

# **Bak, Meredith A.**

## **Cultural Traditions and Public Policy: The National Film Board of Canada's Aboriginal Filmmaking Program**

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My project consisted of an in depth analysis of the National Film Board of Canada's Aboriginal Filmmaking Program, to lead to the eventual publication of a feature-length article presenting the program as a model by which media literacy can be taught by exploring the work of a specific region in order to increase global communication. Initially, I had planned on traveling to Canada to conduct interviews with a variety of artists and policymakers, however, upon completion of preliminary research and based on the information offered by my Canadian contacts and my faculty mentor, I restructured my methodology to include primarily local research.

I examined a number of existing articles regarding Canadian National Film Board policies and consulted several interviews held with liaisons between various special interest groups concerned with media policy. These works, published by a number of groups, constituted the majority of the body of information from which I drew.

I constructed an even sounder foundation upon which I could build my research. This was accomplished by expounding by expanding my scope to include several additional subjects and proceeding to substantially expound upon them. In order to accurately and contextually discuss the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program, for example, it became necessary to further research its institutional predecessor, the Challenge for Change program. Doing so provided a much more thorough understanding of such a program's standard successes and failures and gave valuable insight into the varying gaps between the policy's goals and actual accomplishments. One very important connection came to light as I worked—the relationship my specific project had to the larger field of cultural studies. By further investigating this vital link, I was able to trace the program's patterns and understand its operation in terms of a number of similar movements such as feminism.

Among the many conclusions my research began to help me draw, was the principle question I'd initially asked. Is there a link between a specific group or region and the aesthetic tradition generated by such a set? The Aboriginal Filmmaking Program, and other similar programs, were primarily concerned with filmmaking as activism. I learned that much attention was paid to the development of traditions that would tell the story from the perspective of the native, rather than of the colonizers. As this is the case, two primary schools were developed. The first is the reactionary method, by which the colonial viewpoints were challenged through direct competition and opposition: filmmakers acknowledged the status quo and chose to create works in an opposite fashion. Other filmmakers fall into the second category, which I call the independent school. This latter group is constituted by a number of works made in styles virtually unrelated to the dominant one. Rather than defining themselves in terms of the colonizing structure, these filmmakers seek self-representation through forming entirely novel

cinematographic methods. Finally, I began examining educational theory and the notions of media literacy, to see how programs such as the National Film Board's can serve as effective models for instructing a media literate generation.

I am currently working to synthesize these two areas of my research, the arts and policy segment and the educational component. As this step gets completed I will continue drafting an article including a bibliography and ample examples to document my research, which I hope to eventually publish in order to shed light on the way in which visual literacy is taught and understood by specific groups and peoples.