana*, but also in visual ethnography at large. In her influential study *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle*, Fatimah Tobing Rony challenges the claims of objectivity and empiricism attached to traditional ethnography in general, exposing it as a practice that not only hinges on an essentialist split between the western “Self” and the primitive “Other,” but also promotes the erasure of the latter. As she argues in her introduction with some help from Lévi Strauss,

The people depicted in an “ethnographic film” are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until too recently were categorized by science as Savage and Primitive [...]: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives. In other words, people considered “*ethnographiable*,” in the bipolar schema articulated by Claude Lévi Strauss, as opposed to people classified as “*historifiable*,” the posited audience of the ethnographic film, those considered to have written archives and thus a history proper. (7)

According to Rony, then, the ethnographic film is typically structured through a colonizing gaze that not only casts racialized others as “primitive” beings, but also denies them status as “historifiable” subjects, persistently situating them in a “displaced temporal realm” (Rony 8) outside of the nation’s history proper. Although this colonizing impulse frequently manifests itself in overtly negative depictions of racialized others as uncivilized – or even pathological – savages, it can also issue in more subtle, seemingly benevolent modes of representation. In

Rony's words, "the Ethnographic was not only viewed as Savage but also was seen as alternatively authentic, macho, pure, spiritual, and an antidote to the ills of modern, industrialized capitalism, a myth embodied in the image of the Noble Savage" (194). Rony explains, however, that regardless of the representational variant adopted in any particular piece of ethnography, the overall effect typically remains the same: the racialized Other is denied historical agency and is embedded, instead, in the teleology of Western progress as "living evidence of biological progression," with his/her body persistently coded as a hieroglyph of the evolutionary past (194).

The first variant of ethnographic representation identified above – that which casts racialized others as savages with pathological inclinations – can be readily observed in *Of Japanese Descent*, a 1945 NFB propaganda film about the Japanese-Canadian internment of 1942. The film begins rather abruptly, foregrounding, in a tone of urgency, the military and strategic reasons that led the Canadian government to order the mass relocation of all the Japanese-Canadians living in Vancouver's mainland in February of 1942. After providing a brief summary of the events that led to the infamous bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces, the narrative voice-over informs us that "with war in the Pacific now a reality, it came to acute nation-wide attention that Canada had 23,000 residents of Japanese racial descent." While the voice-over concedes that it was "well known that a large group of these people was engaged in the fishing industry on the west coast," it stresses that "the outbreak of war brought to new prominence the fact that practically all of [them] lived, worked, and had their businesses *inside* the number one Western defense zone." This opening sequence clearly plays on the widespread fears surrounding the "uncertainty" of the Japanese-Canadian community's allegiance to Canada by suggesting that their presence on the West Coast represented a serious threat not only to the

nation's security, but also to the very success of the allied war effort. In this sense, it reiterates the government's official claim that the removal of British Columbia's Japanese-Canadians was "necessary for the security and defense of Canada" (qtd. in Adachi 216).

Interestingly, however, the film's initial line of argument is quickly superseded by a far more subtle rhetoric: one that works to legitimize the government's treatment of the Japanese-Canadian "threat" by endowing the relocation with the "benevolent" colourings of a civilizing campaign that was carried out in the interest of the Japanese-Canadian community *itself*. As Gittings indicates in his own reading of the film, "in the evolutionary paradigm of the ethnographic film, *Of Japanese Descent* represents evacuation and internment as a necessary relocation of Japanese Canadians to a healthier environment facilitating their improvement through assimilation" (70). This rhetorical manoeuvre makes its appearance very early on in the film, when the voice-over informs us that although some of Vancouver's Japanese-Canadian inhabitants "had adopted Canadian ways and lived a healthy life in good surroundings," the majority of them – particularly those inhabiting the small fishing villages – lived in a state of squalor "in buildings entirely unsuitable for human use." Particularly alarming, the voice-over insists, was the prevalent lack of proper sewage disposal, a condition that resulted in "much poor health" amongst the inhabitants of these small villages. The voice-over's allegations are promptly authenticated by a sequence of shots highlighting the 'sub-human' conditions that purportedly reigned in these communities. The sequence begins with a panoramic view of a fishing village comprised of several run-down shanty-houses linked by unsightly rows of clothesline and surrounded by poorly tended shrubbery. After offering a few unflattering close-ups of these ill-administered and precariously built homes, the camera directs our view downward, to the water flowing underneath the docks. As the camera moves in for a closer view

of the water's surface, we notice that it is littered with raw sewage. The final shot of the sequence, a close-up of the floating waste, stands as a menacing reminder of the threat of contagion that purportedly lurked in these waters. These unsettling images, coupled with the voice-over's tone of urgent concern over the conditions here depicted, invite the viewing subject to conclude that the evacuation of these communities was necessary, for its inhabitants were living in conditions that did not meet civilized standards of safety and hygiene. In this manner, the film not only legitimizes the evacuation, but it also inscribes its Japanese-Canadian victims as ethnographiable "Others" who were pathologically stuck in the evolutionary past, and were consequently in dire need of an intervention by the "civilized" Euro-Canadian establishment.

This tendency to polarize the ethnographiable Japanese-Canadian community and the historifiable Euro-Canadian establishment is reinforced in the next sequence, which details the many provisions that were made by the newly formed British Columbia Security Commission in order to ensure the successful relocation and overall well-being of the evacuees. The voice-over informs us that although the Commission found it very difficult to find communities that were not opposed to a mass influx of Japanese-Canadians, it was nevertheless able to accommodate the evacuees in several towns which, "being semi-abandoned, had buildings and homes suitable for almost immediate occupation." Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that, for all their deficiencies, these ghost towns were a vast improvement over the disease-ridden fishing villages that the evacuees had previously inhabited. The wholesomeness of these new homesteads is reinforced through a series of aerial shots highlighting the beauty and natural abundance of the surrounding mountain valleys. After offering a brief survey of the numerous interior camps that were established along this plentiful area (Slocan, Tashme and New Denver among them), the sequence ends with a tour of Roseberry village. This picturesque community is clearly meant to

stand as a testament to the 'civilizing' effects of the relocation: its charming cottages, with their manicured flowerbeds and well-stocked vegetable gardens, offer a sharp contrast to the dilapidated fishing huts shown in the opening sequence of the film. As the voice-over emphasizes the many medical measures taken by the Commission in order to curb the prevalence of tuberculosis amongst the evacuees, the camera invites us in for a tour of a sanatorium that was built in Roseberry "to fight [this disease] alone." Inside, the patients are shown recovering in cheerful spirits. Outside, in the surrounding common areas, the village inhabitants are shown working in various capacities to develop their thriving little community. We are clearly meant to understand that, with the threat of contagion now under control thanks to the work of the Commission, the evacuees have been able to build a lifestyle that conforms to modern Canadian standards of safety and hygiene. In short, the overall impression created by this brief tour of British Columbia's interior camps is one of harmonious order and wholesome plenty, of hard toil rewarded with the bounty of nature.

The idyllic sequence culminates with several shots of local children playing in their new "beautiful and healthful" surroundings. The viewer is thus invited to conclude that, thanks to the relocation, these children and their families have been rescued from the state of arrested development they had been living in before the government intervened and granted them the opportunity to live in a more suitable environment. Through this pattern of representation, the film not only encourages us to view the pre-existing lifestyle of the evacuees as a "pathological" counterpoint to Euro-Canadian progress, but, in so doing, also obliterates the material achievements and rich cultural history the victims of the internment were forced to leave behind when they were evacuated from their homes. More will be said about this question of material and cultural erasure later on in my discussion. For now, I will merely suggest that the film's

ethnographic orientation, coupled with its narrative structure, works to obfuscate the material dispossession and severe hardships (particularly the alienating experience of forced confinement) the Japanese-Canadian community suffered as a result of the uprooting.

The ethnographic impulses at work in *Of Japanese Descent* also make their appearance in the peacetime documentary *Peoples of Canada*, but in a much more subdued form. Produced in 1947, the film fulfills the NFB's peacetime mandate of "representing Canada to Canadians" by sketching a brief history of Canada's coming of age as a "far-flung country of many racial origins." In contrast to *Of Japanese Descent*, which promotes the institutionalized exclusion of the Japanese-Canadian Other in a relatively overt manner, *Peoples of Canada* sets out to construct what appears to be an inclusive and racially diverse national collective. Throughout the film, Canada is constructed as a promising young nation that has been forged through the collaborative effort of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, despite its professed project of demonstrating "how people of all races have contributed to the history of Canada," the film persistently erases non-white ethnicities from the national landscape by coding them as representatives of the nation's "pre-historical" past and excluding them from the shared experiences and endeavors that give meaning to the nation's present. This impulse can be readily observed in the opening sequence of the film, which (to paraphrase Rony) transports us back in evolutionary time to the period when "European explorers first walked through the silent forests" and "primitive trails known for centuries only to the red man and the Eskimo" in search of the "rich reward of furs." This brief journey back into the nation's childhood is punctuated by the image of a single "red man" walking in what the voice-over is clearly inviting us to read as a pristine, virgin landscape. In a clear manifestation of ethnographic gazing, then, the film simultaneously acknowledges and elides the presence of the indigene, using his physical image

to authenticate its construction of Canada's national origins, yet denying him historical agency by coding him as the "primitive" representative of a past in which the key coordinates of civilized life – language and textual record – were absent from the hitherto "unmapped" Canadian landscape. The "red man's" status as a hieroglyph of Canada's pre-historical past is reinforced in the next sequence, in which his image is promptly displaced by an unmarked map of Canada – a literal representation of the silence and lack of textual/historical agency he is meant to embody. As the voice-over proceeds to describe the period of early settlement that followed the original expeditions, however, the empty map is gradually populated with visual markers of the settlers' civilizing presence. Through these visual cues, the film clearly positions the European settlers as the bearers of textual record and, by extension, of history proper, thereby reinforcing the bipolar paradigm of the ethnographiable indigene versus the historifiable Euro-Canadian subject.

The myth of wilderness posited in the opening sequence is continued throughout the rest of the documentary, as the voice-over traces how settlement moved inland from the coastal regions, opening up "new areas on the map of Canada" and eventually reaching the frontier of "the windswept prairies." Each of these new areas of settlement is represented as an "unexplored bush" with no previous history or inhabitants to speak of. Aside from the "red man" presented in the opening sequence, the only other vestige of the First Nations presence appears towards the end of the film, when the voice-over directs our attention to a new frontier "far above the head of the lakes, stretching across lonely miles of rock and forest towards the pole" – the North. The film's depiction of this 'new' territory strongly echoes the vision of the Arctic promoted in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, which, to borrow from Rony, equates the "snowy white vastness of the landscape" with the "white of [a] page" yet to be populated by text (111). As Rony

explains, within Flaherty's ethnographic construction of the North, "Inuit individuals and dogsleds are [typically] rendered small in the overall scheme," as if to signal their inability to bring meaning to the 'blank page' their territory is meant to represent – a trope that clearly works to reinforce Western Enlightenment assumptions about the inevitable passing of the 'Eskimo' way of life (111). A similar pattern of representation is at work in *Peoples of Canada*. After a series of panoramic shots emphasizing the purported emptiness of the snowy northern landscape, we see the fleeting image of an Inuk gazing up at an airplane in the sky. In contrast to the "red man" shown earlier, however, the Inuk's presence is never registered by the voice-over. As Gittings has noted in his own discussion of the film, then, the Inuk is marginalized from "the film narrative's construction of peoples of Canada," and his silhouette is "reduced to a signifier for north, part of the natural terrain that forms 'our northland' in the white imagination" (82). We are thus explicitly invited to read him as part of a virgin territory to be acted upon by the historifiable Euro-Canadian settler.

The Inuk's lack of agency is further reinforced by his response to the sight of the white man's airplane: he points at it in what can only be described as a gesture of childlike wonderment. This image clearly reinforces the construction of the ethnographic subject as being ignorant of Western technology (and thereby incapable of participating in the future development of the nation). Moreover, through its emphasis on the gestural nature of the Inuk's response, it also plays into the ethnographic tendency to represent racialized others as having no understanding of conventions like language, and therefore having to express themselves through their bodies in what the late nineteenth-century film ethnographer Félix-Louis Regault called *le langage par gestes* (Rony 57). Much like the "red man" previously presented, then, the Inuk is transformed into an emblem of the primitive's lack of textual – and, by extension, historical –

agency. The voice-over's subsequent reminder that the Inuk's territory "is *still* in the stage of discovery and development" (emphasis mine) seals this process of cultural erasure by projecting a national future in which the 'blank page' of the Inuk's territory shall be rendered meaningful by the language-bearing presence of the Euro-Canadian settler.

The nation-building project promoted in *Peoples of Canada* is predicated on the exclusion not only of First Nations, but also of immigrants of non-Western origin. This orientation becomes evident as the film concludes its account of early settlement and goes on to trace the arrival of immigrants from various backgrounds: "through the centuries, peoples of all races have crossed the ocean to start anew, and have added their achievements to Canada's history," the voice-over announces. We are then offered a catalogue of the specific contributions that several immigrant groups have made to the Canadian nation-building project: the Germans are credited with bringing skilled carpentry to the country's shipyards, the Normans and Bretons are extolled for their role in developing the fisheries of the East Coast, the Dutch are credited with developing the highways of the Maritimes with their "powerful ox teams," and the Scots and the French-Canadian are both praised as faithful preservers of "the old craft, the work of the farm." Each group's contribution to the national effort is measured in accordance with the role they have played in shaping and developing Canada's "stubborn terrain." Labour thus becomes a corollary of national participation, the pre-eminent collective endeavour through which the nation acquires unity and meaning. However, while the film offers plenty of visual and narrative evidence of the nation-building work performed by European (and especially northern European) immigrants, it fails to produce any images that reflect the contributions made by immigrants of non-Western origins. Indeed, aside from the previously discussed shots of the "red man" and the "Eskimo," the only image of racial difference offered throughout the film is that of a Sikh man

crossing the street. Not only does he disappear in a matter of seconds, but, in a third instance of ethnographic exposition (where the raced subject is simultaneously acknowledged and elided), his presence is not registered by the voice-over narration. Indeed, as Gittings points out, in contrast to the European nationalities enumerated in the previous sequence, “the Sikh presence in Vancouver [...] is not narrated by a voice-over explaining the history of Sikh immigration or the contribution of Sikhs to Canadian culture” (83). Hence, although his physical image is used to authenticate the film’s construction of Canada as a country “of many racial origins,” the Sikh man is swiftly marginalized from the shared collective endeavours that give meaning to this national imaginary.

One might well argue that *Peoples of Canada*’s failure to produce images depicting the nation-building contributions of racialized ‘newcomers’ can be attributed to historical context: indeed, the film deals primarily with the formative years of Canada’s immigration history, when the population was still largely composed of people of British and northern European descent. While this point may be allowed, it still does not account for the film’s elision of the fact that, even in these early years, Canada’s need for labour was fulfilled largely through the recruitment of immigrants of non-Western ‘racial stock,’ as was the case with the 6,500 Chinese men who were imported to build the transcontinental railway in the late 1800s (Mackey 33). Such an omission is especially surprising in a film that devotes an entire sequence to the “great achievements of [Canada’s] railway engineering.” Here, the voice-over’s announcement of the railway’s triumph over “the mighty barrier of the Rockies” is punctuated by images of Euro-Canadian men working towards a common goal and cheering in jubilation when their work is finally completed, revealing “3,000 miles of steel [linking] Canada from sea to sea.” The film’s representation of the CPR’s history not only elides the contributions of the many Chinese

workers who died in the process of building this defining marker of Canadian identity, but it once again reinforces the status of the 'historifiable' Euro-Canadian self as the pre-eminent forger of Canada's nation-building present. Clearly, then, despite its construction of Canada's status as a nation of "many racial origins," *Peoples of Canada* constructs a national imaginary in which racial differences are managed and organized in hierarchical ways, and where racialized others are persistently denied historical agency through various modes of ethnographic exposure.

A second convention that characterizes Griersonian documentaries like *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* is their reliance on the structuring principle that Homi Bhabha has termed the "pedagogical temporality" of the nation. Building on Anderson's notion that nations are fictional constructs, Bhabha posits that the process of nation-narration depends largely upon the plotting of teleological narratives in which a unified community is seen moving progressively through the ages. According to Bhabha, what characterizes this particular type of narrative construct is that it is predicated on a decidedly linear and cumulative understanding of time: the reader (or, in this case, the viewer) is asked to ascribe to a national pedagogy in which the nation is always situated in a "line of continuous development" beginning with a glorious past leading to the present and then onward to an even more promising future (205). As Bhabha and many other postcolonial scholars have suggested, this narrative strategy carries serious political implications. In the words of cultural anthropologist Eva Mackey, it requires that "specific versions of history are highlighted, versions that re-affirm the particular characteristics ascribed to the nation" (23). Mackey also argues that, in the Canadian context, myths of national progress typically "draw upon [...] versions of national history [that] explain the nation's 'fairness' and 'justice' today" (23). More specifically, she contends that, since the early days of Canadian nation-building, national mythmakers have constructed Canada as a "tolerant" nation

that has been founded upon an English-Canadian heritage of mutual understanding and has consequently been able to resolve differences in a “friendly, peaceful and collaborative” manner whenever these have arisen (2). She adds that such notions of Canadian tolerance have been central not only to the “management and regulation of cultural [and racial] differences *within* Canada” (16), but also to the articulation of a national mythology which distinguishes Canada from other countries, particularly the United States.<sup>x</sup>

A similar narrative orientation to that described by Bhabha and Mackey can be observed in the two Griersonian documentaries under consideration. Although different from one another in subject matter and tone, *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* both present a similar temporal structure: in both cases, images are spliced and ordered to create a teleology of national progress linking the nation’s glorious past to a harmonious present and a future full of promise and growth. The narrative voice-over enhances the pedagogical dimensions of this teleology by shaping (or at least attempting to shape) the connections and conclusions viewers will derive from the sequence of images presented on the screen. Moreover, both films deploy this pedagogical temporality in order to highlight Canada’s tradition of tolerance and its ability to use this unique historical heritage to manage conflict in an ‘equitable’ and ‘collaborative’ manner.

Although the use of such narrative/temporal tropes is clearly compatible with the professed goal of *Peoples of Canada* (that of charting how people of diverse ethnic backgrounds have contributed to the Canadian collective), it may seem contradictory in a film like *Of Japanese Descent*, which explicitly sets out to legitimize the state-sanctioned marginalization of a racial minority. Paradoxically, however, the use of such tropes is central to the film’s project of legitimizing the Japanese-Canadian internment. Indeed, it is by inserting this episode of Canadian history into a national temporality that reinforces Canada’s willingness to facilitate the

integration of racialized others into the 'Canadia way of life' that *Of Japanese Descent* is able to justify the treatment given to the victims of the internment. As discussed earlier, after relating how the threat of contagion posed by the 'yellow peril' was successfully contained through the government's efforts, the film goes on to construct a teleology that underscores the Japanese-Canadian community's increasing growth under the guidance and supervision of the newly formed Security Commission. For instance, in a sequence delineating the work opportunities available to the evacuees, we are informed that many of them were able to find employment in the lumber yards of the B.C. interior, which were experiencing unprecedented growth thanks to the housing needs of the new interior camps and to the wartime fuel requirements of the country at large. By emphasizing the Japanese-Canadian labourers' role in the wartime economy, the film creates the impression that the relocation not only made it possible for these previously destitute evacuees to gain self-sufficiency, but also enabled them to make a contribution to the Canadian war effort and, by extension, to Canadian society at large.

The narrative of development constructed by *Of Japanese Descent* culminates with what appears to be the effective integration of the Japanese-Canadian evacuees into the Canadian way of life. Not only are they demonstrated to have successfully adopted Canadian standards of living and hygiene, but, towards the end of the film, their children are shown partaking in cultural activities that the viewing audience would register as quintessentially Canadian. Hence, in an obvious attempt to confirm the successful assimilation of these young Japanese-Canadians, the voice-over announces that they have formed "a wolf club pack and a boy scout troop." Always faithful to the mythology of Canadian tolerance, the film takes great pains to assure the viewer that this process of assimilation has not interfered with the Japanese-Canadian community's right to self-determination. For instance, in a sequence depicting the cultural life of the camps, we are

informed that the evacuees have been allowed to hold celebrations for the Oban festival, a Buddhist tradition “which came to Canada from rural parts of Japan,” but “is now observed in this country by Buddhists and Christians alike.” We are clearly meant to register that, despite their newly developed appreciation for Canadian values, the evacuees have been able to retain their own unique cultural traditions. This symbiosis between the evacuees’ time-honoured Japanese traditions and their new Anglo-Canadian values is reinforced through recurring close-ups of the festival decorations, which are comprised of lanterns decorated with Japanese and British flags alike. The impression of cross-cultural cooperation created through these images is carried through to the next sequence, which sketches the administrative organization of Tashme, the largest among the camps located in the B.C. interior. Here, the voice-over informs us that although the town operates under the oversight of the Security Commission, its various offices and stores are run by the townspeople themselves. The message, of course, is that Tashme’s inhabitants have been left free to handle their own community affairs. Tashme is thus offered up as evidence of the Security Commission’s willingness to respect – and even facilitate – the self-determination of the Japanese-Canadian communities that have been established under its benevolent jurisdiction.

While *Of Japanese Descent* deploys pedagogical temporality in order to highlight Canada’s ability to handle a domestic *wartime* crisis in an impartial and cooperative manner, *Peoples of Canada* uses it to trace the growth of this national tradition of tolerance in the *postwar* era. Central to the teleology created in this film is the notion that Canada’s unique heritage of English-Canadian collaboration has not only armed it with the tools necessary to achieve unity in the face of vast geographical distances and increasing cultural diversity, but has also enabled it to position itself as a model for the management of such differences at an

international level. The film thus constructs a continuous line of development between Canada's "pioneer tradition of mutual understanding," its present willingness to allow immigrants from different parts of the world to add "their achievements to Canada's history," and its promising future as a leader in the post-war search for "understanding among the different nations of the world."

Although the narrative orientation described above permeates *Peoples of Canada* in its entirety, it is most clearly encapsulated in the sequence that traces the arrival of the railway to the "boundless plains of the West" and the consequent settlement of this new territory by diverse groups of Eastern European and Scandinavian origin (the Doukhobors and Hutterites among them). In a condensed – yet extremely effective – use of pedagogical temporality, the voice-over constructs a two-minute teleology tracing the coming together of these culturally diverse newcomers to create a unified and hard-working farming community:

... the railway opened the boundless plains of the west to all comers. They left behind them an old world crowded and torn with bitterness and strife. Before them lay space, freedom, and the land that promised a livelihood. They had no easy task in wresting a harvest from the soil, but they beat the stubborn land by working together. They built towards a new and hopeful life. And the land did not disappoint them.

In this short narrative, Canada is constructed as a nation that has not only welcomed all newcomers with open arms, but has also inspired them to transcend the cultural antagonisms that reigned in their countries of origin and work alongside their cultural and racial others in the creation of a new, more tolerant, homeland. Like *Of Japanese Descent*, *Peoples of Canada* bolsters its narrative of national tolerance by stressing that the process of integration experienced

by the minorities in question still allowed for the preservation of their respective cultural traditions: “in thanksgiving for peace, and bread, and tolerance, symbols of [the immigrants’] ancient faiths rose into the new world sky,” the voice-over announces as the camera displays the images of several exotic-looking religious buildings (a synagogue and Eastern Orthodox church among them) standing prominently against the prairie horizon. The sequence ends on a triumphant note as the voice-over draws a direct link between this early period of cultural collaboration and the cultural diversity that has since blossomed across the West: “Today, descendants of these pioneers *still* share the Great Plains. [...] On the streets of every small town across the prairies, the crowds speak a dozen languages. Each group has made its own contribution to the development of our country, and all are bound together in their common interest as farmers and Canadians.”

But the mythological reverberations of the intercultural synergy achieved by Canada’s Western pioneers do not end here; they also spill over into the final sequence of the film, which charts Canada’s coming of age during the war years and its incipient rise to international prominence in the post-war era. Here, the voice-over seals the progressive temporality constructed throughout the film by projecting a future in which the nations of the world will embrace Canada not only as a provider of rich natural resources (Canada is said to have “the raw stuffs needed by older lands”), but also as a model for the peaceful and successful resolution of cross-cultural differences in the post-war context: “the cooperative idea so successfully applied in the building of our country has new significance in the world today. It can make life for our children and the children of all nations more secure,” the voice-over affirms as the camera emphasizes the nation’s potential for future development by surveying a schoolyard replete with promising young Canadians.

The pedagogical temporality constructed in both *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* not only emphasizes those aspects of Canadian history that reflect the nation's superior capacity for tolerance, but it also assimilates (or at least *attempts* to assimilate) more problematic episodes of history by creating what film scholar Brian Winston has called a "problem moment" structure. Writing about the teleological narrative orientation of Grierson's earlier British documentaries, Winston argues that this technique for structuring material promotes a dynamic in which contentious historical episodes are persistently "sandwiched between a wonderful past and a beautiful future," creating the illusion that they are but minor, transitory glitches in the "unfolding history of the nation" (42). According to Winston, this treatment "allows for a social ill to be covered [...] while at the same time denying that the ill has real causes and effects," a phenomenon that becomes especially dangerous given the perception that documentary film offers an "objective" and "socially significant" representation of reality (42). In short, the "problem moment" structure enables the Griersonian documentary to maintain its claim to archival/historical authenticity while managing the political and social issues that might disrupt the line of continuous national development it attempts to construct.

In *Of Japanese Descent*, the "problem moment" treatment is deployed in order to neutralize the material and political disenfranchisement that was suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community as a direct result of the internment. Indeed, by embedding this problematic national episode within a teleology in which the interned families are seen blossoming under the auspices of the Security Commission, the film elides the mass dispossession that was imposed upon them by the Canadian government. No mention is made of the fact that most of these families were forced to leave their property – homes, businesses, automobiles, fishing boats, and farms included – 'in trust' with the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property only to have it auctioned

off without their approval (and at a fraction of its market value) soon after (Kadota et al 1, Takata 141). Instead, the evacuees are persistently represented as formerly destitute individuals who have greatly benefited from the living conditions and job opportunities offered at the relocation camps.

But the film's most conspicuous use of the problem moment structure occurs in a transitional sequence addressing the 'rumour' that the inhabitants of the BC interior camps were living under forced confinement: "it should be made clear that Japanese residents in these (relocation) towns are *not* living in internment camps. Travel between towns in the same group is not restricted," the voice-over insists as the camera shows a group of female evacuees boarding a bus that will presumably take them to visit family and friends in a neighbouring village. The closest the film comes to acknowledging that the evacuees are living under repressive conditions is when the voice-over informs us that all Japanese-Canadian individuals wishing to travel to areas *beyond* the general relocation territory must clear a series of security roadblocks where their permits and personal belongings must be carefully inspected. Immediately after making this admission, however, the voice-over re-affirms the fairness and impartiality of the Security Commission's practices by assuring us that "guards with bayonets and barb wire fences have not been necessary" in order to secure the relocation area. The viewer is clearly meant to understand that violent measures like these have not been necessary because the evacuees recognize the fairness of the regulations instituted by the Commission and *willingly* acquiesce to them.

The sequence ends with a shot portraying an RCMP officer cheerfully inspecting a vehicle at a security checkpoint – an image that takes on considerable ideological significance when examined in the context of Mackey's observations regarding the use of mountie imagery in Canadian nationalist discourses. She contends that, since the early days of Canadian nation-

building, the image of the benevolent RCMP officer has been mobilised to differentiate between British-Canadian justice, typically constructed as impartial and non-violent, and its American counterpart, typically constructed as more violent and oppressive (35). A similar impulse seems to be at work in this scene. With his friendly, yet authoritative demeanour, the mountie featured in *Of Japanese Descent* is clearly meant to stand as an embodiment of the impartial and gentle brand of justice which, according to the film, has been practiced by the Canadian government in all of its dealings with the Japanese-Canadian evacuees. The mountie's appearance at the exact moment in which the voice-over assures us that the methods employed by the Security Commission have always remained non-violent also encourages the viewer to draw a direct comparison between the United States' heavily militarized response to the "yellow peril" and Canada's more 'benevolent' methods for dealing with its own Japanese-Canadian population.<sup>xi</sup> Yet such a construction belies the symbolic violence that the Security Commission, aided by the RCMP, deployed against the refugees on a systematic and ongoing basis throughout the years of the internment. Indeed, as Ken Adachi explains, although "to call [the BC interior camps] "concentration camps" [...] after the pattern of Dachau or Treblinka or even the ten camps in the United States [...] would be a gross exaggeration," they "were definitely institutions which bred a prison complex" (252). It also belies the fact that the economic and political losses sustained by the Japanese-Canadian community were much greater than those suffered by its Japanese-American counterpart. Indeed, while Japanese-Canadians were forced to relinquish all of their property and were not allowed to return to their homes until 1949, Japanese-Americans were allowed to keep their property and return to the coast as soon as the war ended. *Of Japanese Descent* not only elides this aspect of the internment, but it also trivializes the displacement experienced by the evacuees by framing it as a condition that would last only *temporarily*, while

the government verified that they had been successfully 'cleansed' of the TB virus and assimilated into the Canadian way of life. To paraphrase Winston, the internment is ultimately transformed into a "problem moment," a moment that will pass thanks to the generosity of the Canadian State, which, even as this sequence was being filmed, was working tirelessly to ensure that all 'loyal' Japanese Canadians could one day transcend their temporary confinement to find their proper place within Canadian society.

Although its elisions are far more subtle than those seen in *Of Japanese Descent, Peoples of Canada* also makes use of the problem moment structure in order to minimize those aspects of Canadian history that do not mesh with the progressive narrative it attempts to construct. There are two specific "problem moments" in which this impulse betrays itself. The first one occurs when, shortly after relating how the railway brought the first wave of immigrants to the West, the voice-over acknowledges that these newcomers "had no easy task in wresting a harvest from the [prairie] soil." The second one occurs shortly thereafter, when we learn that the Westward expansion spearheaded by the CPR was momentarily interrupted when, "at the western limits of the plain," the railway met with its most challenging obstacle yet: the "mighty barrier of the Rockies." Both of these fleeting remarks acknowledge – albeit somewhat tacitly – the fact that the settlement of the West did not follow an entirely linear progression, but was instead fraught with conflict and hardship. In both instances, however, the voice-over re-contains the potentially unsettling effects of this admission by casting the conflicts in question as character-testing struggles between man and nature. Indeed, the viewer is invited to conclude that the only obstacles which ever stood in the way of Canada's Westward expansion emerged out of the country's own unforgiving geographical conditions, and that all that was needed to overcome such barriers was the collective resolve and hard work of the newly arrived pioneers. No word is

said about other, more substantial, conflicts that disrupted the expansion – the colonial project to overturn First Nations entitlement to the lands in question being the most prominent among these. The sequence's use of the 'problem moment' structure not only reframes this volatile socio-historical conflict as a mythical – even romanticized – struggle between pioneer and natural terrain, but it also bolsters the national teleology constructed in the film as a whole by reassuring viewers that future contingencies and interruptions in the nation's progress will be similarly overcome through the persistence and pioneering spirit of the Canadian people.

In addition to constructing a pedagogical temporality that emphasizes the nation's tolerance and impartiality, *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* both deploy a narrative device that Bhabha has termed the "performative address of the nation" in order to mobilize the spectator in the service of their respective narratives of nationhood. Bhabha posits that nation-narration is a dual process that not only entails the plotting of pedagogical narratives of progress, but also calls on readers (or, in this case, viewers) to validate the authenticity and cohesiveness of the nation-space under construction by engaging in a performative process whereby "the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life [are] repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture" (209). A similar orientation can be observed in Grierson's ideas concerning documentary audience formations. Across his many editorials and theoretical writings, Grierson repeatedly expressed the conviction that the documentary was a powerful ideological tool that could be employed not only to articulate a dramatic sense of Canada as a nation, but also to inscribe specific attitudes in its viewers, interpellating them to demonstrate the unity of the nation through daily involvement in the life of the community. Such a conviction is a reflection not only of his interest in revitalizing people's sense of civic duty, but also of his desire to elevate the documentary film above its more commercial Hollywood counterpart. Unlike the ubiquitous and

low-brow Hollywood movie, which – according to Grierson – was notorious for producing a passive, almost escapist, response on the part of the viewer, NFB documentaries should stimulate their audiences' sense of resolution (“Policy” 63). In short, the documentary film should be a call to action, to performance. As Grierson himself put it in his 1942 article “The Documentary Idea,”

There is the need to create a sense of urgency in the public mind, and *gear it in its everyday processes to the hardness and directness which make for action and decision*. If there is one thing that good propaganda must not do these days it is to give people catharsis. That hard but truer way of culture will not go by default if we search out the design in the seeming chaos of present events and [...] create the cooperative and more profoundly ‘democratic’ ways of the future. (257-58, italics mine).

Grierson’s notion that the documentary should interpellate audiences to join together in the execution of a national imperative is clearly in keeping with Bhabha’s conceptualization of the performative, where audiences are called upon to actively engage in the “repetition and pulsation of the national sign” (211).

For Grierson, the performative dimensions of documentary spectatorship were of special value in the Canadian context: divided by the multiple “geographical and psychological distances” (“Idea” 248) that characterized their country, Canadians needed to create a communicative space where they could gather as a unified community, if only provisionally. The documentary screening room provided the perfect space for this kind of gathering: not only did it supply an opportunity for a wide cross-section of Canadian society to participate in a shared viewing experience, but it also centred this experience on films that “progressively cover[ed] the

whole field of civic interest,” telling the audience “what they need[ed] to know and think about if they [were] going to do their best by Canada” (64). Grierson exploited the performative dimensions of this documentary viewing experience by promoting what he referred to as the “non-theatrical revolution” in documentary exhibition. Unwilling to contend with the Hollywood monopoly over commercial screen spaces, and attracted by the “ready-made” audiences available in “the schools and the village halls, the church halls and community centres” (“Policy” 63, 62) and other similar venues for community gatherings, he established a network of itinerant projection circuits that screened NFB documentaries in small towns and rural areas across Canada. This initiative not only made it possible for Grierson’s documentaries to reach an ever growing circle of national subjects, but it also ensured that audiences living in the most remote parts of the country would be able to participate in the communal gatherings fostered by these films.

The performative dimensions of Grierson’s documentary vision are reflected not only in the distribution and exhibition practices he instituted as head of the NFB, but also in the discursive strategies deployed in the documentaries themselves. True to the performative mandate expressed in Grierson’s writings, both of the films under consideration – *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* – feature closing sequences in which the voice-over momentarily abandons its position as a detached narrator in order to address the audience with an overt call to action. In *Of Japanese Descent*, for instance, the voice-over concludes its report on the Japanese-Canadian internment by reminding viewers that, despite the success of the measures introduced by the Security Commission in order to sanitize and assimilate the Japanese-Canadian community, the “yellow peril” remains a dormant problem that they, as Canadian citizens, will have to address at some point in the near future: “like people all over the

world, [among the Japanese-Canadians] there are the good, the bad and the indifferent. The problem they represent has been solved only temporarily by the war. The ultimate solution will depend on a measure of careful understanding by *all Canadians*,” the voice affirms in a solemn tone as the camera surveys a group of smiling Japanese-Canadian children. The implication is that although these children do not *currently* pose a threat to the nation’s integrity, they *could* potentially develop anti-Canadian sentiments as adults. The viewer is thus left with the impression that he/she must participate in a collective effort to protect the unity and security of the nation by ensuring that these children will grow up to be loyal Canadian citizens.

The closing sequence of *Peoples of Canada* promotes a similar dynamic. Here, the voice-over concludes its summary of Canadian history by directing viewers’ attention to a future in which they will have to work collectively to ensure that Canada will find its rightful place as a guide in the post-war search for international peace: “the pioneer tradition of mutual understanding guided our country in its progress through the years. It is for *us* to employ that same heritage today in the search for understanding among the nations of the world.” Although slightly different from one another in tone, both of these closing sequences communicate to the spectator that he/she has a pivotal role to play in preserving the nation’s integrity: to paraphrase Bhabha, he/she must authenticate the unity of the Canadian nation by participating in a shared national endeavour, whether this be ensuring that the “yellow peril” will remain contained (as seen in *Of Japanese Descent*) or that Canada will rise to international prominence in the postwar era (as seen in *Peoples of Canada*).

Despite its attempt to enlist readers/viewers in the propagation of a national ideal, the performative dynamic described above has an unsettling effect on the national narratives constructed in the two documentaries under consideration, giving rise to a phenomenon Bhabha

has described as the “interrupted address of the nation.” Bhabha has memorably argued that the performative address of the nation disrupts the linear and progressive temporality of its pedagogical address by introducing a *second* temporality – one that “erases any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle” of community life (208). As he goes on to explain, the tension between these competing narrative/temporal dimensions produces an *internally* ambivalent national territory where readers/spectators are doubly inscribed as “historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy” and performative “‘subjects’ of a process of signification [...] by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process” (297). In order to constitute themselves as national subjects, then, readers/spectators must engage in two mutually contradictory exercises: they must adhere to a pre-existing national mythology (or ‘idea’ of the nation) and, at the same time, perform the nation into being by engaging in the iterative exercise of retelling/reproducing this master narrative. But where there is room for retelling, there is also room for contestation and revision. Indeed, as Bhabha explains, the double process of nation-narration is always haunted by the possibility that audiences might “turn *pagan* in [the] disseminatory act” of propagating and reenacting national mythologies, intervening in these master narratives with alternative interpretations of history and other modes of minority discourse (214). In other words, the performative address of the nation unsettles the very nation-space it is attempting to construct because it inadvertently acknowledges that any totalizing claims of cultural homogeneity are untenable because “the position of narrative control [within the process of nation-narration] is neither monocular nor monologic,” but is instead under perpetual contestation (215).

A similar narrative interruption occurs in *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada*. In both films, the call to action featured in the closing scene cuts across the progressive/pedagogical

temporality established earlier by betraying that the nation is not an *a priori* historical presence bound on a progressive journey through the ages, but a precariously constructed symbolic entity whose integrity – and, indeed, very survival – is contingent upon the spectator’s readiness to participate in the act of nation-narration by performing the living principle of national life. In *Of Japanese Descent*, this slippage not only fissures the teleology of national tolerance constructed in previous scenes, but it also throws the very authority of the Security Commission (and the Canadian State behind it) into question. Indeed, the voice-over’s ominous closing statement tacitly acknowledges that, despite its purported ability to resolve racial tensions in a just and collaborative fashion, the Security Commission has ultimately been unable to dissolve the threat represented by the Japanese-Canadian Other. The audience is thus left with the contradictory mandate of lending credence to the nation’s purported triumph over the Japanese-Canadian threat while at the same time actively engaging in a national campaign to ensure that this *same* threat will not resurface in the future. A similar – though more subtle – contradiction occurs in *Peoples of Canada*. The voice-over’s final assertion that all Canadians must work collectively to ensure that Canada will find its rightful place as a leader in the “search for understanding among different nations in the world” interrupts the progressive temporality created earlier by betraying that this rise to international power is not historically fated, as the film would have us believe, but rather *contingent* on audiences’ willingness to continue rehearsing the nation’s “pioneer tradition of mutual understanding” in their own community life.

Ultimately, these narrative slippages not only fracture the totalizing national mythologies constructed in both of these documentaries, but, in so doing, they inadvertently open up a space for cultural contestation and historical revision. Viewers who apprehend the disjunction between the pedagogical and performative aspects of the national narratives created in *Of Japanese*

*Descent and Peoples of Canada* will not only be alerted to their constructedness, but they might also begin to re-consider those aspects of history which have been re-framed or omitted in order to make such narratives possible. This ambivalent experience of spectatorship, though unsettling, creates a valuable opportunity for audiences to engage with the very marginal voices that the Griersonian documentary attempts to displace. Though not intended by Grierson and his contemporaries, this (internally created) potential for cultural contestation is perhaps the most fruitful legacy of the Griersonian documentary.

### **Bringing Poetry Out Of The Ivory Tower: Social Protest, Griersonian “Actuality,” And Dorothy Livesay’s Documentary Poem**

Dorothy Livesay began her literary career amidst the burgeoning climate of avant-garde poetic production of the 1920s. Ezra Pound’s memorable exhortation to “make it new” was making waves not only throughout Europe and the United States, but also throughout Canada, where a growing number of poets (W.W.E. Ross, R.G. Everson, Raymond Knister among them) began to draw on the tenets of *Imagisme* and free verse to produce their own poetic experimentations (Norris 57). The child of two well-known writers who subscribed to the avant-garde magazine *Poetry: Chicago* (which published Pound’s influential article “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” in 1913) and avidly collected the works of the first Canadian modernists, Livesay was introduced to the Imagiste aesthetic from the time she was an adolescent (*Journey* 90). The movement’s emphasis on musicality as the pre-eminent structuring principle of poetry meshed well with Livesay’s innate fascination with what she called “the *beat* behind ordinary spoken language” (“Song” 41). Thus, her early work was largely influenced by the Imagiste mode.<sup>xii</sup>

However, Livesay’s poetics underwent a dramatic transformation during the years of the Depression. Moved by the increasing unemployment and social injustice she witnessed during this period, she grew dissatisfied with what she came to perceive as the elitist and self-referential tendencies of her high modernist milieu and began searching for a poetic medium that “possessed [more direct] social or revolutionary significance” (*Journey* 130).<sup>xiii</sup> After much experimentation, Livesay found her desired medium in a rather unlikely source: the CBC radio play. Beginning in the late 1930s, she wrote a series of socially significant narrative poems designed to be “heard aloud, [...] specifically on the radio” (DC 269). The resulting genre,

subsequently designated by Livesay as the “Canadian documentary poem,” combined the poet’s aesthetic interest in “poetry as oral communication” (*Journey* 151) with her growing political interest in the plight of the marginalized and the unemployed. Indeed, writing for a radio audience not only enabled Livesay to exploit the oral/musical quality of her poetry, but it also gave her access to a platform for the mass dissemination of her political ideals. However, her involvement with this new medium breached two of the central priorities of the high modernist project – namely, its emphasis on the need to police the boundary between “high” and “mass” culture and to prevent the “misuse of art for political effect” (Goldman 14). Moreover, because high modernist standards of literary value were largely “based on gendered assumptions that feminized and devalued popular [cultural forms], at the same time as they masculinized and overvalued literary writing” (Kelly 53), Livesay’s radioplays stood on a particularly precarious cultural and literary footing.

Livesay’s foray into radio play production has puzzled literary scholars for decades. Her documentaries have long been regarded as “historical curiosities rather than real poems” (Denham 73), and it is only recently that they have begun receiving serious critical attention. However, although a growing number of critics are acknowledging the historical and literary significance of Livesay’s documentary oeuvre, the motivations behind her engagement with the radio remain nebulous. Critics have found it particularly difficult to reconcile the poet’s deliberate courting of “mass” audiences with her staunch insistence on the need to create a high culture agenda for Canada’s national radio (she memorably criticized the CBC for running “a bog of soap suds” during the daytime instead of providing Canadian audiences with real “culture” [*Dorothy Livesay* 8,7]). For instance, Paul Tiessen has noted that, while Livesay’s willingness to “deconstruct the ‘mass’ as a threatening abstraction” placed her at odds with the

mainstream political and aesthetic interests of her time, she nevertheless echoed the establishment's suspicion of "the low-brow tyranny that they felt pulsating within mass culture" (220). In Tiessen's analysis, this contradiction figures as little more than an accidental byproduct of Livesay's attempt to adapt her modernist sensibilities to a burgeoning, albeit highly controversial and "unstable," new medium (220). It is my contention, however, that Livesay was not only well aware of the inconsistencies underlying her involvement with the radio, but also made a concerted effort to smooth these contradictions *and* legitimize her creation of a "high culture that was user-friendly to [...] middle class" audiences (Tiessen 221) by aligning herself with the Griersonian documentary tradition, framing her radio plays as literary incarnations of the "experimentations originally made by Grierson in film" ("Documentary" 269).

In this chapter, then, I argue that Grierson's documentary legacy supplied Livesay with a precedent for the aesthetically and politically "responsible" use of a mass medium, thus enabling her to justify her involvement with the radio before the modernist literary establishment. After tracing the aesthetic and political motivations behind Livesay's adoption of the documentary genre, I discuss how she repurposed several key principles of Grierson's ideology to develop a full-blown documentary theory of her own. Ultimately, I argue that Livesay used these precepts not only to legitimize her foray into new media, but also to position herself, with Grierson, as a tastemaker capable of steering the general public away from cultural products that encouraged a "silly [and] inconsequential outlook on life" and towards content that reflected "what Canadians need[ed] to know and think about if they [were] going to do their best by [their country] and by themselves" ("Policy" 55, 64).

### **The Origins of Livesay's Documentary: From Agitprop Obscurity to Radioplay Exposure**

It was in 1931, when Livesay travelled to Paris to write a thesis at the Sorbonne, that she began questioning both “the bourgeois literary world [she] had grown up in” (*Right Hand* 33) and the poetic sensibilities she had cultivated as a result of this upbringing. In Paris, the young Livesay was brought face to face with the looming threat of a Nazi takeover and the devastating social and economic effects of the Depression – an experience that not only jolted her out of her political and emotional “innocence” (*Right Hand* 33), but also led her to take a keen interest in the plight of the socially and politically marginalized. As the poet relates in an account of the life-altering political changes she observed during this time,

The depression and the Nazi movement and the feeling of war was [sic] all abroad in Paris in 1931 and 32. We spent all our time associating with what was going on politically [...] There was a great deal of pressure against the unemployed and the factory workers. I remember coming out of one meeting and the police were there waiting. [...] we saw the brutality of the French police – there were workers killed and wounded who had been demonstrating and parading... (*Right Hand* 36)

Haunted by these scenes of state violence and oppression, Livesay felt increasingly estranged from the self-referential lyricism to which she had been subscribing thus far and began reaching for a poetics that could enable her to capture the harsh social reality she witnessed in the streets of Paris. This transformation is clearly reflected in her short lyric “Growing Up,” written shortly after her return from her year abroad. In it, Livesay openly rejects the life of “leisure, literature [and] learning” she was born into, suggesting that the prejudices she inherited from this bourgeois literary world had stifled her innate “longing to *understand*” her social reality (*RH* 69). A literary and political manifesto, the lyric ends with an affirmation of the poet's newfound

freedom and her readiness to bring forth a new kind of poetics, one that will be seriously committed to the collective struggle against political and artistic oppression: “My hands [are] ready, with yours, fighter and worker/ To crush the boss, the stifler,” it concludes (*RH* 69). However, as Livesay would later intimate in her memoirs, at this early stage of her personal and literary transformation, she still found it very difficult to distance herself from her previous literary influences, and continued to produce “intimate love lyrics” (*RH* 36) even as she struggled to create a poetics that spoke to the political reality of the age.

The new, politically minded poetics envisioned in “Growing Up” began to materialize in the years following Livesay’s return from Paris, as she embarked on a degree in social work at the University of Toronto. During her first year of studies, Livesay developed a keen interest in Marxism, eventually joining the local Young Communist League. But it was in her second year, when she travelled to Montreal to do some fieldwork for the Family Service Bureau, that her political and literary convictions were cemented. As one biographer explains, Livesay’s stay in Montreal “confirmed her commitment to political activity, for, if anything, the reality of working-class life she encountered there at the height of the Depression was even more fierce than that of Paris” (Stevens 39). Not only did she experience the squalor of Montreal’s working class life first-hand, but, through her work with various ethnic labour organizations, she also became acquainted with the challenges faced by the city’s many racial and cultural minorities. Her narrative poem “An Immigrant,” written during this period, reflects this newly acquired consciousness of the intersection between race and class struggle. In it, Livesay focuses on the plight of Montreal’s immigrant workers, suggesting that their status as socially and politically disenfranchised “newcomers” made them particularly expendable in the eyes of the capitalist establishment:

The immigrants come in; year follows year.

Slower the wheel turns, faster more are thrown

Ruthless against the wall, to sleep in parks

Or at the Refuge face lies and rats. (RH 84)

Eager to use her poetic talent to expose these inequalities before a wider public, Livesay joined the Progressive Arts Club, a communist cultural organization that sought to “provide the basis for militant, working class art and literature and to register popular complaint about the economic crisis of the thirties in Canada” (Souchette 77). The Club published a national socialist magazine called *Masses* and sponsored the Workers’ Experimental Theatre, an amateur troupe dedicated to the production of agitprop plays. It was during her time with this organization that Livesay first began experimenting with drama as a vehicle for political protest. Drawing on the conventions of Russian agitprop theatre, she wrote a series of dramatic pieces that were based on current news articles and were aimed at inspiring audiences to take political action.<sup>xiv</sup> Although these early plays differ quite significantly from their documentary successors both in form and content, they anticipate what would later become the driving impetus of Livesay’s documentary work: a desire to redress the suppression of working class and minority dissent by structuring her narratives precisely around these marginalized voices.

Indeed, a key feature of Livesay’s early plays was their attempt to create a polyphony of working class and minority utterances through the use of two standard agitprop devices: recitations and mass chants. This strategy is clearly exemplified in *Joe Derry*, a 1933 play about the arrest of a Young Communist League leader. A didactic piece aimed at educating school-aged audiences about the struggles of the working class, the play uses a combination of recitations, pantomimes and mass chants to dramatize Joe Derry’s life and eventual arrest. In the

first six scenes of the play, a single child narrates the title character's personal history, from his first job in a factory "making the wheels that make things go," to his rise as an outspoken leader of the Y.C.L, to his fateful encounter with the oppressive "arm of the law" (26, 28). The speaker's narrative is accompanied by a pantomime in which a group of silent children recreate Joe's life in a series of tableaux depicting class struggle. Although the recitation and the pantomime run parallel to one another, there is no integration between the two until the very last scene of the play, when the speaker ends his narrative by calling on his silent comrades to join forces: "Our shoulders are the new foundation!/ Onward, children, youth and men,/ United, we will surely win!" he exclaims (29). The silent children respond to this exhortation by joining their voices in a mass chant denouncing class oppression: "Answer the bosses attack! The right to organize is ours! Protest the attack on the Y.C.L.! Defend Joe Derry!" they shout in unison. This culminating shift from single recitation to mass chant is clearly meant to have symbolic reverberations. It serves to underscore the notion that, isolated as a single worker might appear on first instance, he is never alone, for his struggle is shared not only by his comrades, but ultimately by society at large. Livesay's hope, of course, was that the play's culminating scene of solidarity between the single speaker and his pantomiming comrades would trigger a similar show of solidarity on the part of the audience. However, it is primarily on this front – the capacity to inspire audiences into political action – that the agitprop form adopted in *Joe Derry* and other early works ultimately failed to live up to Livesay's political expectations.

Not long after beginning her career with the Workers' Theatre, Livesay began to develop reservations about the direction she had taken in her first dramatic experiments. Indeed, she grew dissatisfied with what she came to perceive as the crude agitational appeals of the agitprop form and longed to write something more than just propaganda. This eventually led her to reconsider

her position on the value of lyric poetry. As she intimates in *Right Hand Left Hand*, upon discovering a handful of “English poets who were, with Cecil Day Lewis, writing about [the] alignment [of poetry] with revolutionary forces for change,” she realized that she had gone too far in completely renouncing her lyric gift and longed to exercise it once again, this time in service of her political ideals (101). Livesay also began to question the representational methods she had derived from her agitprop influences. Indeed, as Rota H. Lister has already noted, her early adherence to standard agitprop conventions, which sacrificed depth of characterization in the name of allegorical value, resulted in an overly simplistic representation of the political issues at stake: “Livesay presents simple blacks and whites, the suffering workers and the ruthless capitalist politicians,” she explains (59). This troubling aspect of agitprop characterization was not lost upon the poet herself, who was mortified when she went to see a Polish play “which depicted capitalism as a serpent with a long tail, thrashing about dragging the workers down” and wished to divorce her own work from such strident methods of representation (*RH* 74). But perhaps most importantly, Livesay realized that, far from awakening the solidarity of the public at large, these “fractional tactics” (*RH* 74) could only succeed in deepening the rift between worker organizations and the rest of Canadian society because they failed to translate the working class cause into terms that could be understood by the public at large. Added to this concern was the inescapable fact that, given its obvious party affiliations, agitprop drama only lent itself to performance in “bleak, cheerless labour halls” (*RH* 73) and could hardly hope to reach other spheres of social influence. The task, then, became to find a creative platform that could enable Livesay to redress the lack of lyrical value, character depth and sociopolitical penetration of her early plays.

It was at the suggestion of her close friend and collaborator Alan Crawley, editor of *Contemporary Verse*, that Livesay finally turned her sights to radio in the late 30s. Crawley, who was blind, had the custom of memorizing poems and reciting them aloud in literary gatherings. Having “always [...] loved to hear poems read aloud” (“Song and Dance” 41), Livesay soon became involved in Crawley’s public recitals, and by the spring of 1939 the two of them were presenting regular poetry readings on the CBC. As Paul Tiessen and Hildi Tiessen explain, it didn’t take long for Livesay to discern that she could use radio as a platform for “exploring, even fulfilling, the artistic and practical elements important to her in the making of poetry” (xii). Presumably, she also saw an opportunity to redress the artistic and practical *missteps* she had made in her brief career as an agitprop dramatist. Thus began Livesay’s decade-long commitment to radio. Her first CBC radioplay, *The Times Were Different*, a piece about “prejudice and how it starts early in a child’s education” (*Journey* 151), was produced shortly thereafter, in 1940.

As Paul Tiessen and Hildi Tiessen have noted, Livesay felt immediately at home in the radio because in it, she saw an opportunity to indulge her long-held fascination with the oral dimensions of poetry and to explore “new ways of presenting [it] as performance, as rhythm, as melody, as song and dance” (xii). To this, we might add that radio opened up a space for Livesay to exercise her recently renewed commitment to lyricism. Indeed, the oral nature of the medium necessitated the deployment not only of compelling dramatic voices, but also of images imbued with enough emotional resonance to captivate the listener’s attention during the broadcast and linger in his or her memory afterward as stark reminder of the political message contained in the play. Livesay’s 1946 radioplay about the Red River Rebellion, *Flags for Canada*, clearly reflects this amalgamation of dramatic dialogue and lyrical imagery for political effect. A patchwork of

narrative voices juxtaposing English-Canadian and Métis accounts of the thwarted rebellion, the play closes with the image of a Dominion Day procession making its way to Fort Garry, where the Union Jack is seen floating triumphantly over the ancient structure. This apparent celebration of restored English-Canadian law and order is undercut, however, as the announcer draws our attention to the haunting detail of the “ruined masonry [that] still remains to tell the world, that this was once a mighty trading post in the wilderness” (94). A nod to the troubled Métis heritage of the site, this final image stands as a testament to the heterogeneity of Canada’s history and the necessity of honouring this unique legacy by raising a new, distinctly Canadian flag in place of the Union Jack. In this sense, Livesay’s use of the Fort Garry image in this passage exemplifies what became one of the standard features of her documentary oeuvre: a valorization of the lyrical image as a potential catalyst for national involvement.

A second opportunity that Livesay discovered in radio was that of moving away from her stock of agitprop character “types” and breathing more life – and sociopolitical complexity – into her dramatis personae. A form traditionally focused on “character development and narrative” (Tiessen and Tiessen xiv), the radioplay accommodated this new directive quite readily, enabling Livesay to bring the political and psychological motivations of her characters into high relief. This new impetus is clearly reflected in *Call My People Home* (1947), Livesay’s documentary on the Japanese-Canadian relocation of 1942. In contrast to the characters in *Joe Derry*, who figure as little more than representatives of their class, the dramatis personae in *Call My People Home* refuse stable categorization along social or political lines. In an attempt to register the heterogeneity of the Japanese-Canadian community, Livesay creates a collage of characters – an Issei (or Japanese-born) fisherman, a young Nisei (or first generation Canadian) student, and a Nisei mother, among others – who are fractured by contesting generational, social

and political affiliations *despite* their shared cultural heritage. In an added layer of social realism, each one of these characters is given a personal history that contextualizes their individual response to the uprooting and its devastating aftermath. Through these two methods of characterization, the question of how the Japanese-Canadian community ought to negotiate this traumatic historical event is transformed into a highly contested dilemma, at least for a good part of the poem. Whether or not these representational strategies truly succeed in highlighting the complexity of the political issue under consideration in this poem is a question that will be explored at length in chapter 4. For now, I will simply suggest that Livesay's use of narrative voice in *Call My People Home* clearly reflects her ongoing effort to use the radioplay format as a tool for redressing the reductive representational tendencies of her previous dramatic experiments.

The third, and perhaps most important, aspect of radio that captured Livesay's interest was its potential as a platform for the mass dissemination of her political ideas. In it, at last, she had found the long-awaited medium that would enable her to reach beyond the niche audiences of literary magazines and labour halls and speak to the Canadian public at large. In engaging with this medium, however, Livesay ventured into an arena fraught with high modernist anxieties about the threatening social and political effects of new media, and of radio in particular. As Tiessen explains, beginning in the 1930s, Canada's literary and intellectual elite registered a concern that radio's "foregrounding of the voice at the expense of the body also produced [a] sense of disembodiment" in its listeners, encouraging them to indulge in escapist fantasies (206). For a female poet seeking to engage with this already suspect medium, an added complication lay in the fact that the "political, psychological and aesthetic discourse[s]" of the time "consistently and obsessively gender[ed] mass culture and the masses as feminine" and used this

conflation as a basis for the construction of artistic value (Huysen 47). In engaging with radio and its audience, then, Livesay was particularly vulnerable to being dismissed as an artist who catered to the “communal cramp of understanding” – to borrow a phrase from her contemporary Margaret Avison – that high modernists saw operating among the masses (“The World Still Needs” 200). In addition to this problematic set of associations, Livesay also had to contend with growing anxieties surrounding radio’s potential as a medium for political manipulation. The Nazi Party’s successful use of the medium as a vehicle for fascist propaganda had prompted unsettling questions “about rational thinking and orderly behaviour, about individual action and the mood of the body politic” (Tiessen 216). Compounding these worries was the infamous display of mass hysteria that was prompted by the 1938 broadcast of Orson Welles’ radioplay adaptation of *War of the Worlds*, which playfully framed H.G. Wells’ narrative as a breaking news story. The radioplay imitated news broadcast conventions so convincingly that many listeners were fooled into believing that they were truly tuning into a real time report of an alien invasion, and a nation-wide panic ensued. In the eyes of the modernist establishment, events like these confirmed both the pliability of mass audiences under the influence of radio and the consequent need to police the use of this highly volatile new medium.

### **Claming a place Within Tradition: Livesay’s Radioplays as Griersonian Documentaries**

Recent scholarship on literary modernism has revealed that a number of key writers – H.D., Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Canadian poet Malcom Lowry among them – challenged the above-mentioned anxieties about new media, not only employing film and radio to explore new aesthetic directions, but (in some cases) also questioning the very concept that “mass” audiences posed a threat to the modernist project (Humm 2003; Hopewell 2005; Tiessen 2000; Tiesen 2005). In this sense, Livesay’s radio-based experiments were not without precedent

in the literary field. However, it appears that despite this precedent, and despite the fact that Livesay had long been used to treading the margins both politically and artistically, she still felt a need to legitimize her artistic choices before her (mostly male) high modernist peers. Indeed, across her memoirs and other autobiographical materials, she registered both a pervading sense that she was “struggling alone to make a woman’s voice heard” (*RH* 19) and a longing to be acknowledged as a serious poet by other literary modernists. In a particularly telling passage of *Journey With My Selves*, she recalls being deeply affected when the B.C. poet Vernon Van Sickle ridiculed her recent efforts to write politically conscious lyrical poetry:

Vernon Van Sickle seemed to be well read in contemporary English criticism, but he had little respect for my views. I was not writing agitprop poetry any more, but ironic political poems along the lines of Auden, Spender and C. Day Lewis. [...] He was known [...] to refer to me as “the Duchess.” I felt crushed, intimidated. (159)

In addition to ridiculing Livesay among Vancouver’s literary circles, in 1937 Van Sickle submitted an article to *New Frontier* in which he reportedly criticized her wartime lyrics for their “sentimentality” (Irvine 68). Although the article was never published because it reportedly failed to substantiate its argument thoroughly enough, editor William Lawson declared his “complete agreement” with its core assessment of Livesay’s poetry in a letter to the New Frontier Club, of which Livesay was herself a member (quoted in Irvine 68). F.R. Scott echoed Van Sickle and Lawson’s verdict in his review of *Day and Night*, in which he also catalogued Livesay’s poetry as “sentimental” (quoted in Kelly 62). Ultimately, such criticisms reveal the extent to which Livesay’s trademark blend of lyricism and socio-political consciousness was subject to attacks even before she became seriously involved in radioplay production. One can speculate that such attacks could only be exacerbated by the social, political and gendered

anxieties that radio was bound to elicit in many, if not all, of Livesay's modernist peers. It is not surprising, then, that Livesay would go to great lengths to devise a body of theory legitimizing her involvement with radio. Central to this theory was the re-framing of her radioplay project as a continuation of the Griersonian tradition in documentary filmmaking.

Livesay did not publish a full-blown documentary manifesto until 1969, when she released her seminal article "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in which she claimed that the Canadian documentary poem had evolved directly out of "the experimentations originally made by Grierson in film" (269). However, she had begun to articulate her ideas surrounding the role of the documentary poem in Canada almost two decades earlier, in a series of "Critically Speaking" talks that aired on the CBC from 1950 to 1953. Read in conjunction with Livesay's now famous essays on the Canadian documentary poem, these documents yield a fairly elaborate theory of documentary praxis, one that clearly echoes many of the core principles that John Grierson established in the late 1930s and early 1940s during his tenure as Canada's Government Film Commissioner. Indeed, Livesay not only adopted Grierson's conceptualization of the nature and purpose of documentary filmmaking, applying them to the radioplay form, but she also reiterated his opinions regarding the documentary's particular suitability as a vehicle for "representing Canada to Canadians" (*National Film Act* s.9).

Like Grierson before her, Livesay based her documentary vision on the notion that modern society – particularly Canadian society – was experiencing a crisis of civic understanding, and that the documentary genre had a critical role to play in redressing this disturbing cultural trend.<sup>xv</sup> However, unlike Grierson, who attributed this problem to a lack of intellectual sophistication among the so-called masses, arguing that the proliferation of new media and the increasing complexity of social systems had rendered life "too complex for

extended apprehension by the individual citizen,” Livesay attributed it to the absence of quality mainstream cultural products in Canada’s cultural landscape, and in its airwaves in particular (“Films and the Community” 119). More specifically, Livesay argued that CBC programming was too polarized, as it persistently scheduled “a bog of soap suds” alongside more high-brow offerings like news programming and classical music, with nothing to fill “the enormous gap that exists between good books [read: high culture] on the one hand and empty minds on the other” (“Critically Speaking 8, 5). Such disparate offerings, she argued, could only serve to alienate the broadcaster’s listeners, among whom she counted herself. Indeed, as she explained in an account of her own experience as a “housewife” who faithfully listened to the CBC during the day,

The great “sin” of radio as the CBC gives it to us, is the acrobatic mind of the program planners. What a jump for the dial when a program you heartily dislike breaks in between two other programs that you enjoy! On the West Coast, for instance, the BBC news at nine in the morning, which interests me, is followed by fifteen minutes of soap serial. (“Critically Speaking” 10)

As Tiessen has already suggested, Livesay’s self-characterization as a CBC-listening “housewife” enabled her to “deconstruct the ‘mass’ as a threatening abstraction and reveal instead the presence of the individual[s], active in body and mind,” that lay behind this construct (220). For the purposes of my discussion, this rhetorical manoeuvre is also significant because it paradoxically enabled Livesay to position herself as a literary/cultural tastemaker capable of tapping into the needs and desires of Canada’s listening public. Livesay the housewife could claim intimate knowledge of the public’s reaction to the CBC’s offerings, and what she extrapolated from her own listening experience was a conviction that Canada’s radio audience was tired of listening to melodramas sponsored by “various breakfast foods” and other

commercial interests and was yearning, instead, for a “higher standard of programming” – that is, programming that could bridge the gap between so-called high culture and the practical socio-political concerns of the middle class (“Critically Speaking” 8). In this gap, Livesay the *tastemaker* saw an opportunity – a responsibility, even – to create radio-based art that not only contributed to the “widening of communications” (and presumably of civic understanding) in Canada, but also had a distinctly Canadian cultural character (“Statement” 19).

Although Livesay’s conceptualization of the “mass audience” and its position vis à vis the socio-political climate of the era was more nuanced than Grierson’s, her prescription for the crisis of civic understanding she saw operating in current times was nearly identical to the one advanced by the former Film Commissioner roughly a decade earlier. Like Grierson before her, Livesay argued that the need for an artistic language capable of distilling the essence of Canada’s community life could be readily filled by the documentary genre. Also like Grierson, she bolstered her argument by establishing a hierarchy of cultural forms in which she placed the documentary format above what she perceived as the escapist commercial melodrama, on the one hand, and the creatively sterile newscast on the other.

Echoing Grierson’s repudiation of Hollywood-style features on the basis of their purported silliness and escapism (“Policy” 55), Livesay’s “Critically Speaking” talks repeatedly berated the Hollywood feature’s radio-based analogues – commercial programs like soap operas and children’s melodramas – as inferior cultural forms. Indeed, she argued that the “improbable” dramatic excesses of these programs not only appealed to the crudest of human emotions, threatening to dwarf listeners’ minds (“Critically Speaking” 4), but ultimately failed to address the needs of the CBC’s listeners, since the majority of them were above these base appeals anyway. As proof of this cultural disconnect, Livesay offered up the complaints she had

purportedly heard from numerous “women of similar interests” to her own, many of whom were immensely frustrated by the constant “wedging of soap [serials] into the uplift field” (“Critically Speaking” 15, 10). However, despite her disapproval of the low-brow escapism of soap operas and children’s melodramas, Livesay admitted that certain elements of these genres could prove extremely useful as pedagogical tools if used sparingly and responsibly, to create narratives “based on truth” (“Critically Speaking” 4).

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum lay the CBC’s journalistic programming, which, according to Livesay, presented its own particular set of problems. Although she applauded the CBC’s tradition of “excellent news commentary” and declared herself a devoted consumer of this genre, she stressed that the broadcaster’s listeners, herself included, could not live on a diet of straight news programming alone: “journalism, written for immediate consumption, is like a loaf of bread: fresh today and stale tomorrow,” she insisted (“Critically Speaking” 14). In other words, Livesay contended that, although news broadcasts were successful at keeping listeners informed on a day to day basis, they did very little to encourage any kind of extended socio-political engagement with current news events. Her assessment of the gaps in the CBC’s fact-based programming clearly echoed Grierson’s previous claims surrounding the insufficiency of newsreels and institutional films as tools of social communication and the consequent need to make cultural products that went beyond the reproduction/description of fact and employed the “arrangements, rearrangements and creative shapings” of commercial cinema to reveal the social and political urgency of current news content (“First Principles” 146).

In a similar vein, Livesay maintained that the documentary radioplay’s unique blend of “topical data [...] held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements” rendered it a far

better tool than journalism for distilling and disseminating the “socio-political implications” of current Canadian news events (“Documentary Poem” 269; “Canadian Documentary” 127). Like Grierson before her, then, Livesay conceptualized the documentary as a genre that amalgamated the best elements of commercial cinema/programming and journalism, employing this dialectical combination to create narratives that could stand as “archive[s] for [the] times” (“Canadian Documentary 127). By appropriating this pre-existing definition, Livesay effectively re-framed her radio experiments as contributions to a firmly established – and well-respected – Griersonian project of civic education. Placed in the context of standard high modernist attitudes toward radio, this manoeuvre could also be read as an attempt on Livesay’s part to forestall potential accusations that, by experimenting with a mass medium, she was necessarily engaging in an intellectually barren form of cultural production. Moreover, this astute strategy also shielded the poet from suspicions of demagoguery and political manipulation. Indeed, potential detractors of Livesay’s radioplays’ creative ‘re-shapings’ (to use Grierson’s term) of political content needed only to look to Grierson’s extensive body of documentary theory to find ample justification for the genre’s paradoxical amalgamation of topical research and aesthetic license. Armed with Grierson’s well-known assertion that the documentary’s use of dramatic and creative resources was always tempered by the higher social mandate of instilling audiences with a “sense of public purpose” (“Propaganda” 247), Livesay could position herself as a tastemaker capable of employing mass media responsibly, using the documentary’s “qualities of experimentation and admirable *restraint*” to educate her readers/listeners about the most pressing social and political questions of the day (“Critically Speaking” 14, emphasis mine).

Livesay’s documentary vision echoed yet another crucial feature of its Griersonian antecedent: its valorization of the documentary format as Canada’s pre-eminent vehicle for

nation-narration. Like Grierson before her, Livesay argued that the documentary could serve as an invaluable tool in addressing Canada's two most important cultural dilemmas: its status as a nation of vast cultural and geographical distances and its susceptibility to American cultural hegemony. Indeed, Livesay affirmed that the "vast and varied" nature of Canada's national landscape made it difficult for individual communities to be "nationally aware of each other," ultimately resulting in a widespread climate of parochialism ("Canadian Documentary" 127; "Critically Speaking" 16). In Livesay's eyes, the documentary, with its emphasis on reproducing the "immediacy of people's lives" and its keen attention to the "landscape, [...] topography [...] and social structure of the country," was ideally suited to the task of redressing this disturbing climate of parochialism ("Documentary Poem" 267, 269). Enhancing the documentary format's inherent nation-building potential was its intended method of delivery: indeed, Livesay suggested that, by exploiting the platform provided by radio, the documentary could bring cities from coast to coast together through the shared experience of listening to the same national narratives. As she stressed in a "Critically Speaking" discussion in which she made a case for the use of documentary tropes in children's "actuality" broadcasts: "In England, during the festival of Britain, I believe children of entire villages took part, doing research on the history of their area and writing it up in plays [...] I would like to see the CBC be more daring, and adventure in this area of intercommunication between cities" ("Critically Speaking" 13). Moreover, Livesay argued that, by creating this shared listening experience amongst Canadian audiences, the documentary could also help redress the pervasive presence of the American influence in Canada's cultural landscape. Indeed, complaining that Canadians had "no national stage" and were exposed only to "plays drawn from American life," she stressed the need to infuse Canada's airwaves with cultural products that "reflect[ed] [the Canadian] environment

profoundly,” the documentary being the most prominent among these (“Critically Speaking” 14; “Documentary Poem” 269).

Livesay’s conceptualization of the documentary as a distinctly Canadian genre clearly worked in tandem with her ongoing project of creating a poetics that spoke to the socio-political conditions of her time and place. Moreover, situated, once again, within the context of modernist cultural politics, this conceptualization can be read as yet another legitimizing gesture – one that enabled Livesay to claim she was forging a distinctly Canadian tradition while distancing herself from the much-criticized Maple Leaf School of writing, whose nationalist poetry was considered archaic and parochial by the modernist literary establishment. Indeed, as Peggy Kelly explains, at the time Livesay was writing, the literary field was marked by a rivalry between high modernists, “who emphasized modern diction and form” along with a commitment to internationalism, and the Maple Leaf School of writers, who emphasized traditional poetic forms and “wanted to develop national literary standards specifically for Canadian literature” (Kelly 53). In her memoirs, Livesay demonstrates both an awareness of this dichotomy and an affinity with transitional figures such as E.J. Pratt, who shared her interest in developing a tradition that was distinctly Canadian, yet demonstrated its nationalism through a concern with “living people rather than with maple leaves” (*Journey With My Selves* 151). Against this backdrop, we can speculate that Livesay shared the high modernist’s disdain for the brand of nationalism practiced by the Maple Leaf School, and wanted to divorce herself from it while still maintaining her claim to Canadian specificity. Once again, Livesay was able to achieve this end by re-defining her radioplays as Griersonian documentaries. By stressing her adherence to Grierson’s techniques, she could now position her poems as part of an emerging tradition that employed an innovative

combination of place-specific research and poetic treatment to engage with the Canadian milieu in a critical, and “often ironic,” fashion (“Documentary Poem” 267).

By appropriating Grierson’s conceptualization of documentary filmmaking as the “creative treatment of actuality,” Livesay was not only able to lend an aura of artistic and socio-political authority to her radio-based experiments, but she was also able to access a constellation of theoretical principles that meshed quite easily with the practices she had developed across her long-standing effort to create a poetics that merged musicality/orality, lyricism, and social consciousness. However, as Tiessen and Tiessen remind us, Livesay’s radioplays were always driven by the “challenge [...] not simply to duplicate well-trying themes and techniques, but to attempt fresh ones” (xi). Her use of Grierson’s principles is a case in point. Although Livesay echoed several aspects of Grierson’s philosophy and aesthetic vision, her adaptation of his principles was far from slavish. Her documentary project diverged from its Griersonian precedent in one crucial area: its conceptualization of the pedagogical purpose of the documentary format. Indeed, although Livesay reiterated Grierson’s belief that the ultimate aim of the documentary was to instill a “sense of social purpose” in its audiences (“Propaganda” 247), her understanding of what this formulation truly meant was very different from Grierson’s. As seen in chapter one, for the filmmaker, it meant mobilizing audiences in the service of the nation state as it currently stood. For the poet, it meant inspiring audiences to engage with – and ultimately challenge – the injustices and inequities of their socio-political milieu. In the interest of engaging with the aesthetic and ideological implications of Livesay’s subversive repurposing of Grierson’s original model, the next chapter will examine whether her documentaries truly succeeded in their manifest aim to create narratives driven by “political criticism” (“Canadian Documentary” 28). More specifically, I will explore the possibility that, despite her effort to

infuse the documentary form with a spirit of social protest, Livesay remained trapped by the hegemonizing narrative techniques of Grierson's original format.

**“So Must I Remember”: Ethnographic Redressal And The Problem Of National  
Temporality In *Call My People Home***

In her 1985 essay “The Canadian Documentary: An Overview,” Dorothy Livesay affirmed that a defining feature of the documentary poem is its “political relevance for its times” (127). By “political relevance,” the poet understood not only a critical engagement with the socio-political complexities of the day, but, more importantly, a commitment to the mobilization of political criticism amongst the documentary’s readers and listening public. Livesay offered up her own poem about the Japanese-Canadian internment of 1941 to 1949, *Call My People Home*, as a paradigmatic example of this kind of documentary praxis: “In my own case, in my 1940s undertaking concerning the Japanese-Canadian Diaspora, political criticism was the energizing force driving my characters into dramatic monologues,” she wrote (“Canadian Documentary” 128). However, a few years after making this claim, Livesay acknowledged the political fruitlessness of what she had once considered to be her most subversive and socially committed poem: “another twenty years went by before the Canadian public began to realize what had happened; my play had failed in its aim to rouse the wrath of the people,” she stated in her 1991 memoir *Journey With My Selves* (173).<sup>xvi</sup> At the time, Livesay accounted for this failure by speculating that *Call My People Home* may have been too “ahead of its time” (173).

More recently, Dick Harrison has offered a more critical explanation, arguing that “the tone of acceptance and the promise of reconciliation [contained in the poem] work to absolve government and society of their sins against the displaced people,” thereby undermining its political edge (153). Building on Harris’ critique, this chapter will contend that the poem’s intrinsic sterility as a catalyst for political action is a direct result of its Griersonian lineage. I argue that Livesay’s attempt to weave a narrative charged with political criticism is hijacked by

residual elements of the pedagogical temporality present in Grierson's original model. More specifically, I suggest that, despite Livesay's sincere attempt to redress the ethnographic tendencies of Grierson's documentary vision, she remains trapped by a Griersonian conception of time in which episodes of national conflict are seen merely as "problem moments" (to use Brian Winston's term once again) in the unfolding history of a tolerant and diverse Canadian nation. Ultimately, I contend that Livesay's adherence to this pedagogical temporality supplies her readers/listeners with a sense of catharsis, thereby nullifying *Call My People Home's* manifest call for political action.

As discussed in chapter two, one of the central features of the documentary genre as Grierson practiced it is a reliance on ethnographic conventions that not only promote an essentialist split between the "historifiable" Euro-Canadian "self" and the "ethnographiable" racialized "Other," but also work to displace the latter from the nation's history proper. As shown in my readings of *Peoples of Canada* and *Of Japanese Descent*, this hegemonizing dynamic hinges on a 'double exposure' technique that simultaneously acknowledges and elides the presence of racialized Others, using their physical images to authenticate the construction of Canada as an "inclusive" nation, yet denying them any kind of historical agency and marginalizing them from the shared endeavours of the Canadian collective. In *Call My People Home*, Livesay not only moves away from this type of ethnographic gazing, but makes a conscious effort to redress it by re-inscribing Japanese-Canadians, previously framed as ethnographiable "Others" in *Of Japanese Descent*, as "historifiable" subjects in their own right. Livesay achieves this re-inscription by populating her radioplay with a cross-section of Nikkei voices that bear witness to the multiple forms of devastation suffered by the entire community as a result of the relocation. Interested in bringing the historical agency of these characters into high

relief, Livesay endows each of them with a complex personal history that shapes their individual response to the injustices committed by the Canadian government against their community. Among these characters are an Issei (or Japanese-born) fisherman who is forced to relinquish his cherished fishing boat to the Vancouver authorities; a young woman who grapples with the dehumanizing conditions she and her mother encounter at the re-allocation centre of Hastings Park; a couple who enlist themselves as labourers in the beet farms of rural Alberta in an attempt to keep their family together; and several Nisei (or first Generation Canadian) voices who struggle to make sense of the marginalization they have suffered despite their status as Canadian-born citizens. As Harrison points out, then, Livesay creates a “polyphonic narrative in which a plurality of equally authentic voices are potentially in dialogue with each other, their narrator, and the audience or reader” (152). Though these voices are clearly fractured along generational, cultural and political lines, viewed cumulatively, their accounts create an alternative history that lays bare the alienation, violence, and material loss suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community both during the relocation and in its aftermath.

Livesay’s Japanese-Canadian voices challenge official accounts that, like the Griersonian *Of Japanese Descent*, frame the relocation as a *necessary* removal of ‘enemy aliens’ by exposing it, instead, as an arbitrary state policy that sent a devastating wave of uncertainty and alienation across the Japanese-Canadian community. This motif is clearly foregrounded in the narrative of the Issei fisherman who is called back to port to have his boat searched and, ultimately, confiscated by Vancouver’s naval authorities. The fisherman’s description of the moment in which he received the devastating report that his boat was “to be examined, searched/ For hidden guns, for maps, for treachery” (182) is fraught with confusion and self-fragmentation. He tells us that although he heeded the government order immediately, his obedience was that of a “blind

man,” for he “could not understand” what was happening around him and no one – including the authorities themselves – could explain or justify this unexpected turn of events (182). He then relates how, unable to fathom why the government would want to search his boat, and paralyzed by a “numb fear” (182) over the future of the vessel, he headed for the nearest port, only to confirm that he was about to lose his beloved “Tee Kay”:

There was no mistake. It wasn't a joke:

At every fishing port more boats fell in.

[...]

How speak about the long trip south, the last

We ever made, in the last of our boats?

The time my life turned over, love went under

Into the cold unruly sea. (183)

In a prime example of her documentary use of lyricism for political effect, Livesay employs water imagery to create a *mis en abîme* effect that replicates the subjective experience of displacement that the government's arbitrary actions have triggered in the Issei fisherman. Alienated by the lack of any logical explanation for the devastating blow he has been dealt by the authorities, and stripped of his only anchor (his boat) in this “new land” (181) away from his native Japan, the fisherman feels as though he has been thrust into the eye of a sea storm, his sense of security and belonging suddenly shattered.

The atmosphere of destabilization and alienation created by this introductory passage continues to ripple through the rest of the poem, manifesting itself most forcefully in the account of the “young Nisei” who appears after the Issei Fisherman. The girl tells us that her childhood was cut short by a traumatic encounter with the RCMP:

Then no [school] bell rang for me;  
 Only the siren  
 Only the women crying and the men running.  
 Only the Mounties writing our names  
 In the big book [...]. (186)

Similarly to the fisherman before her, the girl lays bare the senselessness of the Canadian government's actions against the Japanese-Canadian community by giving readers/audiences a glimpse into the subjective experience of fragmentation and alienation she suffered at the moment her family was seized. Not only is she traumatized by the memory of the chaos and confusion she was immersed in after the abrupt arrival of the RCMP and her parents' eventual incarceration, but also like the fisherman, she is unable to find any justifying logic for the actions carried out against her community by Canadian authorities. In the absence of any ordering logic, she is left only with a sense of betrayal and the "stifled feeling of being caught, corralled" by the arbitrary and oppressive force of the Mounties (188).

The young Nisei's perception of the Mounties – and, by extension, of the Canadian state at large – stands in sharp contrast to the sanguine portrayal of the RCMP as a repository of the Canadian state's decisive, yet gentle and impartial, brand of justice in *Of Japanese Descent*. As I suggested in chapter two, the NFB documentary bolsters its vision of the RCMP's purportedly "benevolent" dealings with its Japanese-Canadian internees by emphasizing that the agency never had to use any physical violence during the relocation, implicitly suggesting that such measures were never necessary because the evacuees somehow recognized the fairness of the regulations instituted by the state and *willingly* acquiesced to them. Contrastingly, Livesay's voices repeatedly express their bewilderment – and, in the case of the young Nisei voices,

outright resentment and bitterness – at the policies of a state that seems to act capriciously, with no regard for the rights or wellbeing of even those Japanese-Canadians who “were born/ Into the new world, [and] called British Columbia home” (184). Furthermore, their reaction is shared by the Anglo-Canadian voice of a ghost town mayor who is suddenly called upon to accommodate a contingent of evacuees in his village. Though the mayor never openly questions the actions of the state, he clearly recognizes the confusion and dislocation that the evacuees must be feeling as a result of their abrupt displacement. Hence, recalling his first meeting with the contingent, he describes how “slowly the aliens descended, in huddled groups [...] Looking bewildered up and down the platform, / The valley closing in, the hostile village” (189). His description of the newcomers as “aliens” is clearly ironic: instead of constituting an exclusionary commentary on their difference, as we might be tempted to deduce on first instance, it signals the mayor’s awareness of – and empathy for – the othering that the evacuees have suffered at the hands of their own government. Ultimately, by acknowledging the evacuees’ subjective sense of alienation, his account bears witness – and lends tacit official credence to – the alternative history of state abuse that emerges from the Japanese-Canadian testimonies presented in the poem.

A second aspect of the relocation that is retrieved from obscurity by Livesay’s voices is the violence that lay at its core. Indeed, in direct contrast to *Of Japanese Descent*’s construction of the dispersal as a ‘peaceful’ evacuation that did not require any force on the part of the state, *Call My People Home* unearths the physical and symbolic violence that the Canadian government, aided by the RCMP, deployed against the internees on a systematic and ongoing basis throughout the years of the internment.<sup>xvii</sup> Although this project of retrieval permeates the entire poem, it surfaces most clearly in the testimony given by Mariko, a young woman who has

been interned along with her mother in the re-allocation centre of Hastings Park, where evacuees are being forced to live in horse stalls with “hundreds of strangers pressing upon [them]/ Like horses [...] tied to a manger” (187). In addition to exposing the material violence inherent in forced displacement and confinement, Mariko’s account highlights the pathogenic and dehumanizing conditions that the evacuees had to endure during the relocation. But perhaps most importantly, it traces a process of symbolic violence similar to what Mona Oikawa has described as “the discursive production of the [Japanese-Canadian] displaced subject” as racially subordinate and inherently uncivilized (81). According to Oikawa, this discursive production was “imposed and reinforced through spatial exclusions” which confined Japanese-Canadian subjects to “degenerate” physical environments (75, 85). She further explains that these spatial exclusions were employed to code Japanese-Canadian bodies as inherently inhuman and pathological: “when bodies were moved to particular spaces, they acquired particular meanings,” she argues, adding that these spatial-bodily encodings were mobilized to both “disguise the Canadian citizenship status of those who were incarcerated” and legitimize their relocation as a campaign of “assimilation (read civilization)” (Oikawa 81, 82).

Mariko’s testimony maps a similar dynamic of discursive/symbolic violence enforced through spatial segregation. In what is perhaps the most disquieting passage of the poem, she confides that, unable to assimilate the continuous fear created by the sub-human living conditions of Hastings Park, her mother has gradually withdrawn from reality, to the point where she imagines herself “back in her home/ Embroidering blossoms on a silk kimono” (187). However, the mother’s daydreams are intermittently interrupted by an awareness that she is not really back at home, but is lying, instead, “in a manger with her hands tethered” (187). This unsettling image of animalization not only encapsulates the immediate physical violence of the

conditions at Hastings Park; it also underscores how, through its confinement in the manger, the body of Mariko's mother has been coded with "animalistic" meanings. But perhaps most importantly, Mariko's description reveals the lasting debilitating effect that such bodily encodings can exert on the psyche and will of the incarcerated subject: trapped in a cycle of psychological dissociation and renewed physical shock, her mother has been gradually reduced to a state of what can only be described as an animal-like passivity. She has internalized the animalistic meanings imposed on her through her spatial segregation in the crowded stalls of Hastings Park.

In an added layer of psychological devastation, it becomes clear that the speaker herself has experienced a similar transformation. Like her mother, Mariko is also trapped in a debilitating cycle of psychological dissociation and renewed shock. Unable to process either the extremity of her living situation or the pain of watching her mother's physical and mental distress, she takes refuge in the dreams she had constructed with her lover, Susumu, before the internment. Her musings are continuously interrupted, however, by painful misgivings about Susumu's own fate:

I wonder where in the inner country  
 On what train far from this animal silence  
 This thick night stifling my heart, my nostrils –  
 Where like a rocket shooting between two planets  
 Have you flown, Susumu? Have you gone? (187)

Mariko's culminating words are imbued with a poignant mixture of political anger and impotence. In her lucid moments, she is seized by a sharp resentment over the violence she and her loved ones have experienced; however, she cannot see a way out of her material and

symbolic incarceration and has thus developed the conviction that she is voiceless. In this sense, then, Mariko's sense of feeling overwhelmed by the "animal silence" of Hastings Park reflects the extent to which she, like her mother, has internalized the animalistic conditions of her physical environment. Ultimately, the process of internalization suffered by both women clearly resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's notion that symbolic violence can be a far more effective and insidious tool of domination than physical violence because it enlists the dominated in the maintenance and reproduction of their own oppression. Indeed, because "the dominated [begin to] apply categories from the point of view of the dominant," they misrecognize their condition as "natural" or inevitable and tacitly submit to it (*Masculine Domination* 35). Oikawa echoes this notion when she observes that the "discursive and material production" of the displaced Japanese-Canadian subject left a semantic legacy that circumscribed the way Japanese-Canadians themselves understood and expressed their condition, thereby paralyzing their ability to "remember and name the violence they experienced" for decades to come (88). Mariko's account, with its emphasis on the "animal silence" endured – and, in many cases, internalized – by the evacuees, stands as a testament to the devastating effects of this symbolic warfare.

A third and final aspect of the internment that Livesay's voices unearth is the mass dispossession that it imposed on the Japanese-Canadian Diaspora. Before discussing Livesay's portrayal of this phenomenon of material loss, however, it is important to highlight the historical circumstances surrounding the confiscation and sale of "alien" property during the internment, as this policy had a devastating impact not only on the refugees themselves, but also on subsequent generations of Japanese-Canadians. As the Japanese-Canadian Redress Committee explains, in addition to being uprooted from their homes and separated from their families, evacuees were forced to relinquish "a lifetime of priceless personal belongings" when their "fishing boats,

automobiles, homes, business and personal [property] were seized by the custodian of Enemy Alien Property and held ‘in trust’” (Kadota et. al 2, 1). In an even more devastating blow, in 1943 the Order-in-Council granted the Custodian of Alien Property the right to auction off all the Japanese-Canadian property entrusted to it for ‘safekeeping’ without notifying the owners. It thus became clear that the government had confiscated all of this property not to safeguard the interests of the internees (as it had initially claimed), but to “effectively destroy any hope of a large scale return of the dispossessed to the West” (Takata 141). This preemptive measure proved so effective that it arrested the development of the Japanese-Canadian Diaspora for years to come. As reported by the Japanese-Canadian Redress Committee, “thousands of citizens and their descendants lost opportunities for employment and education, and [...] suffered immeasurable shame and grief at [...] having their dignity undermined” through this dispossession (Kadota et al., 5).

*Call My People Home* is imbued with a keen awareness of the anguish and degradation that resulted from the mass confiscation and sale of Japanese-Canadian property. In particular, the poem highlights the significance that coastal property – particularly boats – had in the Japanese-Canadian way of life and the consequent devastation that ensued when the navy seized the Japanese-Canadian fleet in British Columbia. This motif is foregrounded in the testimony of the Issei fisherman who appears at the beginning of the poem. As I suggested earlier, the fisherman’s account is at all times coloured by a profound attachment to his boat, the “Tee Kay.” For him, the vessel is not only the source of his livelihood, but his very home:

Home was my boat: T.K. 2930 –

[...]

Now I could own my boat, *Tee Kay*, the Gillnetter

[...]

Now after thirty years a free man, naturalized,

A man who owned his boat! (181-182)

In this passage, the *Tee Kay* becomes a symbol of the freedom and self-determination the fisherman has achieved after a lifetime of hardship and labour. Hence the pride he exudes when he recalls the days when he used to command the vessel: “I was my own master/ Must prove it now, today!/[...] I [...] grasped the fly wheel, swung her over,” he exclaims (182). For the fisherman, then, the “Tee Kay” is an outward marker of identity that signals not only his self-determination as a new Canadian, but also his intense attachment to the very coastal landscape he had once found alienating. Indeed, with the “Tee Kay” under his command, the fisherman had found his sense of place and belonging in the “new land [that had first] found him struggling/ Against [...] the uncertain harvest of the sea” and the “uncertain temper of white fishermen” (181).

Ultimately, by underscoring the significance of coastal property as a marker of the fisherman’s – and, by extension, the Japanese-Canadian – identity, Livesay draws our attention to the profound impact that the mass confiscation of the BC fleet had on the evacuees: in being forced to relinquish their boats, she reminds us, Japanese-Canadians were robbed not only of the material fruits of decades of labour, but also of an intrinsic part of their cultural identity and way of life. The pain and degradation that resulted from this double dispossession are vividly evoked in the closing lines of the fisherman’s account. Here, he describes the moment when he relinquished his boat to the naval authorities at the Steveston wharf in terms that suggest that this loss reduced him to a devastating state of infantilization. He tells us that he “stood lonely on the wharf, holding the *Tee Kay*’s line/ For the last time” while “the naval men/ Ma[de] a note of her

number” (184). This description, with its emphasis on the fisherman’s reluctance to let go of the metaphorical umbilical chord that ties him to his boat (which he genders as feminine throughout his account) invokes an experience of trauma similar to that suffered by the child separated from his mother.<sup>xviii</sup> In this sense, with his line to the “Tee Kay” ‘cut’ by the naval authorities, the fisherman is emasculated and infantilized: he is no longer a “free man” with a sense of ownership and self-determination, but a helpless man-child with no sense of direction and no material means to support himself. This poignant image not only encapsulates the severity of the loss sustained by the internees, but it subtly invokes what is perhaps the greatest irony of this mass dispossession: that it was mobilized by the government to infantilize Japanese-Canadians as a financially and socially destitute community in dire need of government assistance. As reflected in the Griersonian *Of Japanese Descent*, this re-framing of the Japanese-Canadian community as helpless and destitute enabled the government to justify the internment as a benevolent intervention that was carried out in the interest of the evacuees *themselves*.

Livesay’s keen emphasis on the alienation, violence and dispossession spawned by the internment reflects her interest in redressing not only the silencing of the Japanese-Canadian subject in Canadian post-war culture at large, but also the kind of ethnographic gazing present in Griersonian documentaries like *Of Japanese Descent*. In a clear departure from the representational methods of Grierson’s documentary model, Livesay not only reinscribes Japanese-Canadians as “historifiable” subjects in their own right, but also creates a palimpsest of testimonials that expose the multiple layers of material and symbolic abuses that lay underneath the vision presented in *Of Japanese Descent*. This project of redressal is stymied, however, by the narrative temporality constructed in *Call My People Home*. Indeed, although the poem successfully unearths the trauma suffered by the Nikkei Diaspora, it inadvertently re-contains it

by embedding it within a pedagogical temporality in which the internment is assimilated as a *transitory*, if painful, interruption in the unfolding history of a tolerant and diverse nation.

This progressive temporality begins to emerge in the testimony offered by the Nikkei wife who decides, along with her husband, to relocate to a sugar beet farm on the prairies in order to keep “all [her] family together” (190). Sensitive to the hardships suffered by Japanese-Canadians who enlisted as labourers on the sugar beet farms of Manitoba and Alberta in order to avoid family separation, in this section of the poem, Livesay draws our attention to the gruelling living and working conditions found on such farms.<sup>xix</sup> As her Nikkei wife relates,

It was harder than hate. Home was a blueprint only.

We lived in a hen coop perched on a farmer’s field

Soaked by the sudden storms, the early rains of April.

[...]

In summer the sun’s beak

Tore at our backs bending over the rows

Endless for thinning.... (191)

In addition to highlighting the alienating and back-breaking conditions of beet farm labour, the wife’s opening statements are also imbued with a profound sense of material loss. Like the fisherman before her, she is devastated after being forced to relinquish the fruits of her life’s work, and despairs at the prospect of having to build her life anew after years of struggling to grow her family’s “small plot” to a “wider green”: “had it all to be done again, worked at again/ By our gnarled hands, in a harsh new land?” she consequently asks in a marked tone of resentment (191). The political implications of her query are neutralized, however, in the stanzas that follow, which re-frame her family’s government-mandated “journey into emptiness” (191)

as a character-building struggle against the prairie landscape. In other words, the wife and her family are cast as pioneers who embark on a trying, but ultimately rewarding, quest to tame and cultivate a new frontier land. Hence, the wife relates how, after months of wrestling with the harsh prairie soil, she and her husband had a sudden epiphany: “I think we had nearly given up, and wept,” she tells us, “until, one evening lull, work done/ [We] leaned upon the poplar gate to watch [...] fireflies [dance]/ Like lanterns of Japan on prairie air” (191).

Finally yielding to the couple’s persistent toil, the prairie landscape rewards the couple with a sense of belonging (as signalled by the pair’s recognition of the Japanese lantern-like fireflies dotting the prairie sky) and, most importantly, with the promise of a prosperous future. In the words of the couple’s Ukrainian neighbour, who steps in as a mouthpiece for the life-defining lesson they have derived from their toil in the sugar-beet fields, “see how tomorrow is fine. You work/ Hard, same as me. We make good harvest time” (192). With this culminating refrain, the couple’s displacement, dispossession and subsequent abuse on the sugar-beet farms are all effectively transformed into mere “problem moments” in their unfolding journey towards a future marked by growth and cultural integration. In this sense, the wife’s account echoes the temporality of progress constructed in Griersonian documentaries like *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada*, both of which assimilate unsettling national episodes by embedding them within teleological narratives that bolster Canada’s tradition of tolerance and diversity. Indeed, with its emphasis on the collaboration between Japanese and Ukrainian families to extract a harvest from the “strange and new” prairie landscape (192), *Call My People Home* clearly echoes those sequences in *Peoples of Canada* which emphasize the Canadian collective’s capacity to transcend cultural and political strife through participation in the shared endeavour to “beat the stubborn land” and “buil[d] towards a new and hopeful life.” In both cases, this

teleological movement culminates in a *sponte sua*-like turn in which the prairie soil finally reciprocates the pioneers' dedication by bestowing itself freely and abundantly. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter two, the sequence depicting the settlement of the West in *Peoples of Canada* ends with the affirmation that, though pioneers had "no easy task in wresting a harvest from the soil," ultimately, "the land did not disappoint them." Livesay constructs a similar, but even more romanticized, vision: in the closing lines of the wife's account, the Ukrainian farmer's prayer for a future of "Good growing" is promptly answered by the "quickenings fields," which display their receptivity to the farmer's stewardship by swaying back and forth in the prairie wind (192).

Livesay's integration of the wife's account into a temporality that highlights the growth and opportunity offered by the prairie fields resonates with a pioneer ethos in which the empty landscape figures as a terrain for individual endeavour and conquest. It is not difficult to imagine why the poet chose this trope to illustrate the hardships experienced by the families who relocated to the prairies: eager to mobilize her largely Anglo-Canadian audience in support of the Diaspora, she knew she needed to translate the Nikkei plight into terms that her target audience could easily recognize and identify with. Her depiction of the Japanese-Canadian sugar-beet labourers as pioneer figures can thus be read as an attempt to mobilize her audiences' sense of national pride and solidarity in the service of the Japanese-Canadian cause. Yet, however well-intended, this rhetorical maneuver glosses over a crucial aspect of life in the sugar-beet fields of Alberta and Manitoba: the Nikkei workers who were employed laboured not for their own benefit, but for that of the farmers and large agricultural interests who owned the land, the notorious Rogers Sugar Company of Alberta being the most prominent among these. Moreover, their status as migrant workers made them particularly vulnerable to abuse by their employers.

As Toyo Takata explains, “the beet workers specially noted [how] some farmers took advantage. Unlike the ghost towns or roadcamps where grievances could be presented and supported in a body, one or two families were at the mercy of an uncaring owner since they could not readily move to another farm” (138). The progressive temporality constructed in the wife’s account not only elides the systematic oppression suffered by these migrant workers, but also romanticizes the back-breaking labour they had to endure, extolling it as a vehicle for self-fulfilment and self-determination. This oversight is especially surprising given Livesay’s history of criticism against the sugar-beet industry of Alberta and Manitoba. Indeed, in the late 1930s, she had chronicled the hardships and abuses suffered by beet workers in these provinces: “the sugar monopoly is able to keep wages down to forty-five cents an hour and less. They haven’t bothered with union trouble, [as] anyone knows [workers are] glad to get a job these days,” she denounced in an article entitled “The Beet Workers (1936). Ironically, in *Call My People Home*, Livesay inadvertently divests what she had long regarded as a pressing labour crisis from all of its socio-political implications, rendering it, instead, as a character-testing interruption in the Japanese-Canadian community’s unfolding trajectory towards a “good harvest time” (192).

The poem’s capitulation to a progressive temporal structure culminates with a prescriptive closing passage in which Livesay’s Japanese-Canadian voices reject the destabilizing influence of political anger in favour of a more ‘productive’ mode of socio-historical engagement, one that will let “the past be/ And the future become” (193). As a mouthpiece for this prescriptive understanding of the nation’s temporality, Livesay introduces the voice of a young Nisei “philosopher” who grapples with the question of how he and future generations of Japanese-Canadians ought to process the memory of the internment. After considering both the

historical baggage left by the “blow” of Pearl Harbour and his community’s ethical obligation to preserve “the world/ For others” (193), the philosopher comes to the following conclusion:

So must I remember. It cannot be hid  
 Nor hurried from. As long as there abides  
 No bitterness; only the lesson learned  
 And the habit of grace chosen, accepted.

(194)

In this passage, the philosopher is caught between two opposing world views: that of the stoic Issei who have gradually suppressed the painful memories of the injustices they suffered, and that of the militant Nisei whose continuing bitterness has thwarted their ability to learn from their experience and move on with their lives. Finding both perspectives equally problematic, the philosopher ultimately opts for a third alternative: he and future generations of Japanese-Canadians must learn to honour the memory of the uprooting *without* encouraging more bitterness and animosity. The implication, of course, is that they must relinquish their political demands and focus, instead, on ensuring that their Nikkei heritage will be honoured and celebrated as part of Canada’s multicultural national identity. In the concluding stanza of the poem, the philosopher’s prescription is bolstered by a chorus of ‘reformed’ Nisei who demonstrate their newfound adherence to the “habit of grace chosen” by renouncing their former political anger over the confiscation of the BC fleet: “home [...] is where life is: Not Manitoba’s wheat/ Ontario’s walled cities/ Nor a BC fishing fleet,” they affirm (4). Livesay’s previous emphasis on the material dispossession suffered by the internees is thus superseded by an abstract understanding of “home,” one that stresses that belonging is a function of community integration rather than geographical location or material ownership. By the end of the poem, then, the Nisei

have relegated the material effects of the uprooting to oblivion and contented themselves with achieving a sense of purpose and belonging among their multiracial neighbours. Home, they ultimately come to understand, is “the white face leaning over your shoulder/ As well as the darker ones” (194).

The compromise reached by the philosopher and his accompanying chorus of Nisei voices in the closing passages of *Call My People Home* has traditionally been read as a token of the poem’s steadfast commitment to the political plight of the uprooted. A subscriber to this line of criticism, Lee Thompson has suggested that “the Japanese people of *Call My People* home are asked not to surrender their culture and their sensibilities but to contribute them to the Mosaic” in an “ecumenical dream [that] embraces all” (58). Yet, however ecumenical this vision may seem, it clearly resonates with Eva Mackey’s and Himani Bannerji’s parallel observations surrounding the paradoxical function of multicultural tropes in the mythological construction of Canada as a tolerant nation “moving progressively through time” (Mackey 24). Mackey argues that the “development of Canada’s self-image as a pluralist cultural ‘mosaic’” has been facilitated by “*managing* [as opposed to truly acknowledging] differences within the nation” (50, emphasis mine). Moreover, she contends that the pedagogy of multiculturalism *itself* has traditionally functioned as a symbolic weapon that contains “potentially dangerous political situation[s] through the recognition and management of culture” (64). Bannerji offers a similar assessment, suggesting that the myth of Canadian multiculturalism has conveniently worked to displace *political* debates about minority rights onto a *cultural* sphere, resulting in the “reduction of these groups’ [political and material] demands into cultural demands” (9). The progressive temporality introduced in the wife’s account and vocalized by the Nisei philosopher and the closing chorus promotes a similar dynamic of political displacement. Indeed, all of these voices gradually learn

to think of the internment as a painful, but nevertheless transitory, “problem moment” in their shared journey towards true integration into Canadian society. Hence, by the end of the poem, they seem to have forgotten about the material dispossession and political disenfranchisement they have suffered and are contented merely with being recognized as part of Canada’s diverse mosaic of national cultures. Much like *Of Japanese Descent* before it, then, *Call My People Home* divests the internment of its sociopolitical implications by inserting this episode of Canadian history into a national temporality that reinforces Canada’s completed development into a diverse and tolerant nation. This narrative orientation, coupled with the code of historical remembrance advocated by the philosopher and his chorus, which stresses the need to let “the past be/ And the future become,” cuts across Livesay’s manifest aim of inspiring political action by providing us, instead, with a sense of political catharsis. Indeed, whether intentionally or not, Livesay’s voices leave the reader with the impression that no further political action is needed on behalf of the Japanese-Canadian Diaspora, as the Nikkei have not only learned to accept their past suffering as a valuable (albeit painful) “lesson learned” (194), but are also well on their way to assuming a legitimate place within the Canadian collective.

This political catharsis becomes especially problematic when we consider that *Call My People Home* was written in the midst of a burgeoning political movement demanding reparations for the Japanese-Canadian community. Indeed, in 1947, two years before the poem was written, growing complaints about the loss of chattels entrusted to the Custodian of Alien Property finally compelled the government to establish a royal commission to inquire after the losses sustained by the Diaspora as a result of the internment. However, after two years of deliberation, the commission only granted compensation for losses resulting from the sale of property at less than fair market value. As reported by the Japanese-Canadian Redress

Committee, “loss of income and opportunity were not considered, nor were the [...] broken promises regarding the safekeeping of properties entrusted to the custodian” (5). Ironically, the progressive temporality constructed in *Call My People Home* elides the ongoing effort to redress this material and political disenfranchisement, inadvertently contributing to the marginalization of those voices that were beginning to demand compensation (however minimal) for the losses spawned by the uprooting.

Although Livesay challenges the ethnographic orientation of Grierson’s original model, she remains trapped within a Griersonian temporality that eschews the sociopolitical implications of unsettling historical events such as the Japanese-Canadian uprooting. This narrative slippage not only prevents *Call My People Home* from fulfilling its political goals, but also reveals a fundamental inconsistency in Livesay’s early documentary project: like its Griersonian predecessor, it is internally marked by a disjunction between its performative call for national participation and its pedagogical construction of the nation as an entity already bound on a journey of continuous development. Ultimately, this contradiction reveals that Livesay’s project of infusing the documentary genre with a genuine sense of sociopolitical purpose was impossible without making a complete break with the progressive/pedagogical dimensions of the Griersonian documentary. In this sense, her documentary stands as a testament to Homi Bhabha’s memorable assertion that “to reconstitute the discourse of cultural difference demands not simply a change of cultural content and symbols [...] within the same time-frame of representation,” but a “radical *revision* of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written” (246, emphasis mine). It appears that this lesson was not lost upon the poet herself, for, in her late documentaries, she breaks with the progressive temporality deployed in *Call My People Home*, drawing on changing notions of documentary narration and of historiography in

order to question the possibility – and also the desirability – of integrating moments of national strife within authoritative and didactic narratives of progress. The next chapter will chart both the emergence of this new narrative orientation in Livesay's 1967 documentary "Zambia," and its subsequent consolidation in the work of another documentary poet: Daphne Marlatt.

**Resisting The Urge To “Get Theoretical”: Documentary Self-Reflexivity And Historical Contingency In Livesay’s “Zambia” And Marlatt’s *Steveston***

It is widely acknowledged that Dorothy Livesay’s poetics – and her use of the documentary format in particular – underwent an important transformation in the years following her return from Northern Rhodesia (Now Zambia), where she held a UNESCO post from 1959 to 1963 (New 18, Sparrow 18). After a long hiatus from writing, in 1964 Livesay wrote her documentary *The Colour of God’s Face* – revised and published again in 1967 as the Zambian suite in *The Unquiet Bed* – in response to her experiences in Africa.<sup>xx</sup> By her own account, this sequence constituted a *new* kind of documentary. It was not “a presentation true to the found ‘facts’” like *Call My People Home* had claimed to be; rather, it was a “white outsider’s appraisal of what was happening to the blacks” as Northern Rhodesia moved towards independence from colonial rule (“Song and Dance” 47). In *The Colour of God’s Face*, then, Livesay abandoned her previous attempts to construct a totalizing archival record, emphasizing, instead, her own subjectivity as an observer of sweeping historical changes.

Previous scholarship has attributed this shift almost exclusively to Livesay’s post-war disillusionment with the ideals she had espoused as a young member of the communist party. For instance, Fiona Sparrow suggests that “while her concern for social justice had never slackened,” Livesay was becoming increasingly “wary of terms like ‘freedom’ and ‘progress,’” and consequently avoided making any overarching pronouncements about the significance of the events she witnessed in Northern Rhodesia (25). There are, however, other shaping factors to consider. Although Livesay’s growing suspicion of modernist notions of progress certainly played an important role in the revision of her documentary principles, she was not working in a

vacuum. Her rejection of the Griersonian claim to archival authority in favour of a more observational/personal approach mirrored the developments that were taking place in the world of documentary filmmaking with the rise of direct cinema in North America and cinema vérité in France.

In the interest of situating Livesay's late documentaries within their cultural context, and of charting their divergence from the didactic/prescriptive maneuvers that characterized their Griersonian predecessors, this chapter examines how the *Zambian suite* adapts some of the conventions associated with direct cinema and cinema vérité and articulates them to changing notions of historiography in order to unsettle the possibility of arriving at a stable reading of national history and identity.<sup>xxi</sup> I also examine how another prominent documentary poet of the era, Daphne Marlatt, applies the narrative innovations introduced in Livesay's *Zambian suite* to the home front, using them to interrogate the haunting legacy left by labour and racial exploitation in the seemingly tranquil town of Steveston, British Columbia. Ultimately, I argue that the narrative innovations introduced by Livesay and consolidated by Marlatt dismantled some of the key ideological maneuvers that the Griersonian documentary (and its literary incarnation in Livesay's early documentary work) had traditionally deployed in order to establish its claim to archival authenticity. I also suggest that, in so doing, these innovations paved the way for a more self-reflexive documentary praxis, one that not only acknowledged the politics of representation inherent in the act of documentary narration, but also encouraged the reader's participation in the creation of meaning, opening up a space for the creation of what film critic Michael Renov, writing about the impact of cinema vérité-style narration, has described as "an interactive social meaning constructed in reflection" (32).

As the previous chapters have illustrated, Grierson's notion that the documentary could subject reality to various rearrangements and creative treatments while still maintaining a claim to authenticity gave rise to a host of representational tensions not only in the field of documentary filmmaking, but also in that of documentary poetry. This problematic did not go unnoticed by Grierson's contemporaries. By the 1960s, the epistemological and representational problems generated by his memorable formulation had become the subject of heated debate across the filmmaking world. As Brian Winston notes, a new generation of documentarists began to question the manipulations Griersonians would perform in order to infuse their raw materials with sociopolitical resonance and temporal continuity: "If what distinguished the documentary was that it offered evidence of the real world, how could such manipulations be justified?" these documentarists asked (143). This growing re-appraisal of Griersonian conventions was exacerbated by a key technological development: the introduction of lightweight cameras with synchronous sound technology. Now able to record sound on the spot and carry their equipment "into any situation unobtrusively," thereby gaining the capacity to capture material "in real time with minimal disturbance," filmmakers were no longer pressed to perform extensive reconstructions in the editing room (Winston 143,147).

These technological developments, which lessened the need for extensive editorial intervention, converged with the filmmaking world's growing scepticism of the manipulations advocated by Grierson to revolutionize the way documentarists understood their own position vis à vis their subject matter. In North American circles, this re-appraisal issued in the notion that the documentarist's role was not to create an authoritative, "creative shaping" (to use Grierson's term) of socially and historically significant events, but rather to "poke into places society was inclined to ignore or keep hidden" and bring audiences as close as possible to the middle of the

action, while leaving all conclusions and interpretations up to them (“First Principles” 146; Barnow 232). In the words of the influential filmmaker Richard Leacock, then, the principal agenda of the post-Griersonian documentarist was “to convey the feeling of *being there*” (qtd. in Winston 149, emphasis mine). This new narrative orientation gave rise to the direct cinema movement, which positioned the documentarist as a “fly on the wall,” an invisible bystander recording the minutiae of real events *without* prescribing an authoritative reading of such events (Winston 188). But, as several film critics have pointed out, despite its rejection of Griersonian reconstructions and its ostensible refusal to promote an authoritative interpretation of accrued data, direct cinema still clung to a problematic claim of authenticity, disavowing the impact – and even the presence – of the documentarist’s subjectivity by positioning him/her as an invisible, neutral bystander (Winston 158; Renov xx).

The self-effacing tendencies of direct cinema soon found opposition in the cinema vérité movement, which developed contemporaneously in France under the leadership of documentarist Jean Rouch. Like direct cinema, cinema vérité deviated from Grierson’s didactic attempts to present an authoritative reading of actuality, focusing, instead, on conveying the experience of being in the ‘middle of the action.’ However, as Renov explains, the cinema vérité approach rejected the “pretense of invisibility” of its North American counterpart, insisting on the “necessity of acknowledging the impact of the filmmaker’s presence” in the scene under representation (xxi). Indeed, Rouch’s films not only drew attention to his own subjectivity as a documentarist, using first-person voicings “to imply not certainty so much as a testimonial presence tinged by self-doubt,” but they frequently contained *mis en abîme* moments reminding viewers that “filming [was] in progress” (Renov xxi; Winston 185). Indeed, Rouch’s work not only drew attention to the fact that documentary images/scenes are always tinged by the creator’s

perception; it also lay bare the processes involved in documentary production by including self-images of the filmmaker at work.

Winston has written incisively about the ideological implications of the cinema verité movement, suggesting that, for all its self-reflexivity, it maintained a “pretension to a superior representation of the real,” urging viewers to believe that what was being presented was still “evidence, evidence of documentarists making a documentary” (88). But despite his suspicion of cinema verité’s self-reflexive posturing, he allows that this form of filmmaking not only opened up a space for the critique of documentary production as an ideologically charged endeavour, but also spawned an increasing movement away from the Griersonian model of the documentarist as an “all-powerful” artist to a vision of the documentarist as a “facilitator” interacting with his audience to create social meaning (258). It is my contention that Livesay’s “Zambia” and Marlatt’s “Steveston” pioneered a similar movement within the field of documentary poetry.

The self-reflexivity of Livesay’s “Zambia” has generally been overlooked by critics. Sparrow, for instance, has claimed that “the *Zambian suite* is written almost entirely in the documentary voice and [...] reveals little of the poet’s personal responses” (22). Her argument invites two criticisms: first, it does not take into account that, by the time Livesay was writing *Zambia*, the so-called “documentary voice” was taking on increasingly self-reflexive dimensions thanks to the widespread influence of cinema verité. Second, it elides the many references – some of them rather obvious – to the documentary “I” that Livesay inserts in the sequence, thereby invalidating any reading of it as a traditional documentary claiming archival authenticity. Indeed, as mentioned from the outset, “Zambia” differs radically from Livesay’s earlier documentaries in that, instead of seeking to construct an authoritative archive of its subject matter (Northern Rhodesia’s transformation into the independent nation of Zambia), it focuses

on conveying the subjective experience of the documentarist as she struggles to process and understand the historical unrest she is witnessing.

Livesay's avowal of the documentary "I" becomes readily apparent from the opening stanza of the first poem of the sequence, appropriately titled "Initiation." Here, Livesay dispenses with the framing device of the 'objective' voice-over narrator (or "announcer," as she denominated it in earlier documentaries) and introduces a first person narrator who clearly stands in as a figure for herself: "from the twentieth of November [...] I entered the dark continent – / it was blazing with light," her speaker announces (306).<sup>xxii</sup> Having thus acknowledged the presence of the documentary "I," the poem goes on to catalogue the documentarist's impressions as she walks through the city of Lusaka for the first time. In a gesture that evokes direct cinema's mandate of conveying the experience of 'being there,' the poet/documentarist goes on to record every sight, sound, and physical sensation she experiences as she moves through the crowded cityscape. The poem's style, which imitates the hurried and fragmented diction a documentarist would use in her field notebook, lends a disorganized, cacophonous, character to the catalogue of sensory details amassed by the speaker. However, though seemingly disjointed, her impressions are unified by their shared emphasis on the sensory overload she is experiencing as she explores this strange – but intriguing – new landscape. More specifically, the details recorded by the poet repeatedly emphasize the blinding resplendence of her new environment: the streets glitter "like yellow glass"; the colourful, profusely flowered trees blaze like "flaming flamboyants"; the scorching sunlight bounces off the white clothing and "polished" faces of the black men "sauntering [in] the streets" (306). The speaker/documentarist feels so overwhelmed by these multiple layers of reflected and refracted light that, as she tells us in the final stanza of the poem, she tries to seek refuge from it:

From the twentieth of November  
I entered the resplendent sunlight  
took shelter under trees  
gold-fisted. (306)

By reiterating the date of her arrival in Lusaka, this final stanza tacitly suggests that, in seeking the shade of the trees, the documentarist is not just attempting to escape the sensory overload created by the city's luminosity. She is also, it seems, attempting to distance herself – if only momentarily – from her surroundings in order to regain her temporal and spatial bearings. By staging this moment of alterity and disorientation, this final stanza goes beyond the direct cinema-like representation of the sensory experience of “being there” and begins to tread on cinema verité ground, revealing the self-doubt underpinning the documentarist's account of her experiences as an outsider travelling the streets of Lusaka.

The poet's confrontation with the Zambian landscape not only triggers feelings of disorientation and alterity; it also generates a subtle interrogation of the impact of her preconceptions on the act of representation. This movement is reflected from the outset of the poem, with the speaker's ironic description of Africa as the “dark continent.” By avowing that her perception of the continent has been coloured by this colonial construct, the speaker implicitly acknowledges that the impressions/representations that are about to follow are tinged by her own cultural baggage. The second poem of the sequence, “Village,” continues to emphasize this problematic of documentary mediation by playing on the poet's struggle to extract meaning from a scene of which she has little cultural understanding. As the title of the poem indicates, here the poet documents her impressions of life in a tribal village. Her description focuses on what she perceives as the mimetic primitivism of tribal life. She tells us

that the “clay huts” inhabited by the tribespeople are “brown to the ground,” and consequently blend in with the arid landscape that surrounds them (306). This mimeticism extends to the tribespeople *themselves*: they, too, seem to blend into their surroundings, “loving the earth no more than a man loves his own hand” (306). Moreover, because they feel no difference “between the land and themselves,” they see no need to name their village or even themselves (306). Based on these characterizations, an obtuse reader might be tempted to charge Livesay with objectifying her Zambian subjects as “ethnographiable” Others incapable of articulating their own national identity and history. Such an interpretation might be allowed if, with Sparrow and Antje Rauwerda, we read “Village” as an omniscient account formally and thematically independent from the first person narration found in “Initiation” (Sparrow 22; Rauwerda 106). But to allow such a reading would be to ignore the interrelation between a series of poems that are, after all, meant to be read as a unified documentary sequence. If, in opposition to Sparrow and Rauwerda, we read the first person narration in “Initiation” as a framing device for the sequence as a *whole*, then the colonialist objectifications reflected in “Village” become self-reflexive commentaries on the poet’s failure to resist her admitted tendency to read Zambia through the “dark continent” construct.

The next poem of the sequence, “Wedding,” also dramatizes the documentarist’s ongoing effort to transcend her colonialist reading tendencies. This time, however, her struggle yields far more promising results. If in “Village” the speaker is unable to break with her preconception of Africa as a “dark continent,” in “Wedding” she openly challenges this problematic conceptualization, denaturalizing the colonial and patriarchal attitudes that underpin it. The poem describes a wedding ceremony and the subsequent consummation of the union between man and wife. But what starts out as a description of a seemingly private moment soon takes on explosive

public/political connotations. Indeed, throughout her description, the speaker conflates the nascent sexuality of the newly married couple with the nascent political self-determination of the Northern Rhodesian (soon to be Zambian) people at large:

At the periphery and fringe  
 Of villages where drumming swings  
 The hand that does the drumming  
 moves the world  
 [...]  
 The hand that does the drumming  
 Drums man home  
 To womb and woman (307)

Rauwerda has taken issue with “Wedding’s” conflation of sexuality and political power, suggesting that this rhetorical manoeuvre perpetuates colonial stereotypes of the black subject as “earth bound, body bound, and prey to his natural appetites” (108). What I propose, however, is that, in sexualizing Zambians and the Zambian landscape, the speaker is reacting to – and attempting to deconstruct – the colonialist conceptualization of Africa as the “dark continent” (306). Indeed, the speaker seems to register that this mythology is rooted in a gendered construction of Africa as a virgin territory awaiting colonial exploration and penetration. Against this backdrop, her persistent sexualization of the Zambian body/landscape can be read as an attempt to reactivate the originary myth of Africa’s sexual subservience in order to challenge the power relations it prescribes. What Livesay stages in “Wedding,” then, is not a colonialist fantasy of African wantonness, but an intervention into colonial master narratives aimed at creating an alternative reading of the African body/landscape, one that acknowledges the sexual

(and, by extension, political) agency of the African ‘mistress’ instead of casting her as a passive terrain for colonial endeavour. Such a reading of “Wedding” becomes even more plausible if we consider the poem – and the *Zambian* sequence as a whole – in the context of Livesay’s subversive use of sexual imagery throughout *The Unquiet Bed*. As Peter Stevens has noted, across this entire volume, Livesay emphasizes the “liberating force of sexual love,” repeatedly drawing a link between sexuality and creative agency (68). The documentarist’s reflections in “Wedding” mobilize a similar set of associations, now using them towards an overtly political end. Ultimately, by emphasizing the sexual and political agency of its *Zambian* subjects, the poem denaturalizes the patriarchal and colonialist impulses informing the “dark continent” construct, thereby opening up a space where the power relations prescribed by the “white man’s God” can be challenged by “the resurrection of a *woman/ an African* mother” (313, emphasis mine). Livesay, however, is careful not to construct an idealized view of her speaker’s struggle to cultivate a more nuanced, less colonially inflected, understanding of her new environment: indeed, while “*Zambia’s*” documentarist is allowed certain moments of hermeneutical lucidity and political optimism, her account is also shot through with episodes of contingency and confusion – a dynamic that unsettles her ability to arrive at a stable or comprehensive reading of the historical unrest she is witnessing.

Livesay’s dramatization of the documentarist’s struggle to process and understand the historical change she is witnessing resonates not only with the narrative developments introduced by cinema direct and cinema vérité, but also with the changing conceptualizations of historiography that emerged in the 1960s and 70s under the influence of such thinkers as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, among others. Of particular interest for our purposes is the way in which Livesay’s management of narrative perspective and national temporality in “*Zambia*”

echoes Foucault's critique of the temporal pitfalls associated with traditional historiography and his prescriptions for a more 'effective' mode of historical representation.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault takes issue with the progressive temporality propagated by those traditional methods of historiography that – much like the Griersonian documentary – attempt to "go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity" between an immutable past and "the destiny of [the] people" under representation (146). He argues that such methods fail to recognize that history does not operate progressively, but is, instead, permeated by contingency and conflict (154). Moreover, in their search to trace the birth of our cultural truths and values, these methods not only bypass those contentious events which do not correlate with the current state of affairs, but they frequently rely on a variety of textual "substitutions, displacements [...] and systemic reversals" in order to facilitate a comprehensive reading of the historical moments under representation (Foucault 151). Perhaps most importantly, in integrating isolated events into an idealized continuity, traditional historiography encourages readers to feel a reassuring sense of "completed development," thereby removing the need for any political action on their part (Foucault 156).

Interested in redressing these problematic omissions, Foucault prescribes a *different* kind of historiographic praxis, one that is concerned not with tracing the origins of identity (both individual and national), but rather with making "visible all of those discontinuities that cross us," thereby challenging us to recognize that the terrain of national history and identity is fraught with "numerous systems [of meaning] that intersect and compete" (161). According to Foucault, in order to achieve this goal, the historiographer must operate with three basic principles in mind: first, he must acknowledge that his reading of events will inevitably be filtered through his personal history, thus placing the authority of his own narrative under contention (156). Second,

he must emphasize the contingent nature of history, resisting the temptation to create a narrative of “continuous development” (153). Third, he must resist the compulsion to make all-encompassing pronouncements about the meaning of historical events, acknowledging, instead, that history’s conflicts and contingencies cannot “be mastered by the powers of synthesis” (161). A documentary that self-reflexively plays on the intersection between individual subjectivity and the construction of national history/identity, Livesay’s “Zambia” activates all of these principles.

The sequence’s adherence to the first imperative outlined above, that of acknowledging the subjectivity of the historiographer (or, in this case, documentarist), has already been established through my analysis of Livesay’s cinema vérité-like management of narrative perspective. But “Zambia’s” undercutting of its own archival authenticity moves beyond the mere avowal of the documentary “I” to thematize the speaker’s struggle against the Griersonian compulsion to integrate contentious historical events into neat narratives of progress. Indeed, the poem’s dramatization of the documentary-making process hinges on an interrogation of this most problematic of documentary conventions. Preoccupied with distancing herself from any attempts to construct a totalizing archival record, and interested in capturing the full complexity of the historical moment she is witnessing, in “Zambia,” Livesay abandons the linear/cumulative narrative structure she had previously deployed in *Call My People Home* and assembles, instead, a deliberately dislocated collection of lyrical fragments, each one of which focuses on a single scene of the speaker’s journey across Zambia. Not only does Livesay refuse to weave these isolated events into a tidy narrative of progress, but she self-reflexively toys with our expectations of documentary temporality. Indeed, the first poem of the sequence, “Initiation,” plays on linear temporal conventions by chronicling the speaker’s first entry into the “dark continent” in terms that establish clear boundaries of time:

From the twentieth of November

At the turn of the moon's tide

I entered the dark continent –

it was blazing with light. (306)

By demarcating the beginning of the documentarist's journey in this manner, Livesay invites us to assume that what we are about to read is a linear account tracing her narrator's growing understanding of Zambia's condition as an emerging nation. The final line of the stanza, which debunks the colonialist construction of Africa as the "dark continent" by stressing that the narrator found it, instead, "blazing with light," reinforces this temporal expectation by suggesting that the speaker's account is going to end with a totalizing episode in which she will have acquired a stable understanding both of her new surroundings and of her own condition as an outsider witnessing historical change. In short, "Initiation" invites us to view the poems that follow it as stepping stones in an unfolding continuum of personal and historical progress. However, the rest of the sequence frustrates this expectation by constructing a haphazard, and often disorienting, constellation of individual scenes. With the exception of the first-person narration in "Initiation," which can be taken as a framing device for the entire sequence, there are no contextualizing details or linking devices enabling a comprehensive reading of the sequence's individual tableaux. The dislocated collection of scenes thus takes on the aura of a documentary travelogue that was precariously pieced together in the course of action, and consequently resists any ordering logic or narrative emplotment. In short, the sequence's prevailing effect is one of fragmentation instead of accretion. In this sense, "Zambia" clearly resonates with Foucault's imperative of developing a method of historical storytelling that dismantles "the traditional

devices for [...] retracting the past as a patient and *continuous* development” and emphasizes, instead, the contingent and haphazard forces operating in history (153, emphasis mine).

In “Zambia,” Livesay not only creates a temporal experience that resonates with the Foucauldian mandate to reject linear emplotments of history; she also thematizes the documentarist’s ethical obligation to resist making prescriptive pronouncements about the significance of the events she is witnessing. The poet foregrounds this imperative by staging a thematic play of oppositions whereby the interpretation of events espoused by the speaker in one scene is always undercut by the revelations made in another scene. For instance, “Initiation,” which anticipates a “turn of the moon’s tide” (306) both in the speaker’s consciousness and in the political situation of Zambia, is immediately followed by “Village,” which describes the relationship between the Zambian landscape and its inhabitants in terms that invoke a somewhat stifling sense of political passivity. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the village people under observation are said to be “too much” of the land to “love [it], or name it” (307). This description, with its emphasis on the integration between villagers and landscape, suggests that the former are too caught up in the established rhythms of their land to question or change the current state of affairs. However, the next lyric, “Wedding,” reactivates the theme of political possibility by forecasting a social upheaval which will enable those who lie at “the periphery and the fringe” to dictate the rhythm that “moves the world” (307). In yet another layer of contradiction, the political hope raised in “Wedding” is complicated, if not ironized, by the final two poems of the sequence, which document two conflicting movements in Zambia’s struggle for independence. “The Leader” chronicles the rise of Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia’s first president) as an outspoken representative of his people, while “The Prophetess” deals with the rise of Alice Lenchina as founder and leader of the Lumpa Church, a religious sect that

countered the colonialism of Northern Rhodesia's dominant religious institutions – the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland – by infusing the Bemba language into its rituals and hymns. As Fiona Sparrow explains, in the final months of the struggle for independence, these two individual movements came into political conflict with one another, and “Kaunda was [eventually] forced to destroy [the Lumpa Church revolt] since it challenged his authority” (25). Although this conflict had not yet come to a head when *Zambia* was first written, the sequence demonstrates a prescient awareness of the potential tension between the revolutionary voices of Kaunda and Lenchina. It is interesting, for instance, that instead of integrating both of these figures into a single narrative chronicling the rise of a mythopolitical tradition native to Zambia, Livesay keeps them completely separate from one another, and even signals a kind of opposition between the two by arranging their respective portraits back to back.

Moreover, in both “The Leader” and “The Prophetess,” the revolutionary opportunity embodied by the title character is shot through with glimpses of impending violence. Indeed, as Fiona Sparrow points out, in “The Leader,” Kaunda’s people are “seen as clustering flowers, their faces turned to the sun, but [it is clear that] their freedom will not be won without sacrifice” (24). Similarly, in “The Prophetess,” the violence inherent in Alice Lenchina’s revolutionary promise is foregrounded through a crescendo of drumbeats evoking the growing momentum and explosiveness of the “new hosannah” she has brought to her people:

The drums beat  
 tentative      questioning  
 the drums come out of hiding  
 now strong ones      bold ones  
 the drums beat louder and louder (314)

Ultimately, Livesay's haphazard juxtaposition of freeze frames capturing moments of political passivity and political unrest, combined with her recurrent emphasis on the violence underpinning moments of revolutionary promise, not only negates the possibility of projecting any sense of completed development (to use Foucault's phraseology) onto the historical moment under representation, but also makes it impossible to arrive at a stable interpretation of the Zambian independence movement or of Zambians themselves. This dynamic prevents *Zambia* from providing any kind of catharsis for its readers, and thereby inoculates it against the kind of political conformism that overtakes *Call My People Home*. Coupled with the sequence's repeated undercutting of the objectivity/authority of the narrator, this refusal to provide a totalizing reading of contentious historical events marks an important turning point not only in Livesay's own documentary oeuvre, but also in the history of the Canadian documentary poem at large. Indeed, through these two complementary strategies, Livesay establishes a new kind of documentary practice, one that offers readers a self-reflexive glimpse of the ethical and representational problems inherent in the process of documentary production.

The narrative innovations introduced by Livesay in "Zambia" also make their appearance – albeit in a more consolidated and sophisticated form – in Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*, a 1974 documentary charting the troubled heritage of this once-boisterous fishing port in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The sequence was born out of a series of interviews that Marlatt conducted as part of an aural history project commissioned by the Provincial Archives of British Columbia in 1973. Like "Zambia," *Steveston* follows the footsteps of a female documentarist who sets out to record the character, topology and history of a locale in which she feels like a displaced outsider. Indeed, although *Steveston* turns its sights towards the representation of a Canadian town, it is still very much a narrative of outsiderhood, one that explores the experience

of alterity and cultural relativity that Marlatt has long been concerned with as an invisibly (because white and Anglophone) ‘othered’ immigrant writing about Canadian history and identity. As she writes in “Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination,” the experience of being such an immigrant led her to take an interest in the way people perceive and relate to geographic locales, and in the kinds of narratives that emerge from the encounter with “the mystery of [a] new place” (18):

It seems to me that the situation of being [...] an immigrant is a perfect seed-bed for the writing sensibility. If you don’t belong, you can *imagine* you belong, you can retell [a place’s] history in a way that admits you (as I did in *Vancouver Poems*). Or you can register your presence in a world you are drawn to (*Steveston*), even as, from outside, you witness its specific and other characteristics. (22)

This dialectic between the newcomer’s subjectivity and the physical/objective characteristics of her new surroundings lies at the heart of *Steveston*’s management of the documentary voice. Indeed, like “Zambia,” *Steveston* takes its speaker’s experience of outsiderhood as a jumping off point for a cinema vérité-like interrogation of the impact of the documentary “I” on the process of documentary production. Central to this project is Marlatt’s emphasis on the speaker’s sensory/bodily experience of her new environment, a dynamic readily on display in “Imperial Cannery, 1913” and “Steveston as you find it,” both of which document the speaker’s impressions of the town’s fish canning industry. Like Livesay before her, in these two poems, Marlatt creates a direct cinema-like experience of ‘being there’ by emphasizing every sight, sound, and physical sensation her speaker encounters as she moves through the alienating environment of a fish cannery. And also like Livesay, Marlatt puts this emphasis on sensory

detail to a far more complex use than that prescribed by the direct cinema movement. Indeed, instead of deploying this strategy to create an impression of unmediated reportage, the way a direct cinema creator would, Marlatt actually uses it to *draw* attention to the presence of the documentary “I.” Indeed, as Douglas Barbour has noted, her sensory descriptions work to emphasize the mediated nature of the archival records the speaker is producing, thereby reminding us that “each writer will speak his or her world as it is immediately perceived in terms of particular attitudes [held] at the moment of perception and articulation” (176). Sabrina Reed offers a similar assessment, suggesting that the accretion of sensory detail across *Steveston* works to foreground the notion that experience – and, by extension, the retelling of experience – is perpetually being redefined “in the light of new sensory data” (135). We might consider the political implications of this use of sensory detail to foreground the documentarist’s subjectivity.

Much like their counterparts in Livesay’s “Zambia,” *Steveston*’s many sensory descriptions are imbued with political connotations. This impulse becomes apparent early on in the volume, with the poem “Imperial Cannery,” which focuses on a young girl’s initiation as a fish cannery labourer. Here, the speaker describes the interior of the cannery in terms that invoke an oppressive experience of sensory overload. In the third stanza, for instance, she tells us that the plant is crowded with “cans, & [...] steam, & [...] men with rolled up/ sleeves & straw hats, & men in oilcloth slickers spattered with/ fish guts” (46). The overwhelming details continue to accumulate as the speaker gazes through the back door of the cannery, to the docks beyond. There, she sees a “collector’s boat” filled with hundreds of fish piled “on top of [one] another, their own scale grease [keeping] them alive in a sea they’re taken from to dry” (46). These descriptions are clearly meant to evoke something more than the speaker’s firsthand experience of being inside the cannery. Their emphasis on the oppressive accumulation of industrial sights,

sounds and smells invokes the similarly oppressive nature of a fish canning industry that is perpetually squeezing life not just out of the fish it processes, but also out of the people and natural resources of Steveston at large. By emphasizing the speaker's politically inflected perception of the interior of the cannery in this manner, Marlatt draws our attention to the fact that documentary representations are always filtered through the cultural and political consciousness of the observer. But Marlatt's emphasis on the experiential dimensions of documentary reportage not only work to foreground the subjectivity of her speaker. They also raise an important question: if the documentarist's perceptions are constantly being redefined in light of new experiences and revelations, how can she guard herself against the temptation of imposing prescriptive readings on the phenomena – and, more importantly, the other subjectivities – under representation?

In “Steveston as you find it,” Marlatt's documentarist grapples with this same ethical dilemma, oscillating between a direct cinema-like interest in maintaining her objectivity as an observer and an ever growing awareness of the political ramifications of the scenes she is witnessing. In the opening stanza of the poem, the speaker takes a moment to remind herself that she must resist the temptation to “get theoretical” and must focus, instead, on the task at hand: she must record “the multiplicity simply there: the *physical matter* of the place [...] the cannery” (51, emphasis mine). However, as she plunges into her description, it becomes obvious that she has failed to live up to the mandate she initially set for herself, for she increasingly begins to editorialize the scene under observation. Indeed, what begins as a catalogue of sensory perceptions soon turns into a politicized meditation on the effect that the fish cannery industry has had on Steveston and its inhabitants. This turn becomes apparent as the documentarist goes on to describe the fish canning process. In a telling example of Marlatt's use of sensory detail to

foreground the political consciousness of her documentary “I,” her speaker describes the industrial dismemberment of fish in terms that suggest that another, more disturbing form of dismemberment is also taking place in the cannery:

There’s a subhuman, sub/marine aura to things. The  
 Cavernous “fresh fish” shed filled with water, with wet bodies of dead fish,  
 in thousands, wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim,  
 cut, fillet, pack these bodies reduced to non-bodies, nonsensate food *these*  
 bodies ache from, feet in gumboots on wet cement, arms moving,  
 [...] ears dull from, the in-  
 sensate noise of machinery, of forklifts, of grinding and washing, of conveyor  
 belt. (52)

In this passage, the workers *themselves* have become objects of consumption. Just as the fish are being chopped up and packaged for mass retail, so too are the workers being figuratively dismembered by a fish canning industry that sees them as disposable commodities to be used whichever way the market dictates. Their bodies, like the bodies of the fish, have been “reduced to non-bodies”: they are not seen as human entities anymore, but have been transformed, instead, into a collection of disjointed limbs that carry out machine-like functions on the assembly line.

The notion that the bodies of Seveston’s cannery workers are perpetually being marked and consumed by the fish canning industry permeates not only “Seveston as you find it,” but also the entire sequence as a whole. In “Imagine: a town,” for instance, the narrator once again conflates the industrial consumption of fish with the industrial exploitation of workers’ bodies, suggesting that the delta at the mouth of Fraser is lined with sediment from “bodies of men & fish corpse piled on top of each other [...] an endless waste the trucks of production grind to

juice” (43-45). Ultimately, these descriptions highlight the speaker’s tendency to read the environment that surrounds her in a subjective, and decidedly political, way. But while this impulse triggers many productive meditations on the power relations inscribed in Steveston’s industrial heritage, in some poems, it also gives way to rather prescriptive – if not reductionist – pronouncements about the lives of the town’s working class.

In “Steveston as you find it,” for instance, the speaker describes the cannery’s female Japanese-Canadian employees in terms that invite us to read them as passive beings who readily conform to the mind-numbing work that is being imposed on them, and who have no agency over their own lives: they “break, from routine, with the ease of tired bodies laughing/ for what? “It’s life.” *Their* life? [...] Or how the plant packs their lives, chopping/ off the hours, contains *them* as it contains first aid, toilets, beds,” the speaker tells us (52). A similar pattern of representation is at work in “Moon.” Here, the speaker describes (what she perceives as) the complacency of Steveston’s inhabitants vis à vis the “corporate growth that monopolizes” their lives:

... they see nothing remarkable  
in this, they know it like the back of their hands on a familiar  
table, like fish conveyed by belt to the steady chopping of steel  
blades. Beer to lips, end of a shift, end of another week. (50)

Ultimately, the speaker’s tendency to cast Steveston’s labourers as conformist and passive highlights one of the central preoccupations permeating *Steveston* as a whole – that of the documentarist’s ethical responsibility towards the Other. Indeed, as William H. New has noted, by acknowledging the subjective dimensions of her speaker’s documentary account, Marlatt not only rejects the “man-in-place, man-with-the-power-to-chart-and-name” metaphor

that dominates traditional documentary travelogues, but she also draws our attention to the politics of documentary representation, encouraging us to ask, “if [the documentary “I”] implies authenticity, [...] who has the right to speak? [...] Who is privileged by the existing linguistic conventions?” (*History* 248). But what separates *Steveston* from the *Zambian suite*’s similar questioning of the politics of representation inherent in documentary production is that, unlike Livesay’s text, which focuses exclusively on the speaker’s own embattled experience as a documentarist, it also considers the *other* side of the representational equation – namely, that of the documentary subject’s potential response to the observational moment.

Indeed, although Livesay’s use of the documentary “I” in “Zambia” marks an unprecedented movement towards self-reflexivity in the genre of documentary poetry, it falls short of employing the kind of auto-representational strategies that became the hallmark of the cinema vérité movement. To be more specific, although “Zambia” clearly thematizes the documentarist’s struggle to process/understand the scenes of social upheaval she is witnessing, it does not *actively* expose the documentarist at work, or interrupt the narrative underway to remind readers that the act of representation is in process, the way a full-blown vérité documentary would. In this sense, “Zambia” can be said to occupy a transitional territory between the self-effacing techniques of direct cinema and the self-reflexive techniques of cinema vérité. Livesay’s documentarist may not pretend to be a neutral bystander, the way a cinema direct creator would; however, she remains very much an *observer* and not a participant. She is never shown interacting with her subjects and, though she is deeply preoccupied with the impact of her own preconceptions on the documentary process, she never considers how her subjects may respond to – and affect – her attempted representations. *Steveston* closes this gap, not only drawing attention to the subjectivity of the documentarist, but also using a vérité-like *mis en*

*abîme* effect to foreground the negotiations and power struggles that emerge between the documentarist and her subject(s) during the process of representation.

Marlatt's creation of what Renov, writing about cinema vérité, has described as "the interactive mode in which the filmmaker-subject encounter takes precedence over externalized observation" (178) becomes readily apparent in "End of Cannery Channel." The poem describes the speaker's encounter with a group of Japanese-Canadian fishermen who are working on the docks. Like most of the poems in the sequence, it begins with a catalogue of sensory details recreating the scene under observation. However, in a cinema vérité-like turn providing an inset self-image of the documentary in process, the final lines of the stanza not only reveal that what we are reading is an entry in the speaker's travel journal, but they also draw attention to the fact that the fishermen under observation are reluctant to become the subjects of such an entry: "two men [are] bent over, replacing rusty springs & talking with a third who's looking on. Who glances at my notebook," the speaker tells us (59). The tension between the documentarist/observer and her fishermen subjects continues as she approaches them to ask whether she can watch them "raise the pole" (59). Intent on capturing a picturesque scene of Japanese-Canadian industry, the speaker is taken completely by surprise when the fishermen respond to her query with a series of sexual innuendoes: "She wants to watch! [...] You gonna *help?*" one of them asks suggestively (59). The innuendos become increasingly crude as the fishermen ask the speaker to dance for them and signal, through a series of wordplays, that they view her as a promiscuous "hippie" who likes to "have variety" (60). Analyzing the problematic encounter, near the end of the poem the speaker concludes that the fishermen have objectified her on the basis of her sexual and cultural difference:

I'm clearly a woman on their float. Too weak to lift the pole,

old enough to have tastes – “you know what I mean?” He eyes me  
across the rift of language, race, & sex. Should I go? (60)

What is left unsaid by the speaker, but the reader is clearly meant to register, is that this is not the only objectification at work in the poem: the speaker *herself* is in the process of reducing the fishermen’s work to a picturesque scene of local character when she is jolted out of her poetic reverie by their innuendos. Indeed, despite being told that the pole they are about to raise weighs 200 pounds, requiring the strength of three men to carry it, the speaker romanticizes the fishermen’s work by suggesting that there is a “curious backwater stillness” to what *they* clearly regard as a back-breaking task (59). Against this backdrop, the fishermen’s innuendos, which collapse the speaker into a wanton “hippie,” can be seen as tokens of their resistance against her similarly reductive reading of their own condition. In a gesture that confirms that what we are witnessing is a struggle over the politics of representation, in the final line of the poem, one of the fishermen turns to the speaker and asks, “See what it’s like?” (60).

“Work” enacts a similar, albeit far more nuanced, documentarist-subject encounter. The poem documents the speaker’s rendezvous with a Japanese-Canadian “fisherman of consequence” in a local restaurant (64). Her encounter with this man to whom she is clearly attracted – and who suggestively assures her that her “presence haunts the dock” – prompts a meditation on her interactions with all of the Japanese-Canadian fishermen she has encountered in Steveston, most of whom seem to regard her as a “sexual obsession” (65). Relinquishing the feelings of victimization she had previously expressed in “End of Cannery Channel,” the speaker struggles to understand the reasons behind the fishermen’s apparent fixation. After some thought, she realizes that, in fantasizing about her, the men are playing out “an old/ dream [her] hair, [her] body happen to fit: the incarnate goal/ of all that’s *out there*” (65). Indeed, the speaker realizes

that, in the fishermen's eyes, she represents both an escape from a stifling existence defined by "nothing more than hard work, over and over" and an opportunity to prove their manhood by exploring "what one man can do, where he can go..." (65). But perhaps most importantly, she also realizes that she has also been guilty of projecting her own needs and desires onto the fishermen – that, just as they have been collapsing her into an erotic dream, she has persisted in "seeing *them*, these men" as representatives of Japanese-Canadian ethos of romanticized industriousness (67). Thanks to this revelation, what starts out as an encounter highlighting the cultural rift between the documentarist and her subject becomes a fleeting, but nonetheless transformative, moment of connection in which the speaker is able to recognize herself in the Other.

Ultimately, by staging encounters like the two described above, Marlatt establishes an intersubjective dynamic that highlights the inherently contested nature of the documentary image, thereby undercutting the possibility of arriving at an authoritative reading of the scenes under observation. But the documentarist-subject relationship is not the only focus of *Steveston's* self-reflexivity. Like Livesay before her, Marlatt adds yet another *mis en abîme* to her documentary by dramatizing the impossibility of arriving at a comprehensive reading of the historical moment under consideration. Indeed, echoing Foucault's call for a mode of representation that recognizes the contingent and haphazard forces operating in history and resists the compulsion to create a sense of "completed development" (156), Marlatt creates a disjointed temporality that refuses to integrate Steveston's troubled history into a teleological master narrative.

One of the principal concerns of Marlatt's oeuvre as a whole is the retrieval of those experiences of history that have been glossed over or altogether omitted by the nation's master

narratives. Speaking specifically about her concern over the obliteration of women's histories, Marlatt has stated that:

women's daily experiences of history have hardly been taken note of [...] Much of women's work, a lot of it caretaking, never enters the records, is a-historic as such. So I've wanted to look at historical events through the filter of women's daily lives, foregrounding the textures of those lives. Women's experiences of war – rape, famine, destruction of their families and homes – are often callously viewed as just "collateral damage" in the grand heroic narrative of war. (Kossew 53-54)

Marlatt's interest in the "a-historic" has also extended to the lives of Vancouver's First Nations, its Japanese-Canadians, and other groups whose experiences have been either lost or recorded merely as "collateral damage" in the "stor[ies] the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world" (*Ana Historic* 28). Central to her exploration of their obliterated histories has been her interrogation of the perceived authenticity/authority of the Island's archives and other "official" historical documents: "official history, written history, interests me because it passes itself off as objective, documentary, as "the facts," when it usually represents the view of an elite or of one privileged historian," she has stated (Kossew 55).

In *Steveston*, Marlatt draws our attention to the pitfalls of traditional historiography by debunking the temporal conventions associated with the Griersonian tradition. This impulse is clearly on display in the photographic sequence that precedes the text proper. The sequence unfolds in a teleological fashion, opening with a series of images documenting the lives of Steveston's older generation, followed by photographs of its current working generation and, finally, by photographs of its younger generation. By structuring the sequence in this fashion, Marlatt plays on our expectations of the documentary format, inviting us to regard *Steveston* as a

comprehensive archival account of the town's past, present and future. The final image of the sequence, an expansive view of a ploughed field, suggests that the community's ongoing development hinges on a proper stewardship of the land – in other words, like *Of Japanese Descent*, *Peoples of Canada* and *Call My People Home*, the photographic sequence invites us to read work as a corollary not only of national participation and belonging, but also of continuing progress.

These expectations are immediately undercut, however, by the first poem of the sequence, titled “Imagine: a town.” Here, the speaker disrupts the teleology constructed in the opening photographic sequence by highlighting the contingency that lurks beneath Steveston's picturesque exterior:

... chance lurks

fishlike, shadows the underside of pilings, calling up his hall

the bodies of men & fish corpse piled on top of each other (residue

time is, the delta) rot, an endless waste [left by] the trucks of production (43)

Livesay's use of the delta as a figure for the workings of time is crucial here, for it suggests that Steveston's history is comprised of layers and layers of isolated events which, though buried in the “refuse bottom” of the Fraser (“A by-channel” 75), can resurface at any time to haunt the present moment. Indeed, just as the delta's layers are continuously being disturbed and re-arranged by the river current, so too are the layers of the town's troubled history being continuously unsettled by the influence of troubling historical events that refuse emplotment in a neat narrative of progress. By establishing this conceptualization of time from the outset of the text proper, Marlatt prepares us for a disjointed temporal experience that not only undercuts the Griersonian compulsion to construct a teleological national temporality, but also lays bare the

“collateral damage” (to use Marlatt’s own phrase) left by the machinery of nation-building.

Although this impulse permeates the sequence as a whole, it becomes most visible in the poems documenting Steveston’s industrial history and its Japanese-Canadian heritage.

As I have suggested in my readings of *Of Japanese Descent*, *Peoples of Canada*, and *Call My People Home*, the Griersonian temporality of progress hinges on a construction of work as a corollary of national participation. While Livesay’s *Call My People Home* attaches this nation-building value to farm work alone, *Of Japanese Descent* and *Peoples of Canada* attach it both to farming *and* industrial labour. Indeed, in these NFB documentaries, industrial labour takes on special value in the wartime and post-war contexts with the increasing industrialization of the Canadian economy. In *Steveston*, Marlatt challenges this construction by laying bare the human casualties that have been left behind by the machinery of industrial progress. As mentioned in an earlier part of my discussion, one of the sequence’s overriding concerns is the way in which Steveston’s cannery labourers have become disposable commodities to the corporate establishment that governs the town. Marlatt not only thematizes this concern through recurrent images that equate the dismembering and packaging of fish with the dismemberment and packaging of workers’ bodies; she also stages several episodes in which the “collateral damage” left behind by the town’s fish canneries and mills returns to haunt the coastal landscape. This de-stabilizing impulse is readily on display in the final poem of the sequence, “Steveston, B.C.” In this poem, Marlatt’s speaker once again likens the passage of time to the slow accretion of industrial sediments on the riverbank. In the final passage of the poem, however, she emphasizes that the “monument pilings” created by this process of sedimentation have no fixity, for they are perpetually being shuffled back and forth by the river current (89). But most importantly, she tells us that, in its movement to and from the delta, the current is continuously

carrying once-buried industrial and organic remains back to the river shore. Ultimately, this continuous return of the “perilous bodies” (89) repressed by the fish canning and saw mill industries stands as a testament to the unassimilable nature of the abuses committed by a corporate establishment that regards Steveston’s workers and natural resources as objects of consumption that can be readily discarded in the “refuse bottom” (“A by-channel” 75). Their uncanny presence stands as a testament to the fact that Steveston’s history is shot through with violence and contingency, and consequently resists integration into a continuum of progress.

Another unassimilable historical force at work in *Steveston* is the memory of the Japanese-Canadian internment. Challenging the progressive temporalities constructed in the NFB’s *Of Japanese Descent* and Livesay’s *Call My People Home*, Marlatt refuses to infuse this problematic national episode with any sense of completed development, highlighting, instead, its continuing impact on the lives of Steveston’s Japanese-Canadian inhabitants. In “Ghost,” for instance, her speaker addresses a fisherman who lives haunted by memory of the internment:

...the ghosts of landlocked camps are

All behind you. Only the blip of depth sounder & fish finder,

Harmonic of bells warning a taut line, & the endless hand over hand

flip of the fish into silver pen – successive, infinite –

What do the charts say? Return, return. Return of what doesn’t

Die. Violence in mute form. Walking a fine line. (84)

Like the industrial waste and bloated fish corpses that continually wash out onto Steveston’s shores, the ghosts of the internment refuse to stay buried for any length of time. They keep infiltrating speaker’s narrative, not only bearing witness to the injustices suffered by Japanese-Canadians in the past, but also warning her that the unsettling influence of these events, which

“nobody likes to talk about [...] anymore,” is still alive and well (83). Prompted, perhaps, by her encounter with such ghosts, in “Steveston, B.C.” the speaker acknowledges that the internment cannot be integrated into a teleological “story [...] of belonging” (88). Indeed, she realizes that, although many of the town’s Japanese-Canadians have been able to “buy back their old homes, / at inflated prices” and seem firmly “located” in the town, theirs is still a “continuing” narrative – one marked by the feeling of being “lost, over & over” (88). In this sense, Marlatt’s speaker ultimately refuses to provide us with a cathartic sense of completed development, emphasizing, instead, the unresolved nature of this contentious historical episode. This historical indeterminacy, coupled with Marlatt’s insertion of multiple self-images exposing documentary production as an inherently contested process, ultimately works to foreground – with Foucault – the necessity of making “visible all those discontinuities that cross” the terrain of national representation (161).

The 1960s and 70s saw a radical transformation of the documentary genre with the publication of Livesay’s “Zambia” and Marlatt’s *Steveston*. Arguably inspired by the aesthetic and narrative innovations ushered in by the direct cinema and cinema verité movements, these documentaries abandoned the Griersonian claim to archival authenticity in favour of an increasingly self-reflexive documentary aesthetic, one that acknowledged the subjectivity of the documentary “I” and offered audiences a glimpse into the ethical and representational problems inherent in the process of documentary production. In their search to develop an aesthetic that was sensitive to the politics of documentary representation, these poets also drew on changing notions of historiography to highlight the ethical problems underlying the Griersonian tendency to construct the nation’s history as a continuum of progress. By way of conclusion, we might

consider the sociopolitical implications of this increasing movement towards self-reflexivity and historical indeterminacy.

Writing in reference to *Medium Cool* (1969), an influential documentary on the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Renov has argued that the ultimate aim of the cinema verité film was to represent “itself for the active criticism of the spectator, discourag[ing] the closure of a final meaning [...] in favour of an interactive social meaning constructed in reflection” (32). The self-reflexive strategies I have traced in “Zambia” and *Steveston* seem to have a similar aim. By acknowledging their own subjectivity, laying bare the politics of representation inherent in the act of documentary production, and refusing to give a prescriptive reading of contentious historical events, both of these documentaries – but Marlatt’s *Steveston* especially – implicate readers in the creation of meaning, inviting them to fill in the admitted narrative and representational gaps that have been left by their respective speakers. In this sense, these sequences not only undermine the status of documentary as an authoritative/didactic form, but also begin to position it as a platform for the active interrogation of the process of nation-narration. In so doing, they take an important step towards transcending the “interrupted address” that characterized the Griersonian tradition out of which they were born.

## Conclusion

Brian Winston has memorably stated that “the burden Grierson laid on the documentary was to pretend that his films were reports on the news pages, as it were, when in fact they were editorials for the established order” (255). This thesis has examined the impact this burden exerted on the documentary tradition that Dorothy Livesay inaugurated in the late 1930s with her radioplays written for the CBC.<sup>xxiii</sup> In so doing, it has attempted to close a critical gap in previous discussions of Livesay’s documentary poetry, most of which have failed to consider Livesay’s work within the context of its Griersonian heritage.

My purpose in tracing the many interconnections between the Griersonian tradition and the Canadian documentary poem as Livesay defined it has been fourfold. Firstly, I have attempted to situate Livesay’s documentary within its cultural and historical context by highlighting the many points of continuity that exist between the seminal film policy developments that Grierson introduced in the late 1930s with the view of creating a national film program that “interpre[ted] Canada to Canadians” and Livesay’s well-known – but seldom interrogated – conceptualization of the documentary poem as a genre “particularly suited” to the representation of Canada’s “vast and varied” cultural landscape (*National Film Act* s.9b; “Canadian Documentary” 127). Secondly, I have sought to chart the conventions that Livesay and subsequent practitioners of the documentary poem inherited from the Griersonian tradition, paying close attention not only to the ideological maneuvers the Griersonian documentary deploys in order to establish its claim to authenticity, but also to the narrative and visual conventions it deploys in order to construct a stable national imaginary out of a national landscape fractured by great “geographical and psychological distances” (“Idea” 248). Here, I have focused on three key aspects of the Griersonian documentary: its reliance on ethnographic

looking relations that promote an erasure of the racialized Other from the Canadian imaginary, its tendency to gloss over contentious historical moments in the interest of creating a teleology of national progress, and its attempted interpellation of audiences to perform the coming together of the nation through the act of spectatorship. Thirdly, in the interest of understanding the ideological implications of the Griersonian documentary's migration to the literary sphere, I have explored the extent to which Livesay's own documentary aesthetic was penetrated by the representational gaps and disturbances inherent in Grierson's original format: more specifically, I have looked at the way in which Livesay's documentaries negotiate the ethnographic looking relations and problematic temporal conventions promoted by Grierson's original format. Finally, in the concluding stages of my analysis, I have attempted to chart the re-appraisals and subversions that the Griersonian documentary – and its literary counterpart in Livesay's early documentary oeuvre – is subjected to in Livesay's own "Zambia" and Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*. As I have argued in my concluding chapter, these postmodern works mark a pivotal moment in the history of the Canadian documentary poem: its movement away from the Griersonian claim to archival authenticity and towards a self-reflexive praxis that openly invites us to question the politics of representation that inhere through the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the documentary genre.

What I have attempted to show through my analysis is that, despite its totalizing impulses – or, perhaps, precisely because of them – the Griersonian documentary is an internally (and inherently) contested narrative space, one that has given rise to a plethora of literary appraisals and re-appraisals of the poet/documentarist's role vis à vis the nation-space under observation in his or her work. In so doing, it has also triggered a multitude of competing re-imaginings of the relationship between Self and Other, of national belonging, and of national history. By way of

conclusion, we might consider how this ongoing process of cultural contestation has influenced the work of two contemporary documentary poets: Dionne Brand and George Elliott Clarke.

Dionne Brand has long been interested in the intersection between documentary and historiographical discourses and the construction of personal and national identity. Like Marlatt before her, Brand has been concerned specifically with the elisions made by traditional documentaries that posture as archival records of their era. In her historiographical study of black Canadian women entitled *No Burden to Carry*, for instance, Brand questions the objectivity of “historical fact” and exposes the elisions made by official constructions of Canadian history and identity, calling for an “excavation of Black women’s history in Canada” (13). The need to unearth these obliterated narratives and identities remains a central concern throughout much of Brand’s work, from her historiographical and critical writings to her fiction and poetry. In her poetry, Brand often renders this struggle in terms that appropriate and subvert the looking relations of ethnographic cinema. Echoing Gittings’ notion that “who is ethnographized depends on who is doing the looking,” she debunks the myth of ethnographic objectivity by reminding us that “no language [including that of the documentary] is neutral” and challenging us to view the Canadian landscape through the eyes of the raced Other (*Canadian National Cinema 33; No Language is Neutral*). To this end, she centers her narratives around black female subjects who not only refuse to be ethnographized by the Anglo Canadian gaze, but also claim a place as ‘historifiable’ subjects capable of telling their own stories in their own language. But perhaps the greatest testament to Brand’s project of “returning the gaze” is her own incursion into documentary filmmaking with the NFB Studio D series *Women at the Well*, a collection of three films mapping the black lesbian experience in Canada. Future research on the construction of Canadian identity in the documentary poem would greatly benefit from a consideration of these

films in conjunction with Brand's documentary poems *No Language is Neutral* and *Land to Light On*.

Future studies might also consider the subversion of documentary conventions in the work of George Elliott Clarke. In his study of African Canadian literature titled *Odysseys Home*, Clarke echoes Brand's preoccupation with the erasure of the African Canadian tradition, suggesting that "students of African Canadian literature must [...] counter amnesia" and "[excavate] the past" if they want to understand the African Canadian present (7). Although, like Brand, Clarke is interested in opening up a space where official versions of the Canadian collective can be contested, he magnifies the possibilities offered through this exercise by treating the documentary poem as a site for a hybridized mode of identity production which he terms "poly-consciousness" (*Odysseys* 280). Indeed, recognizing "African Canada is [...] a fragmented collective [...] fissured by religious, ethnic, class, and length-of-residency differences" which resist unified, linear modes of storytelling (*Odysseys* 280), Clarke moves away from Brand's historiographical emphasis and towards myth-making as a more suitable vehicle for exploring the fluidity of national identity. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Whylah Falls*, where Clarke consciously sets out to "improvise a myth" that speaks to the "different landscapes of the mind" comprising the African Canadian identity (xi, xvii). To this end, he affords us snapshots of multiple subjectivities and then weaves these individual portraits into a panoramic view of a hybridized 'Africadian' landscape. This technique not only brings the imaginative aspects of nation-building into high relief, but also gives rise to an aesthetic that explodes the very concept of 'nation,' replacing it, instead, with a de-centralized miscellany of identities that refuse stable categorization. In this sense, *Whylah Falls* stands as a testament to

the documentary poem's ongoing questioning of the ideological and aesthetic practices prescribed by the Griersonian tradition.

This project has looked at the Griersonian documentary as a discursive formation that has persistently influenced the way in which documentary poets think about and articulate questions of national identity. Like the indeterminate national histories charted in Livesay's "Zambia" and Marlatt's *Steveston*, this history of documentary appraisals and re-appraisals is an ongoing narrative. As a brief overview of the documentary poetry of Dionne Brand and George Elliott Clarke has suggested, much like their counterparts in the field of documentary filmmaking, Canada's documentary poets continue to grapple with the questions of "objectivity, ethics, and ideology" (Renov xxiv) posed by the Griersonian tradition. Their sustained interrogation of this influential cultural form demands an equally sustained critical engagement on our part.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> For more on the recommendations contained in this landmark report, see Gittings (79) and Hardy (25).

<sup>ii</sup> Liberal government officials commented that Grierson's report "resembled other reports about as much as a machine-gun resembled a plastic pistol" (quoted in Hardy 25).

<sup>iii</sup> By "narratives," Livesay is referring specifically to long narrative poetry.

<sup>iv</sup> See Tiesen's article "Dorothy Livesay, the 'Housewife,' and the Radio in 1951: Modernist Embodiments of Audience."

<sup>v</sup> During this period, it was common for theatres to screen informative shorts (known also as newsreels or actualités) about current world affairs before presenting the main Hollywood feature.

<sup>vi</sup> See, for example, Elder 93 and Winston 11.

<sup>vii</sup> It should be stressed here that Grierson used the term "film" in reference to the documentary only. To describe Hollywood features, he used the less dignified term "movies."

<sup>viii</sup> National Film Act, section 9b.

<sup>ix</sup> Grierson himself directed only one film in his entire career (*Drifters* [1929]). However, during his tenure as government film commissioner, he maintained tight control over all of the filmmaking activities of the NFB, thus ensuring that his theoretical principles would find practical application in all of the agency's productions. Moreover, Grierson not only worked very closely with all of the filmmakers under his command (Norman McLaren and Stuart Legg among them), but he also instilled his documentary vision in the dozens of young Canadian filmmakers whom he mentored during his stay in the country (Wise 92). For these reasons, most film scholars apply the term "Griersonian documentary" broadly, using it to describe both the films that were produced by the NFB under Grierson's direct guidance and those that were produced well beyond his tenure as government film commissioner, but remained faithful to his original documentary vision. I will be applying the term in the same manner throughout this chapter.

<sup>x</sup> According to Mackey, Canadian mythmakers have traditionally differentiated Canada from its Southern neighbour by "portray[ing] the colonizers of Canada as more generous than those of the USA" and by arguing that "Canada [has] allowed the retention of local traditions and heterogeneity, unlike the homogeneous USA" (25, 32, emphasis added).

<sup>xi</sup> Japanese-American evacuees were exiled to desert locations "encircled by barbed wire and military police in watchtowers" (Adachi 251).

<sup>xii</sup> Music figured quite prominently in the aesthetic theory of Pound and his followers. As Brad Bucknell explains, Pound saw it as a crucial element not only in the "modernization of poetry and the arts in general," but also in the imagiste search for a deeper "congruence of word and emotion" (Bucknell 53, 54).

<sup>xiii</sup> In a 1936 CBC radio talk entitled "Decadence in Modern Bourgeois Poetry," Livesay draws on examples from the work of two representative modernist poets – T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell – to advance the argument that "all modern poetry has [the] same tendency, which arises from the theory of art for art's sake: namely, to appeal to a very small group of people who happen to have the same prolonged education and the same refinement in the senses" (63). The piece closes with the pronouncement that "bourgeois art is dead, [and] a new art, the art of the proletariat, is being born" (67).

<sup>xiv</sup> Agitprop theatre was developed in post-revolutionary Russia "as a means of communicating news to a largely illiterate population" (qtd. in Lister 54). Erwin Piscator, a prominent figure in

Germany's political theatre circles, popularized the genre in Western Europe around the late 1920s. The genre subsequently took root in North America thanks to the work of the New Theatre League in New York. The Progressive Arts Club was the first organization to bring agitprop theatre to Canadian stages.

<sup>xv</sup> In *Right Hand Left Hand*, Livesay cites this perceived lack of civic interest on the part of the general public as her principal reason for staying committed to the communist party despite its "false actions and fractional tactics," suggesting that she "let [her]self be duped because no one else except the communists seemed to be concerned about the plight of [the working class], nor to be aware of Hitler and war" (74).

<sup>xvi</sup> Although *Call My People Home* was published as a poem in 1950, it was originally written in 1947 as a radioplay for the CBC. Hence Livesay's designation of the work as a "play." Given this duality, I use the terms "poem" and "radioplay" interchangeably when referring to the work.

<sup>xvii</sup> I am drawing here on Pierre Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence as a social process that enforces structures of domination without the use of direct physical force. This 'indirect' violence can take on multiple forms, ranging from social rituals, to institutional discourses, to rules governing the constitution and organization of public space. According to Bourdieu, these multiple social processes work to naturalize state violence so that it is interpreted by society at large as a phenomenon that is not only legitimate and justifiable, but, in many cases, also *devoid* of violence altogether: in this sense, symbolic violence is "a power which presupposes recognition, that is, *misrecognition* of the violence that is exercised through it" (*Language and Symbolic Power* 209). In the case of the Japanese-Canadian internment, for instance, the phenomenon of symbolic violence facilitated the 'misrecognition' of the forced displacement and incarceration suffered by Japanese-Canadians as a non-violent and – as seen in the National Film Board's *Of Japanese Descent* – even benevolent "relocation."

<sup>xviii</sup> At one point, the fisherman even describes the *Tee Kay* in terms that evoke a female womb, characterizing it as "the snug and round one, warm as a woman" (181).

<sup>xix</sup> As one Nikkei writer relates, "labouring in the sugar beet fields was long, oppressive, and exhausting. Every worker, young or old, man or woman, was out in the open all day, whether hot, windy or cold. During the irrigation cycle, they could be called out at night. [...] stoop labour was extremely back-breaking and gruelling" (Takata 137).

<sup>xx</sup> I have chosen to base my textual analysis on "Zambia" and not on *The Colour of God's Face* because, by Livesay's own admission, the latter was published while still in an incomplete state. As she stated in a 1978 interview, even after publishing the sequence in 1965, she "could never see, never had anyone to help [her] see how [its individual poems] should be arranged together. So it was just a constant trying to find out what was the best organization for it" (Beardsley & Sullivan 95). In "Zambia," Livesay changed the original order of the sequence, inverting the placement of the final two poems – "The Prophetess" and "The Leader" – in what Sparrow has read as a "political" gesture aimed at giving the "final word" to Alice Lenchina, whose Lumpa church was suppressed by Kenneth Kaunda's UNIP party in the aftermath of the independence (22). In another telling gesture, Livesay replaced the first poem of *The Colour of God's Face*, an omniscient description of the Zambian landscape titled "Land," with "Initiation" – also a description of the Zambian landscape, but narrated in the first person. This replacement is crucial for the purposes of my discussion, because, by inserting a first-person narrator into the text, it encourages a reading of "Zambia" as a post-Griersonian work imbued with documentary self-reflexivity.

<sup>xxi</sup> I am using the term “articulate” here in the same way that cultural critic Stuart Hall uses it, to denote the jointing together of “different [cultural] elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings” (89). Hall uses this concept of “articulation” to describe the way in which ideological struggles operate, claiming that “one of the ways in which [...] ideologies are transformed is by articulating [their] elements differently, [...] breaking the chain in which they are currently fixed” (90). It is my contention that Livesay’s “Zambia” and Marlatt’s *Steveston* are both engaged in a similar struggle, attempting to break the chain in which the documentary form is fixed by articulating its elements to changing narrative practices.

<sup>xxii</sup> The autobiographical dimensions of “Zambia” have already been explored by several critics, William H. New, Fiona Sparrow, and Antje Rauwerda among them (See New, “Commonwealth Responses” 17; Sparrow 18; Rauwerda 119). Livesay herself encourages an autobiographical reading of this poem in the foreword to her 1972 compilation *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons*, where she states that the poems contained in the volume (among which “Zambia” can be found) can be understood to comprise “a psychic if not a literal autobiography” (v).

<sup>xxiii</sup> I am aware that, as Livesay herself notes in “The Canadian Documentary: An Overview,” the lineage of the Canadian documentary poem can be traced as far back as the Victorian period with the poetry of Isabella Vallancy Crawford and Archibald Lampman. However, Livesay was the first Canadian poet to explicitly define herself as a documentarist, and it was largely thanks to her critical writings on the subject that the Canadian documentary was consolidated as a genre.

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