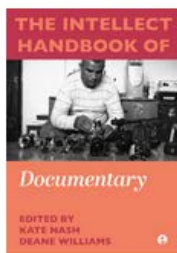


Chapter 14

Recycling Indigenous Images: Archiveology and the National Film Board of Canada

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The Intellect Handbook of Documentary



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In 2015, the organizers of the Pan-American Games in Toronto included an Aboriginal Pavilion as part of the cultural sideshow that accompanied the international sporting event. Among the artworks commissioned for the Pavilion were four short documentary films by Indigenous filmmakers. Produced by the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada, the filmmakers were invited to repurpose and remix sounds and images from the NFB archives. The final films were screened for nineteen days during the summer of 2015 in Toronto and were subsequently shown at film festivals around the world as a group, and as separate works. In autumn 2018, they were installed at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. All four films are currently accessible through the NFB streaming portal.¹ The filmmakers' mandate was to reframe the archive and challenge stereotypes (Chartrand 2015: n. pag.) although the project was called *Souvenir*, meaning memory, raising a number of critical issues regarding the decolonization of visual archives and the potential for Indigenous filmmakers to reframe documentary history.

The Souvenir Project, as it became known, can be described as a set of documentary films, compilation films, remix films, experimental films or essay films. They are films made out of other films, or fragments of documentary films from the settler-colonial

archive, and the filmmakers were tasked with turning that culture back on itself and reworking that cultural history from their own perception and vision. Because the project is one of archival engagement, I would describe it as an exercise in archiveology. In my book *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Russell 2018), I discuss the proliferation of archive-based film practices in light of Walter Benjamin's cultural theory in order to foreground the research function of found footage filmmaking and consider archive-based film practices as contributions to historical knowledge. In describing the potential of appropriation filmmaking as an engaged practice, I wrote that

In archival film practices, the image bank in its fundamental contingency and instability becomes a means by which history can speak back to the present ... archival excess enables us to look beyond the evidence of the failure of the past to a future in which memory is thoroughly saturated with technologies of reproduction and is thus perceptible as public construction materials. (Russell 2018: 50)

The Souvenir Project seems in many ways to exemplify the potential of archiveology to speak back to the archive, and indeed each of the four films is remarkably well executed. Each one takes a slightly different approach to colonial, settler history and the imagery of Indigenous peoples; and the project as a whole is greatly enhanced by the collaboration of contemporary Indigenous musicians. Three of the films use tracks from Inuit artist Tanya Tagaq, a high-profile throat-singer electronica musician, and the fourth, *Sisters and Brothers* (Monkman 2015), uses a track made by A Tribe Called Red, another well-known activist electronica band. While the project is in many ways a successful one, it nevertheless poses a plethora of questions. Because *The Souvenir Project* is clearly a production of the NFB, made as an attempt to redress the colonial history of the institution, we need to inquire what is at stake in remix culture from the perspective of cultural heritage and public memory.

In June 2015, only a month before the Panam Games began, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its findings regarding the legacy of the residential school system that operated from 1876 until the 1990s, a racist system that separated Indigenous children from their families. The commission launched 94 calls to action regarding reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous peoples. The NFB, along with the Games organizers, clearly anticipated this report, which has had an impact on many Canadian institutions since its publication, although tangible results for Indigenous communities remain fairly imperceptible. This chapter is an exploration of the extent to which a government institution such as the NFB can utilize archiveology, or remix film practices, to interrogate its own colonial mandate. To what extent can the images collected and captured by a settler nation be repurposed by Indigenous artists, and what are the off-screen effects for creative labour on the one hand, and for the notion of national heritage on the other?

The aesthetics and ethics of remix culture are multifaceted and overlap with those of appropriation, although the practice can also be described as borrowing (Cocker 2009) or translation (Apter 2008). In the words of a 2016 headline in *Canadian Art Magazine*, 'Appropriation is a Dirty Word' (Couchi et al. 2018: n. pag.). Several controversies have arisen in Canada regarding white settler artists appropriating elements of Indigenous cultures in literature, art and film. Appropriation, according to many outspoken Indigenous activists, is not okay. And yet *Canadian Art* also ran a promotional piece on the *Souvenir* remix films, noting that they were screened in Calgary as an antidote to a concurrent exhibition on Edward Curtis' photographs of native peoples. Appropriation clearly means different things in different media, and in different contexts. In the case of these NFB-produced remix films, appropriation as a mode of borrowing is designed as a strategy of reconciliation within the framework of cultural heritage, but then that strategy can easily become reified as a sign and a badge of that reconciliation.

Embedded within these questions about appropriation and institutional recapitulation are a set of further questions regarding heritage, visual sovereignty and film archives. The term visual sovereignty was coined by Michelle H. Raheja to refer to Indigenous practices of film-viewing and filmmaking that privilege the perspective of Indigenous people. Her examples of laughing with Nanook, and against Flaherty, and her analysis of the landscape temporalities of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk 2001) are important viewing strategies for Indigenous viewers. Her definition of visual sovereignty is 'a way of reimagining Native-centered articulations of self-representation and autonomy that engage the powerful ideologies of mass media' (Raheja 2007: 1163). It is a strategy of double-reading, seeing both the Indigenous practices and subjects, alongside their historical subjugation. Sovereignty may be an important concept in Native American studies, but it does not translate well to digital media culture where images, by definition, travel between users and platforms, makers and viewers, readers, historians, archivists, writers and audiences. The implications of ownership, authority and nationhood seem incompatible with the fluidity of moving images, and thus the term visual sovereignty strikes is more theoretical and ideological than formal. It refers to the relations between viewers and images, rather than to relations between images themselves, or textual properties alone. As Michelle Stewart (2007: 25) has noted, there are 'multiple, contradictory understandings of what representation and sovereignty mean in the digital age'.

Nevertheless, let's say that a project such as *Souvenir* is an exemplary instance of visual sovereignty insofar as Indigenous artists are able to 'speak back' to colonial histories of visual documentation. I would argue that the experimental practice is a means of borrowing images for a new language of cultural resistance and historical imagination, and each of the films unambiguously carries out a revisionist experiment. Sarah Smith and Carla Taunton discuss *Mobilize* (Monnet 2015) in the context of a paper entitled 'Unsettling Canadian Heritage', posing questions of Indigenous heritage within the national narrative. They argue that 'Indigenous heritage is distinct

from a Canadian heritage and is connected to living archives of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, stories, and memories, as well as objects' (Smith and Taunton 2018: 316). The audiovisual record of this heritage is, however, limited. With few exceptions before the twenty-first century, any moving images of Indigenous peoples were produced by settler-colonialist filmmakers. It was not until the late 1960s that First Nations people had access to filmmaking equipment, at which point it primarily came to serve critical, activist, ends. *You are on Indian Land* (Mitchell 1969) made by an 'Indian Film Crew' at the NFB was an influential documentary about Mohawk protests over threatened treaty rights, although before that, Willie Dunn made what might have been the first Indigenous film at the Board, *The Ballad of Crowfoot* (1968), using entirely archival materials, to which we will return below.

Four short films: *Sisters and Brothers*, *Bleed Down*, *She Dances for People* and *Mobilize*

The Souvenir Project is a quartet of short films of 3–5 minutes each, distinguished by quite different aesthetics of montage and mixing. The filmmakers are all emerging or established artists in their own right, and they excavate the NFB archive in different ways, with quite different results. Kent Monkman (Cree) is one of the most well-known Indigenous artists on Turtle Island, a painter and performance artist, as well as video artist. His work is an ongoing practice of recontextualization and appropriation, using ironic strategies to 'talk back to', appropriate and re-use the archive of Euro-American painting. Monkman pillages the histories of European and North American painting and museum practices, whether by re-imagining scenes of violence in paintings such as *The Scream* (2017) which cites Edward Munch as well as Bruegel, or remaking Remington landscapes of mountains and valleys populated by coupling Indian men. *Sisters and Brothers* is very much in line with this work. Monkman is not subtle in his techniques, and his appropriation aesthetic is less one of borrowing, than of translation from one visual language to another.

In *Sisters and Brothers*, his contribution to *The Souvenir Project*, Monkman's strategy is grounded in both the form – the pictorial and frame compositions – and the content of the NFB archive. The three minute-and forty-second film opens with a quote from Native American activist Leonard Peltier, and closes with the words of Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Monkman uses graphic matches and parallel editing to compare the children in residential schools to herds of bison being corralled, for what Jaimie Baron describes as a 'visual metaphor equating the mass slaughter of the bison with the practices of the residential school system that sought to annihilate native culture' (Baron 2021: 4–5). While this describes the effects of corrals, cowboys and the frame-masking that mimics the binoculars of the cowboys, it is also true that the powerful herd of bison, accented by the pounding soundtrack of 'The Road' performed by A Tribe Called Red, carries over to the boys running towards the camera in a disarrayed charge towards the camera. The effect is one of resiliency and wildness within the metaphor of annihilation, and the sense of

transcendence is in turn evoked by a landscape through which a river flows. The detail of the shots of animals and children creates new insights into both scenes of incarceration and behavioural modification. The regimes of power incorporated by men on horseback overseeing the buffalo hunt and the stern-looking teachers and priests at the schools are challenged by the sheer energy of the movement of children and animals.

Another key passage in *Sisters and Brothers* features children inside a residential school. The girls have identical hairstyles and glasses; the boys wear uniform haircuts and clothing. A series of shots of girls sewing, sweeping, serving and going to bed is repeated in scrambled order, reversing at the scene of bedtime. The cutting is a rapid-fire disassembly of routine, an interruption into the order of life. Monkman has taken from the archive a language of the institution and *détourned* its sterilizing effect into a chaotic sequence. The short film is punctuated by a shot of a girl looking back at the camera with a slightly sideways glance, her frown directed at the camera and the spectator in turn. At first, this image is paired with a bison's eye, and it carries the weight of the film's critique. Baron not only notes that Monkman's reuse of the girls' image is an 'act of Indigenous reclamation', but also notes that her own 'misuse' of the image in her book 'demands an ethical accounting' (Baron 2021: 5–6). We could say the same of the NFB's use of this image to promote *The Souvenir Project*. This unknown girl was a real person and did not give her permission to be used as the poster-child for the NFB's efforts at decolonizing itself.

As Baron's distinction between the ethics of Monkman re-using Indigenous images and her own, the identity of the author or artist who appropriates others' images is critical. Michelle Latimer (Algonquin/Métis/French), who made one of the *Souvenir* films, *Nimmikage* (aka *She Dances for People*, Latimer 2015) has been herself accused by Indigenous critics of falsifying her credentials as an Indigenous artist. Because she has part Métis heritage, she 'finds herself in a difficult situation in terms of politics and treaty negotiations', as one expert put it (Sebastien Malette, quoted in Hertz 2001: n.pag.). At stake for the Indigenous community are the funding and award opportunities that helped Latimer become an award-winning filmmaker. Nevertheless, her contribution to *The Souvenirs Project* demonstrates her commitment to Indigenous culture through her critical engagement with the archive. Her documentary *Inconvenient Indian*, based on the work of Thomas King, won her a Directors Guild of Canada Award for Excellence in Documentary, but was pulled from circulation for eighteen months following the accusations against her, despite the fact that it is a creative and hard-hitting account of settler colonialism and the modes of creative resistance that have been fostered in the twenty-first century.

For *Nimmikage*, a three-and-a-half-minute film, Latimer uses black-and-white landscape footage characterized by moving clouds and water, shots of fish and birds moving in swarms and flocks, shots of caribou, including aerial photography and telephoto images that get deep into a herd of moving antlered animals. These images of nature are cut with shots of Indigenous women dancing in a variety of contexts,

including performances for white audiences of uniformed gentry and theatrical settings – although the latter is suggested through montage. Several shots of a huge white audience at Massey Hall watching an unspecified event are cut into the collage, provocatively evoking a society of spectacle in which Indigenous women are inscribed within the production of an attraction for settler audiences. The dancers, like the animals, are spectacles to be consumed; and yet the Tanya Tagaq soundtrack featuring a soaring voice over a constant, rhythmic thrum of throat singing (a traditional Inuit musical technique performed mainly by women) situates the compilation in a transcendent space. The three-and-a-half-minute film ends with a series of women drumming and dancing in trance-like ways that are less performative than spiritual. A recurring image of an Inuit woman dancing in a Northern landscape anchors the film, repeating a dance that is linked to the movement of water and sky by the continuous rhythmic soundtrack. While most of the women in the film seem like they are being served up to the viewer, the dancing Inuit woman seems to be dancing for herself, isolated against the beautiful, barren land around her. A series of portraits of young girls completes the film with an opening onto the future for Indigenous women.

Jeff Barnaby's (Mi'kmaq) *Bleed Down* (aka *Estlinisiqu'niet*, Barnaby 2015), tells the story of Indigenous decimation in Canada, from the turn of the twentieth century, to the emergence of Indigenous activism in the 1960s, in five minutes. Drawing a parallel between resource extraction and the relocation of children to residential schools, *Bleed Down* is the darkest of the four *Souvenir* films. The desecration of the land by heavy industry is paralleled by shots of Indigenous people undergoing medical examinations. The sickness of settler colonialism has killed off both the land and its original inhabitants. In the final shot of the film, a message is posted in the form of a handmade billboard that was erected in Serpent River probably in the late 1960s. It is headlined as 'A Tribute to the Government of Canada,' and is a much longer text than one can properly read in the timing of the film but provocative enough to actually pause if possible, almost as if it is encouraging an interactive viewer. The message describes the legacy of a closed acid plant that operated between 1957 and 1963 and left a huge amount of toxic waste behind that has never been properly cleaned up. The message is an ironic token of gratitude, ending with a salute to the Queen.

Barnaby's imagery includes residential school footage and outtakes from *Circle of the Sun* (Low 1960), a documentary about the Blood Indians of South Western Alberta. The original film was made in colour, but by changing it to black-and-white, Barnaby uses the transformative power of cinema to transpose a 1960 incarnation of a traditional ceremony into something 'timeless'. The film opens with a title card from a 1918 film called *The Red Man in Canada*, preceded by blank frames evoking the technological imprint of early cinema. Below the title, the credits 'Conquest Pictures. Copyright 1918 by Thomas Edison, Inc.' appear. The NFB was not founded until 1939, but this clip was included in another film *Canada 1894 to 1907* (n.d.). Barnaby's short narrative is thus built out of images of images, at one or two removes from their original sources. The dance in *Circle of the Sun* is performed annually as a ritual to

keep the tradition alive, and the original film is framed by the voice-over of a young man who is more interested in rodeo. He is an observer, not a participant, who – in keeping with settler ideology – says that soon the rituals will be forgotten. Barnaby's extraction of images from the 1960 film is not couched as memories, or even history, but as a language of amnesia symbolic of loss and forgetting even if the culture is not in fact lost or forgotten. Paired with the sick landscape and the sickened people poked and prodded by white medical authorities, the 'old' images of rituals are products of settler culture, not Indigenous heritage.

Mobilize by Caroline Monnet (Anishinabe/French) features the fastest-paced montage of the four films and is the only one to use colour footage. Accompanied by another Tanya Tagaq throat-singing track, 'Uja', the editing is driven by a pulsing, bodily produced rhythm. The journey of the three-and-a-half-minute film takes us from woodland activities of wood-cutting and canoe-building, down a white-water river with an expert paddler, to scenes of children and communities in snow, and then down underwater among the fish. Suddenly, we emerge into city life with a streaking metro car and Indigenous men working high above the city building skyscrapers. An Indigenous woman in a short green dress and bobbed hair is featured in several longer shots moving through the city. She is a hostess from Expo 67 and becomes a symbol of Indigenous modernity, a future from the past.

Some of the strongest images in Monnet's film are outtakes from NFB films readily available on the NFB streaming platform: *Indian Memento* (Régnier 1967) which is about the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67 and features this particular hostess, who is uncredited in Régnier's film, but may be Janice Lawrence from the Syilx Nation in British Columbia, and *High Steel* (Don Owen 1965). Monnet has extracted the movements and gestures of the films' central figures in cities that do not embrace them but throw them into relief; even while the figures exude pride and integrity, they remain apart. In *Mobilize*, the filmmaker exercised sovereignty over the images in her remix by translating the images into a new language of history. In *The Souvenir Project*, the present reaches back to the people of the past in a gesture of recognition and shared memory, a memory that belongs to both the settler culture and those who were unsettled.

Mobilize is an especially powerful film and it seems exemplary of how visual archives can enable what Bethany Nowviskie (2019) has described as 'imaginative, generative, alternate futures'. It suggests how 'speculative futures' can be generated from 'obliterated or co-opted pasts'. All four of the *Souvenir* films are products of a neoliberal archive, cashing in on its repository of cultural memory through collaboration with those who have real stakes in remaking historical knowledge. Three of the filmmakers chose to take the path of critical cultural history, reclaiming colonial images of vulnerability, submission and coercion of Indigenous peoples, challenging the truth-value of the archival images. Using dialectical montage to link diverse images, Monkman, Barnaby and Latimer violently misuse the archival materials to create a language of colonial critique. They violate the role of the archive to provide evidentiary truths, precisely in order to create new knowledge and new truths about Indigenous history

and memory. *Mobilize*, on the other hand, extracts only those images that demonstrate the speed, skill, beauty and autonomy of Indigenous people in Canada in order to point the way out of a culture of systemic racism and subjugation.

Show time

The Souvenir Project can be said to have been created for what Ruth Phillips calls 'Show Time', when museums organize events to commemorate a major event in the life of a community (such as the Olympics, or the Pan-American Games). Such exhibits, through their scale and institutional support, can 'reveal complex and contradictory histories' (Phillips cited in Smith and Taunton 2018: 308). Indeed, the collaboration of the NFB with the city of Toronto on the international stage poses the question of whose heritage is it that is put on display through these remix projects. Indigenous artists are asked to remake the Heritage archive, but is the resulting product a challenge to Canadian Heritage, or does it become, by definition, absorbed back into it, as a corrective and therefore a correction to Canadian Heritage? The footage of the residential schools is particularly striking and was a very timely response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the parts of the Board and the filmmakers, as it was one of the first times this footage got out of the archive for public showing. The one NFB film that was released ostensibly about residential schools, called *Off to School* (1958), focusing primarily on the usual transportation methods that children use to get to remote schools, contains nothing as sterile and disciplinarian as what we see in *Sisters and Brothers* and *Bleed Down*.

According to Anita Lee, who produced the series for the NFB, the filmmakers were not given access to NFB films in the entire archive, but to outtakes that had been cleared for reuse and made accessible through the stock-shot library. The NFB does not own copyright for all the films they have produced, and the timeframe for producing the *Souvenir* series did not apparently allow for securing permission for sources not already pre-cleared. This library of footage-for-sale includes films in the NFB collection that were not actually produced by the Board, but which they have acquired for their 'library'. Despite being a government agency, the NFB is nevertheless obliged to maintain its own revenue streams which include production services as well as royalties.

The NFB provided me with shot lists, making it possible to reverse-engineer the compilations to some extent. A particular sequence of girls in a dormitory appears in both Jeff Barnaby's film and Kent Monkman's films for just a few seconds each time. It's a powerful image of concealment, with an inner tension between performance and discipline. Four or five girls under quilted bed covers look up at the camera together and then dive under their quilts as if to hide from its view and enter a dreamland. This is the fulcrum shot of Monkman's gesture of reversal. *Bleed Down* includes two shots of the girls diving under the covers from different angles. I find this quick sequence to be a kind of punctum for the entire series precisely because of its performativity. The two camera angles are even edited together in the original, suggesting a complex

camera set-up designed for a promotional type of film. The hours of rather spooky residential school footage that can be still found in the online stock-shot library is characterized by stern-faced teachers and priests, multiple camera setups and tracking shots, most of it in a sterile institutional setting. The footage of the girls under the quilts actually dates back to 1930 from a film called *The Arctic*, again before the NFB was even established.

Most of the residential school footage was shot at the Mackay Residential School in Dauphin Manitoba in 1969. The purpose was very likely to promote the purported 'success' of the schools to government bodies, although most of the footage in the stock-shot library does not appear to have been used in any complete NFB films before *The Souvenir Project* was commissioned. Sherry Farrell Racette has described the still photography taken in the schools as an important demonstration of institutional control:

Control over children became an important strategy in policy implementation. The subjugated bodies of children were to be raw clay in the project of transforming independent and resistant nations into a useful class of docile labourers and servants. (2009: 51)

Most striking about the residential school footage and still photography is the visual effect of the children's uniform appearances. Not only are they all dressed alike, but they are also assembled in orderly rows at mass and at school, silently looking ahead at teachers and priests. For Racette (2009: 61), 'The students in these images represent the collective body of First Nations children possessed by the state, and they have a subtext that proclaims that right of ownership and control.' However, Racette also notes that he 'staged poses, graphic impact, and dramatic intent have allowed [the images] to be reframed from their original purpose of promoting the project into the visual tools of exposure and denouncement' (Racette 2009: 52). This is precisely what happens in *Bleed Down* and *Sisters and Brothers*, when the footage is recontextualized within the visual sovereignty of Indigenous filmmakers. Moreover, tracing the footage to its archival home, the NFB stock-shot library reveals the extent to which the children were subject to visual surveillance on top of every other way they were dehumanized.

Some of the footage in *Sisters and Brothers* actually dates back to 1934, shot in 35 mm (as was the 'Arctic' footage) in Alberta, featuring boys from the Kainai (Blood) nation. These are the shots of the boys running out on the range like bison. Although it is 30 years earlier than the other footage, the children are also dressed uniformly, with short haircuts, suit jackets, white shirts and ties. By bringing these archival secrets out, the *Souvenir* filmmakers have brought viewers in the twenty-first century literally face-to-face with the children whose trauma in the residential school system has become of national concern decades after their time there. In the 1969 footage especially, close-ups of the children, existing even in the archival versions, need to be recognized as portraits of people who may or may not have survived a

school system that resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of broken families.

Indigenous time

The reframing of settler-colonial footage that takes place in *The Souvenir Project* has the effect of scrambling the linearity of European modernity, a teleology that necessitates the eradication, disappearance and vanishing of Indigenous peoples. Isabella Huberman (2020: 93) has discussed two of the films, *Bleed Down* and *Mobilize*, as countering the 'time machine' of European modernity with a 'multiplicity of times'. In these two films especially, 'time is an abundance', enabling past, present and future to enter into dialogue (Huberman 2020: 104). She cites Georges Sioui (Wendat) who says that 'for Indigenous societies, the past does not exist, nor the future; there is only a continuous present in which the order of life must be maintained' (cited in Huberman 2020: 94).

Mark Rifkin has written extensively on the concept of Indigenous time, noting that it is not hinged on a traditional/modernity break, and cannot be conceptualized as a 'shared time' with settler-colonialism. Indigenous duration, orientation and storytelling, for Rifkin, are distinguished by a 'continued process of creation' that finds a 'new design' for present and future possibilities that departs from any and all patterns of temporal pastness (Rifkin 2017: 51). The notion of the present as charged with possibility constitutes a break with the picture of history as 'an unfolding, universal line of development', or what Walter Benjamin called 'historicism'. Like Benjamin's historiography, Indigenous time is grounded in experience, or what Rifkin calls 'frames of reference', which are significant primarily in the shared experience of the collective.

Rifkin notes that the past is still present in Indigenous time insofar as 'the legacies of the missions [or residential schools] become part of Indigenous frames of reference, even as the attempted eradication of peoplehood through missionization fails' (Rifkin 2017: 26–27). Returning to the question of archival remix in light of Indigenous time, I am struck by Rifkin's citation of Deborah Miranda's discussion of Indigenous futurity in the California context: 'As long as you are attempting to *recreate*, you are doomed to fail! I am beginning to realize that when something is broken, more useful and beautiful results can come from using the pieces to reconstruct it' (Miranda, cited in Rifkin 2017: 31). The remaking or restructuring of history from fragments of the past is precisely the strategy of excavation and renovation associated with archaeology. For Benjamin ([1932] 1999: 576), 'language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium.' The film fragments that are collected in the NFB stock-shot library are precisely that: a medium that can be used as a language of memory. Even if it is no one person's memory, but that of an institution and even that of the State, it provides a starting point for reframing the past and using it as part of a new temporality that is loaded with the potential of the moment to change and be different. Benjamin describes his method

in *The Arcades Project* as one of 'carrying the principle of montage into history ... to grasp the construction of history as such' (Benjamin 1999: 61).

Although Huberman only considers two of the *Souvenir* films to be instances of Indigenous temporality, I would put the whole project, including *Sisters and Brothers* and *Nimmikage*, in that category. In different ways, each film enacts a form of Indigenous sovereignty over the archive, scrambling the colonialist logic of salvage. Huberman describes *Bleed Down* as a 'haunted' film in which ghosts of the past create a continuity between past, present and future (Huberman 2020: 10). She argues that *Mobilize* plays with temporality in the sheer pace of Monnet's montage, the great shifts in scale and in the tic-tak of a metronome in the Tagaq soundtrack that pushes the disordered series of images forward in a disordered drive. In the case of *Nimmikage*, we could point to the dissolving graphic matches of sky and water that make time visible in the endless movement of natural forces. This level of duration is critical to the sense of presentness that is at the heart of an Indigenous temporality outside clock-time. The women dancing is likewise attuned to a constant beat as Tagaq's composition soars and thrums outside of time signatures. *Sisters and Brothers*, finally, tricks settler-colonial time by a critical gesture of reversal and disorder at the centre of the film. By bringing us face-to-face with those lost children, Monkman likewise creates a new present tense in which the spectator may find themselves feeling humiliated and shamed by accusatory eyes; the films stares back at us in a demand for action, retribution and indeed reconciliation.

The excavation of images, like the excavation of resources, involves a kind of violence, especially in the case of colonial collection practices. These four Indigenous artists have successfully harnessed the violence of the archive for a language of transformation and futurity, built on the visual evidence of the past. Conjoined with the landscape, which plays an important role in each of these films, represented in many different ways, they have remixed the archive to imagine other historiographic narratives, other journeys that start in the present and run in all directions.

Although Indigenous filmmaking now flourishes at the NFB, thanks to an Indigenous Action Plan that was launched in 2017,² *The Souvenirs Project* remains anomalous, as the archive tends towards an ethnographic sense of a dying race, while young filmmakers are eager to document their own lived worlds. Archival still and moving images are frequently inserted into documentaries as illustrations of past practices, landscapes, people and places, but they are contextualized by text or visual storytelling; their archival status is rarely foregrounded or interrogated. Two films, made decades apart, rely heavily on archival footage and are among the few exceptions to the norm. A comparison can illustrate how Indigenous temporality has come to displace settler-colonial time for Indigenous filmmakers in the twenty-first century.

The Ballad of Crowfoot (Willie Dunn [Mi'gmaq] 1968) uses archival photographs to illustrate his song about a Blackfoot (Siksika) Chief who negotiated an important

treaty on behalf of his people in the nineteenth century. Dunn's ballad, sung over a montage of archival photographs, repeats the phrase 'Crowfoot, Crowfoot, why the tears? You've been a hero for so many years', while news headlines and images document the century of betrayals that have systematically negated the rights of Indigenous people in Canada. The photos and drawings feature images of male warriors in head-dresses and heroic poses and segues through shots of bison running and cowboys shooting (possibly from the same reels that Monkman used in *Sisters and Brothers*), and images of buffalo skulls, soldiers, small pox, Indigenous people in blankets looking despondent and finally headshots of white politicians. This was one of the first films made by a Native crew, and the tribute to a legendary figure becomes a powerful rebuke to settler-colonial culture, and yet the only temporal imaginary remains one of melancholy loss in which Indigenous peoples are preserved in a distant past. The song may say 'Maybe there'll be a better tomorrow', and yet the images offer no way out of the sorrow of what the Pope recently declared to be a genocide.³

Inuit filmmaker Asinnajaq's (Inuit) *Three Thousand* (2017, 14 minutes), a film sponsored by the Indigenous Action Plan, contextualizes and brackets archival footage of Inuit life with animated figures of digital transcendence. Against a Tanya Tagaq throat-singing soundtrack, Asinnajaq's video immerses the viewer in a slow montage of footage in both black-and-white and colour overlaid with abstract shapes that echo the lines of ice, snow, light, water, wind and birds. The archival footage moves from images of Inuit life in the Arctic in winter and summer, through to shots of settler-colonial benevolence and discipline, to colour footage shot more recently by Indigenous filmmakers of the same or a similar community. The film finally dissolves into an animated nightscape of a sprawling community of light, with futuristic glowing igloos in the middle. A few lines of poetry at the beginning include the words, 'I am a little caribou woman. I will become light.' The short film ends with a lighted horizon line rotating into a slow fadeout with an archival recording of a man chanting in a (presumably) Inuit language.

Three Thousand differs significantly from Dunn's use of archival footage in that it is not a history of trauma or failed heroism that the footage documents, but a history of everyday life. The 'ethnographic' footage of people in the past is recovered and reframed as a record of a way of life that can become a mode of public memory when it is conjoined with imaginary, future-oriented designs and images. The filmmaker's own facility with digital technologies speaks its own truth in *Three Thousand*, even while the shifts in archival footage suggest subtle shifts in points of view. In the early footage of Inuit children they stare back at the camera, turning themselves into specimens of humanity. In the later footage, little girls in pink hats seem at once out of place and terribly familiar as they punctuate the tundra landscape alongside parents and grandparents. The fluidity of time in *Three Thousand* is accentuated by animated figures and animals cavorting across the screen, bringing past, present and future into a dialogue about landscape, food, habitat and clothing.

Decolonizing the archive

These two films, *The Ballad of Crowfoot* and *Three Thousand* are rare examples of Indigenous archiveology in the NFB archive. The filmmakers have researched archives (including the NFB and beyond) to recycle images that can tell some kind of story about their history. The power of images is that, especially when they are moving, the viewer can enter a sensory experience with the past. *Ballad* uses mainly still images that are given movement through camera scans and zooms, but in *Three Thousand* especially, there is life in the images, as there is in the footage reworked by *The Souvenir Project*. Filmmakers such as Alanis Obomsawin, perhaps the best-known Indigenous documentary filmmaker in Canada, will occasionally use archival materials as one element among many in her work, but Obomsawin's contribution is primarily in her interview techniques and her strategies of representing Indigenous peoples and communities in the present tense.

Given the settler-colonial imprimatur of most of the footage in the NFB archive, it is understandable why Indigenous documentary filmmakers are preoccupied with original footage. The commissioning of *The Souvenir Project* was an important initiative on the part of the Board and resulted in some remarkable filmmaking. Offering Indigenous filmmakers the opportunity to reframe and remix historical moving images was a small step towards decolonizing the institution, and yet by limiting the archival resources available for these commissioned films, the Board is being somewhat less than co-operative concerning the remixing of cultural heritage.

In her discussion of the NFB archive and its commitment to 'heritage', Zoë Druick points out that the online digital archive of NFB production is only 20 per cent of their entire archive (Druick 2014: 315). The remainder is extremely challenging for scholars, researchers and artists to access because of rigorous 'access to information' protocols set up by the government institution. Curatorial decisions behind the streaming service have greatly restricted what the public can really know about the audiovisual heritage of the nation. These decisions are guided not only by aesthetic and historical value judgements but also by marketability concerns and rights clearances (Druick 2014: 314). The latter is particularly baffling given that the films were produced with government funds. This is the primary reason why *The Souvenir Project* filmmakers were not given access to the entirety of the NFB vault, but only to materials in the stock-shot library that had already been cleared. Giving rights to the creators of NFB documentary productions was a noble gesture towards artistic recognition of documentary filmmakers, but it has had serious repercussions on the legacy of their work, which could well be appropriately credited by those who re-use it for new histories. The process for recovering 'permissions' has become a cumbersome legal process that has effectively left a huge amount of NFB filmmaking in the darkness of the archive.

Druick points out that the framework of 'heritage' has enabled the NFB to justify the digitization of films that may not always seem to have historical significance and may appear 'dated' (Druick 2014: 318), and certainly most colonial-era footage involving Indigenous people would certainly appear this way. Even so, the conjunction of the

heritage discourse and neoliberal marketing policies means, for Druick, that ‘while NFB films have never been so readily available, the archive itself is being pre-screened and therefore less available for a more thorough-going analysis’ (Druick 2014: 319). For Druick, the stock-shot library is ‘most certainly not part of the interpretation of Canadian heritage’ because it is, by definition, already decontextualized (Druick 2014: 317). However, what we learn from *The Souvenirs Project* is that the ‘raw’ footage as well as the outtakes of finished films is still valuable, from the point of view of a more complex modality of heritage. Because it is not owned artistically, but belongs specifically to the State, this archive may be the ideal place from which to construct – or remake – heritage from an Indigenous perspective. Indeed, as Druick mentions, Arthur Lipsett, one of the first experimental filmmakers to work with found footage, worked exclusively with NFB outtakes scraped from the cut-room floor to make some of the most perceptive, socially conscious found footage films of the 1960s.

And yet, insofar as it is images, not films, that are being remixed, the NFB is really only going part way towards a relinquishment of anything resembling digital sovereignty. Indigenous artists invited to interpret the visual archive should be extended the opportunity to work with the complete archive if they are to truly exercise some sovereignty in the digital field. The stock-shot library is designed to monetize the archive, and the Board was not prepared to ‘release’ actual films for this project, so despite the best intentions behind this initiative, *Souvenir* ends up being a strategy to expand Canadian heritage to be more inclusive, and not exactly a rethinking of what that heritage really conceals.

The decolonization of archives is a topic of some debate, as an effort in this direction can only be partial, given the ‘inherent colonial paradigms that shape the archives as institutions’ (Fraser and Todd 2016: 2). Fraser and Todd (2016: 10) examine the issue of archival control and archival holdings to conclude that ‘it is essential that we continue to recognize archival spaces, especially state archives, for their original intent: to create national narratives that seek to legitimize the nation state by excluding Indigenous voices, bodies, economies, histories, and socio-political structures.’ In other words, a decolonial sensibility is a more appropriate method than a more radical goal of destruction or erasure that would remove all traces of colonial culture, including the presence of Indigenous peoples. A decolonial sensibility includes providing easier access to Indigenous researchers and artists as well as rethinking collecting mandates to be inclusive of Indigenous knowledge. Indeed, the project of counter-archival practice is a global concern with recasting entrenched paradigms that have maligned, marginalized and missed minority groups everywhere. In a discussion of the ‘ethnic archive’ Schweitzer and Henry (2019: 2) point to the work of ethnic archives to ‘produce a harsh and destabilizing clash of voices and truths. They require us to rethink the archive, not just in terms of who and what we include, but how we produce knowledge.’

The Souvenirs Project in this light is a critical means of rethinking the NFB archive as a source for producing knowledge about settler-colonial culture. The four short films

rework historical time into Indigenous time and ‘get the archive to perform differently’ (Stewart 2021: 172). And yet, the four films amount to only fifteen minutes in total of remixed footage. What might be possible with more access provided to more Indigenous filmmakers to exercise and produce visual sovereignty over the entire NFB archive?

Archiveology as a remaking of history depends on an understanding of the commons as the place where media history resides. The revision of so-called ‘heritage’ cannot be remade within a space of proprietary ownership. Artists’ ability to recontextualize visual culture needs to be recognized more fully as a necessary intervention into the image culture that constitutes our shared heritage of colonialism. The huge vault of documentary material that was shot and collected by the National Film Board of Canada over its 130-year history constitutes an incredible source of knowledge about ‘how Canada interpreted Canada to Canadians’. That interpretation for many decades cloaked the systemic racism embedded in settler-colonial culture, and digital technologies have provided the ideal tools to dismantle and challenge that interpretation. If the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67 was a transitional point in an ongoing national project of ‘staging Indianness’, *The Souvenir Project* is merely another point in that continuum, which still has a long way to go before Indianness is not staged, but recognized as central to the past and present of Canadian culture.

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Notes

1. The National Film Board of Canada’s streaming portal can be found at www.nfb.ca. Accessed 26 June 2024.
2. Indigenous Action Plan, <https://www.canada.ca/en/national-film-board/corporate/publications/plans-reports/indigenous-action-plan.html>. Accessed 26 June 2024.
3. Ka’nehsí:io Deer, CBC website (2022) ‘Pope says genocide took place at Canada’s residential schools’, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/pope-francis-residential-schools-genocide-1.6537203>. Accessed 10 July 2024.

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