

The Nation Dreamt Whole: Mid-Century Canadian Political Fantasy and the NFB's “--Of Japanese Descent”: An Interim Report (1945)

ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of the NFB's 1945 film “--Of Japanese Descent”: *an Interim Report* this article explores aspects of a specifically Canadian mid-century political imaginary characterized by very particular economic and racial anxieties. Faced by the emergence of new political economies—fascist and communist models that seemed capable of re-imagining the nation—as well as a broad sense for a debility or limit proper to capitalist liberal democracy, many people in this period began to fantasize about openly post-liberal Canadian futures. At the same time, the Canadian state was attempting to manage and control a narrative of national identity in the context of new flows of non-white immigrants. “--Of Japanese Descent”—a film produced by the Canadian state to positively re-frame the internment of Japanese Canadians during the war—attempts to resolve both vectors of anxiety simultaneously. The internment camp comes to be imagined as a kind of post-liberal utopia, a space of national fulfillment and purpose de-linked from the risks and aporias of liberal capitalism. What we call the “liberal concentration camp”, then, models an alternative, idealized Canadian future while simultaneously functioning as a kind of school or machine for the naturalization of “inadmissible” Japanese bodies. However, even as the film channels fascist and communist desires—for national oneness and economic solidarity respectively—it operates as a means of preparing the Canadian viewer for the re-integration of interned Japanese into their communities and in this sense is a very early snapshots of the limits and contradictions of liberal state multiculturalism in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ

À travers une analyse du film de la NFB « “-- Of Japanese Descent”: an Interim Report » (1945), cet article explore certains aspects d'un imaginaire politique typiquement Canadien du milieu du siècle, marqué par des angoisses économiques et raciales très particulières. Confrontés à l'émergence de nouvelles économies politiques—des modèles fascistes et communistes semblant capables de réinventer la nation—ainsi qu'aux limites de la démocratie libérale capitaliste, un grand nombre

de Canadiens commençaient à rêver d'un avenir post-libéral. Parallèlement, l'État canadien tentait de maîtriser un discours d'identité national tenant compte de nouveaux flux d'immigration non blanche. « -- Of Japanese Descent”: an Interim Report »—un film produit par l'état canadien afin de redéfinir, de façon positive, l'internement des Japonais Canadiens durant la guerre—tente de résoudre la question de ces deux sources d'angoisse simultanément. Les camps d'internement sont imaginés comme une sorte d'utopie post-libérale, un objectif dénoué des risques et des apories du capitalisme libéral et lié à l'idée d'accomplissement national. Ce qu'on appelle les « camps de concentration libéraux » façonnent alors un avenir canadien alternatif et idéalisé, tout en opérant comme une machine qui naturalise les japonais « inadmissibles ». Cependant, même en véhiculant des aspirations fascistes et communistes – pour l'unité nationale et la solidarité économique – il fonctionne comme un outil préparant le spectateur canadien à réintégrer les Japonais internés dans leurs communautés. C'est ainsi qu'il offre un des premiers aperçus des limites et contradictions du multiculturalisme de l'état libéral au Canada.

KEYWORDS: Japanese Canadian; internment; NFB; documentary; Second World War; political economy; capitalist culture; political culture; propaganda



Introduction

In the years between the First and Second World Wars, new species of cultural fantasy and anxiety appeared in Canada not only related to the perceived failures of liberal capitalism, but also linked to a broader, quite novel sense of the contingency and openness of the nation's social and political destiny. Geopolitical competition between communist, fascist and liberal systems created a certain frisson and uncertainty vis-à-vis the future of development in Canada—one that allowed for a high degree of ideological overlap and confusion among significant segments of the population. This article sets out to explore these dynamics in the context of what George Grant (2005) lamented as the loss of wholeness endemic to modern liberalism, a loss expressed idiomatically across the entire field of global modernist literature and art.

Modernism has often been imagined, by Frederic Jameson, for example, as rooted in figures of depth—real life, actual feelings, genuine collective experiences and so forth—capable of psychologically offsetting (or at the very least expressing) the social and aesthetic poverties of industrial modernity (1991: 7–12). The modernist struggled to re-enchant and deepen life, to add style to an increasingly empty and routinized existence; this often remained confined to the domain of individual psychology (the poet whose life is lived as one continuous work of art), but also could

be glimpsed in imaginations of radical new forms of social being. If we can concede, with D. M. R. Bentley, “the wedding of progressive social and aesthetic ideals at the heart of most strains of modernist architecture and literature,” we must at the same time admit that this question of social renovation often invoked a “progress” that was oddly nostalgic and backwards-looking in its reliance on figures of pre-modern social unity and wholeness (2005: 18). Family, nation, tribe, village, race: these forms echo continuously across the global modernist canon in literature and art, sometimes with unambiguously fascistic connotations.

What can be said to link these two kinds of social renovation—one oriented towards the wholly new, the other passing through a mythologized past—is often the state’s centrality to their projects, a force or process itself imbued with unequivocally aesthetic-spiritual dimensions. For Walter Benjamin, it was this aestheticization of politics, the harnessing of the state to categories of sacred presence, authenticity and wholeness, which drew a straight line between the cult of genius and fascist aversions to democracy and difference (2008: 41). For someone like F. R. Scott, however, and a whole cohort of his contemporaries, it was the aesthetic desire of the state—its harmonic scale and powers of spiritual integration—which allowed it to address the fragmentation of modernity and decisively separated its purview from that of a mere economic management of existing social relations. In his essay “The State as Work of Art,” Scott praises the capacity of the state to “direct the dynamic forces of society into socially desirable channels.” He goes on to invoke a state politics that goes beyond “good governance and good economics” or even “social justice” to reach a dimension linked to the harmonic integration of parts in a meaningful, aesthetically satisfying whole (quoted in Bentley 2005: 29).¹

The state—in a figure of politics as old as Plato’s *kallipolis*—was tasked with the work of rendering whole, meaningful and even beautiful the customary life of a people. This is a thematic clearly operative in German Romanticism (which often explicitly invoked figures of Greek harmony and wholeness) and which echoed into early-20th-century modernism, but in a form which no longer framed as necessarily alienating the modern as such. In other words, technology and the state could be seen as means to reintegrate and restore what they themselves had torn asunder in the context of the development of 19th-century liberal capitalism. The question was not merely posed between old and new tout court, but posed instead as an art of coordinating the exact ratio of state, market and technology necessary to produce a society which combined without disruption progress, unity and a certain diffuse intensification of a nation’s spiritual powers and possibilities: modernity, in other words, without its galling loss of wholeness.

In what follows we trace out the economic and racial coordinates of this state modernist fantasy in the specific context of mid-century Canada. Our analysis revolves around two primary axes: first, cultural fantasies anchored in what we might call the political economy of liberalism and an impotence, failure or weakness imagined

as inherent to “free societies”; and second, those anchored in the management of contemporary racial and gendered differences in the context of mid-century white Canadian patriarchy. Our hope is to draw these axes—already deeply enmeshed in social practice—into explicit dialogue through the examination of one concrete Canadian text, D. C. Burritt’s “--*Of Japanese Descent*”: *An Interim Report*, a propaganda film released in 1945 under the supervision of John Grierson and the National Film Board. While Grierson was not directly involved in the film, it is exemplary of the mandate he had established for the NFB: cinema was to henceforth function as a key nodal point in the production and reproduction of national cohesion and spirit. The press at the time referred to Grierson openly as “Canada’s Propaganda Maestro” (Evans 2001: 5) and Grierson himself was unequivocal: “I look on cinema as a pulpit and use it as a propagandist.”

This slippage between the documentary form and the political imaginary of propaganda was in no way uniquely Canadian, but rather a characteristic of the wider symbiosis occurring globally between documentary filmmaking and the state, not only under the conditions of emergent forms of totalitarianism, but in the context of the interventionist, liberal (really bio-political) state as well. Grierson’s leadership later inspired the *National Film Act* (1950), in which state film production was explicitly charged with the mandate of “interpret[ing] Canada to Canadians and to other nations” (NFB).

“--*Of Japanese Descent*”: *An Interim Report*, though framed aesthetically as a neutral record of the government’s internment of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s, is in fact an early manifestation of this desire to propagandistically deploy film as a mechanism of national cohesion.² In terms of form itself there is nothing particularly modernist about the film; it cleaves generically to the codes of the expository documentary, rather than the more lyrical and poetic documentary experiments innovated by Grierson in Britain in the 1930s. It is on the terrain of content alone, then, that the film enacts this modernist state fantasy of a nation in which contradiction and anomie have been replaced by aesthetic wholeness.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 the Canadian state began the process of relocating Japanese Canadians on the basis of a national security doctrine that now interpreted them as potential spies and saboteurs. Approximately 23,000 Japanese Canadians ranging from infants to the elderly were forced to relocate. Their property was expropriated and their rights to free movement annulled. According to the government, they were not, technically speaking, prisoners, but “free” to leave at any time. In reality, their freedom was nugatory: whether they went voluntarily or were forced, they were moved to road camps, internment camps and farms throughout the interior; men between the ages of 18 and 45 were denied the right to be within 100 miles of the BC coast; and all Japanese Canadians were subject to varying degrees of RCMP monitoring and surveillance. Mobility during this period was not a viable option. “--*Of Japanese Descent*” entered into this conjuncture with the

intention of managing domestic and international anxieties around the potential symmetry between “liberal” internment and the Nazi concentration camps appearing across Europe at the time.

There is evidence that as early as 1940 the Canadian government had some knowledge of the German concentration camps, given that they had accepted 2,290 Jewish escapees from Hitler into Canadian POW camps.³ Archived correspondence between NFB staff and the government as early as 1943 also indicates that “--*Of Japanese Descent*” was being produced to educate national and international communities into a clearly controlled understanding of Canadian policies, practices and camp conditions. NFB producer Dallas Jones wrote to Grierson’s assistant, “there is rather a good film to be made here and a necessary one as an insurance against criticism when this is all over” (Jones 1943).⁴ By 1944–1945, the importance of the film would have been increasingly clear, given the amount of information about Nazi concentration camps beginning to circulate in official circles and beyond. Between the spring of 1944 and 1945, the Soviets, the British and the Americans would liberate numerous concentration camps in Nazi-occupied territory. Rumours were confirmed and in the spring of 1945, President Eisenhower had the liberation of the camps filmed: the atrocities that had been committed there were becoming public knowledge.⁵ By early 1945, correspondence between the NFB and the Department of Labour indicates that the NFB had been tasked with creating a cinematic archive of the internment conditions. Dallas wrote, “For the present, and as evidence in possible post-war dispute, the International Red Cross and the Japanese Protecting Power have indicated a need for a film record of Canada’s treatment of the Japanese” (Jones 1943).⁶ This is the precise context in which the film’s aspiration to the generic transparency of the report—indicated in the title itself—should be understood. Given the striking similarities and even genealogical linkages between the Nazis’ rhetoric and white nativist Canadian discourses, the NFB, working in cooperation with several government offices including the British Columbia Security Commission and the Department of Labour, was now tasked with managing not only the international reception of Japanese Canadian internment, but also the preparation of white Canadians for the post-war reintegration of Japanese Canadians into Canadian communities. This called for a re-visioning, quite literally, of the Canadian national imaginary, one no longer exclusively grounded in the project of a pure white British ideal. Though clearly steeped in many of the racist, nativist ideals which characterized the pre-war period in Canada, “--*Of Japanese Descent*” is at the same instant one of the first attempts on the part of the state to openly transition the Canadian national imaginary towards a more diverse and tolerant multicultural ideal.

In a structure we will describe below more fully, the film not only sets out to separate and manage the racial alterity of Japanese Canadians, it projects onto the concentration camp many of the properties it would like to see fully developed within Canadian society at large. What we are calling the “liberal concentration

camp” comes to embody Edenic imaginings of the possibilities endemic to the Canadian project while functioning as a machine or school through which to integrate and naturalize those racialized Others imagined as incompatible with fundamental Canadian ideals. We are interested, then, in what this film tells us about the “political unconscious” of mid-century Canadian political imagination (Jameson 2002: 4). What, in other words, does it reveal about the desires or anxieties of liberal democracy in Canada at a time characterized by the emergence of new political systems and styles, all of which issued exclusive claims to model and anticipate the future? Our thesis is that the disavowal of internment is very much imbued with a desire to simultaneously actualize and exit Western liberalism, an ambiguous desire to envision a diverse post-liberal Canadian society that balances order, tradition and wholeness with progress, capitalism and technological modernity.

Liberal Democracy in Crisis

In the years following the First World War, western liberal democracy experienced a complex series of challenges to its social legitimacy and to the exclusivity of its identification with historical development and progress. The economic growth on which it relied for its capacity to resolve entrenched social divisions had vanished in 1929 and with it the notion of industrial capitalism as the mode of production natural to modernity. The short-term successes of the Soviet Union—its ability to employ the majority of the population, its seeming evasion of the business cycle and its very rapid early economic growth—convinced many educated commentators in the West that command economies would be the economic systems of the future. Shorn of the nuisance of liberal rights, policed labour laws and wage negotiations, free of the need to make choices checked by electoral feedback or democratic consultation, the Soviet executive had about it a Promethean quality which allowed it to mobilize for war or production on a scale unimaginable in the West. Mass unemployment, a serious problem for capitalist democracies right up to the beginning of the Second World War, could in this context be seen as a symptom of wholesale societal impotence: capitalism, both figuratively and literally, simply was not working. We should not underestimate the extent to which this spectacle of idleness and social wastage tested long-established Protestant conceptions of success as the necessary correlative of hard work. Indeed, unemployment directly compromised a period masculinity highly dependent on associations with production, utility and muscular, industrial strength: redundancy and emasculation went hand in hand. There was, then, something almost axiomatically absurd about an economy which left masses of its own human potentiality unused, an ambiance of societal decline and paralysis expressed continuously (and across political divisions) in the criticism and commentary of the era.

A similar logic can be discerned in the context of early liberal democratic perceptions of fascism, though what was in the first instance a question of primarily

economic power was then grafted onto the domain of the nation as a social, racial and political ideal. If commentators denounced Hitler's violent departure from the tradition of rights-based liberalism, if they found distasteful the arbitrariness and collectivism of the brown shirts, there remained within educated and popular discourse in the 1930s in Canada and elsewhere a transfusion with the figure of the Führer and with national socialism as a political model. Far from the demographic heterogeneity and porous borders of liberalism (an openness which portended intercultural conflict), and from the creeping sense that the nation had no direction or purpose, fascism presented an image of the nation soldered violently onto its own racialized territory: the nation would henceforth be a work of racist art, pure, whole and aesthetically ideal. Amidst the new consumerist cityscapes of the early 1920s, many in the West lamented the deterioration of family values and of the customary boundaries separating women from men and parents from children; authoritarian Germany, however, appeared to offer the possibility of a nation comprised of (and really an extension of) a reinvigorated conception of the family, one that conserved the good old things without turning its back on the industrial prosperity and convenience of the modern. In the figure of the Führer authority remained intact, executive control over the destiny and spirit of society appeared undiminished, and the charismatic gesture still seemed capable of creating something out of nothing. Such is the aesthetic presupposition of fascism, its well-documented emphasis on scale, monumentality and mass consonance or conformity all subtly undergirded by the mobilizing will of the still-virile Führer. The classic cinematic touchpoint here is, of course, Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

In the Canadian context, these broader sociopolitical anxieties were relayed through a whiteness that could only interpret racial alterity, and the presence specifically of "the Japanese" within an Anglo-Canadian nation, as vectors of rupture, fragmentation and loss. In pre-Second World War public Canadian discourses, Japanese Canadians were perceived as Other to the extent that it was widely believed that they were effectively unassimilable. Peter W. Ward explains at length that "generally it was assumed that, socially and racially, the Japanese could never be assimilated... this was the constant refrain of west coast nativists... it was the gravest threat which the Japanese immigrants posed... Oriental immigration precluded a homogeneous Canadian citizenship, and in so doing imperilled the nation's very existence" (1990: 107). By the beginning of the war, Japanese Canadians had come to accumulate private wealth and property: many owned homes, cars, handcrafted fishing boats and in some cases successful businesses. This accumulated wealth only exacerbated white Canadian fears as it represented the possibility of permanent settlement in Canada as well as a threat to Anglo-Canadian hegemony. Given these anxieties it is perhaps not surprising that the government chose to liquidate Japanese Canadian property and to force Japanese Canadians to pay for living costs during the length of their wartime confinement. Detaining Japanese Canadians only partially managed the threat they had represented through the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century. In the short term, financially weakening them further reduced the perceived economic and political threat they posed, while in the long term the proposed solutions were either “repatriation”⁷ or assimilation. The political ambiguity of the “Japanese” at the time is illustrated by the dash in the title “--*Of Japanese Descent*,” which subsumes and elides discussion of the different status held by members of the Japanese Canadian community, ranging from newly arrived immigrant, to long-time resident, to citizen born in Canada, despite the fact that the nation had not yet accorded any of them full rights of citizenship.

A Tale of Two Ghettos: Unhygienic Ethnic Enclave vs. Convalescent Wartime (Internment) Spa

“--*Of Japanese Descent*” begins by clearly establishing the link between liberal democratic normality and a certain diffuse experience of physical and social dilapidation. That is, liberal freedom, positively counterpoised throughout the film with authoritarian control, is nevertheless seen to reach a breaking point where its extension comes to threaten the internal coherence and self-transparency of the social whole itself. Two factors, here appear to be essential: the right of the individual to free association and movement; and rights to privacy in daily life and to a clear separation between civil and public spheres. The first opens up the possibility of forms of cultural identification inhospitable to the logics of white, Anglo, liberal progress; the second maintains infrastructural conditions capable of shielding such identifications from the gaze of the state.

The film’s opening immediately establishes one overriding claim, widely accepted at the time as arguable fact: Japanese Canadians, left to themselves, have established communities that, we are told by the narrator, often fail to meet minimum standards of modern health and hygiene. Individual prerogative has rendered possible a situation in which some Japanese Canadians adapt fully to modern protocols of cleanliness while others opt to live crammed many to a house in unsanitary conditions. These representations are grounded in Eurocentric, racist norms and function as the alibi for an internment that can then be framed as rehabilitation; they function as obvious excuses for a uniquely liberal and progressive form of internment, one that cures disease, prettifies neighborhoods, privileges the nuclear family, and eliminates squalor. Internment becomes, as Chris Gittings puts it, “a corollary for development” (2002: 71). At the same time these conditions uncomfortably double as direct evidence for the failure of liberal norms themselves, norms inherently susceptible to cultural subversion and fragmentation. It is precisely the failure of Canadian liberalism to prevent the formation of this dangerous ethnic ghetto, which sets into motion the film’s desire to imagine a politico-economic reality that combines fascist, communist and liberal motifs in a salutary but confused manner. This Edenic post-liberal society projected onto the figure of the concentration camp will interestingly come to mirror some of the ideological ambiguities of Grierson himself.

In a first and curious editorial move on the part of the director, a voice-over narration of pre-internment Japanese Canadian life—one which aspires to a kind of descriptive, sociological objectivity—overlays a series of images of Japanese Canadian homes, neighbourhoods and stores that have been vacant since relocation has taken place. Streets entirely emptied of people and any trace of activity or life create a disturbing sense of extant anomie, a population that was already in a state of dysfunctional absence vis-à-vis its own communal possibilities. Stores are either boarded up or frozen in a state of rushed abandonment, doors left open, shelves stripped of useable produce or wares. An equivalency is established between storefronts still printed with Japanese kanji and the thick patina of dust which now covers everything; surely the filth which now characterizes this abandoned space was always already constitutive of everyday life here. And this, of course, is then explicitly argued by the narration: basic standards of health and hygiene are/were not being met. Past and present, however, have traded places, the graphic effects of forced evacuation rearranged to appear temporally and causally antecedent. Economically unproductive, piled illogically and en masse into homes built to support far fewer, their sewage flowing raw in the street, “the Japanese”, as they are named by the narrator, are framed as having entered a state of ghettoization that is both socially and biologically unhealthy.

The film frames the transition between the pre-war ethnic ghetto and the wartime ghetto of the camps as part of a naturalization process preparing Japanese Canadians for integration and assimilation into the Canadian socio-scape. The ambiguity of this representation differentiates and essentializes “the Japanese” while at the same time transforming them into model-citizen-subjects of the British empire. The post-war motif of Japanese Canadians as a model minority is here shown as having been made possible by the experience of first having lived in transformational model “towns” (as the camps are euphemistically called in the film) that have been designed, organized and policed by the Canadian state (*Descent* 1945). This is what Daniel Coleman has since theorized as the allegory of the “maturing colonial son: manning the borders of white civility” (2006: 169), whereby “English Canadian nationalist rhetoric...anxiously reiterates scenes of the civil incorporation of non-British people into the body of the nation...who are *always beneficiaries of and never agents in the nation's civil order*” (Coleman 2006: 171, emphasis added). The film represents the state’s intervention into the lives of this population as responsible for the positive impacts on their general health and standard of living. Life in the camps is imbued with the attributes of a vacation or health spa:

Life isn’t all work in the orchard. As the village was built right on the shores of the Slocan Lake, a fine lake is available for swimming and sunning, with beneficial results to health. Relocation has resulted in an improvement in the general health level. Before the evacuation from the Coast, tuberculosis was known to exist among the Japanese and medical measures against it were carried on. However, the true extent of the widespread ravages of the

disease went unreported to the proper authorities, until the relocation. Then, so many cases were detected it was necessary to build this sanatorium to fight tuberculosis alone. In addition regular hospitals were built or expanded. Thus, quite a large number of the brightest young men and young women will have a chance for life that they would not otherwise have had. (*Descent* 1945)

The idea of state-provided medical treatment here coexists with the notion of a general shift in hygiene provoked by the personal and communal “improvement work [that] goes on constantly”; the contradiction between pre-war squalor and the vigorous health of the camp-spa becomes impossible to ignore (*Descent* 1945). It is interesting to note the way in which the bridge formed between these two states of being is one constructed out of an image of labour that is at once vertical—top-down and organized by the government—but also oddly horizontal, produced through the spontaneous, voluntary activity of the population itself. At the same time, the film is imbued with echoes of the aforementioned F. R. Scott quote, in which an essential indistinction emerges between the ends of politics and the domains of beauty. The film repeatedly emphasizes the aesthetic value of the sites chosen for internment, as well as the beautification of the camps through construction and gardening, equating the natural beauty of the ordered world of the camp with health and even life itself: “The Harris Ranch settlement: this is one of the most beautifully situated and also one of the healthiest spots. It is built on a sunny bluff high above the Slocan Lake” (*Descent* 1945). The reality, of course, was dramatically different. Those interned in camps found themselves forced to live in unsanitary conditions with many crammed into buildings originally designed to house animals—barns and stables, for example. Living quarters in the camp were unhygienic and inhumanely cramped, effectively abolishing privacy of any kind.

Juxtaposed with the pestilent, unsanitary conditions of pre-war life, internment is framed by the film as a kind of convalescence. If separation from nature (and the nation) breeds illness and stagnation, reincorporation nourishes health and wholeness—a diffuse regeneration of life’s forces. Nature, in a motif common to both settler narratives and European fascism, decontaminates the foreign, filtering away disease by annulling the racialized, liberal ghetto which gave rise to it in the first place. Healing, however, is not to take place through the strategy of liberal assimilation—the spatial dispersion of individual Japanese Canadians throughout the whole of the national body—but through aggressive racialized containment—in other words, precisely through the construction of another ghetto. Liberal assimilation works on a principle of dispersion that seeks to cure the “disease” of foreignness by weakening the attachment of a culture to itself; rehabilitative internment alternatively “hospitalizes” the Other and in doing so cautiously avoids the risks that come with direct contact between the “normal” and the “pathological.” Japanese Canadians, then, are in some profound way, naturalized by the “treatment” of internment. Separated from their own “unhealthy” inclinations towards separation

itself, forcibly extracted from the ghetto of cultural specificity, they become restored and reformed citizens of the national whole: figures of nature, beauty, health and politics, here, merge indissolubly. Foucault's concept of the bio-political, used to distinguish contemporary operations of power from their classical sovereign antecedents, usefully illuminates the specificity of the political logic at work in this arrangement. The internment spa is not tasked with disciplining life in the direction of a oneness imposed on it from a sovereign point outside its purview. Instead it claims to do no more than create the conditions for a spontaneous convalescence, a movement towards health that, in realigning the relationship between the body and nature, induces the organic emergence of Canadianness itself.

From Liberal Economic Idleness to Virile Post-Liberal Utopia

Given the aforementioned anxieties about the state and future of liberal capitalism in the interwar years, the way “--*Of Japanese Descent*” reimagines economic life through its representation of the internment camp is genuinely fascinating. The film envisions a very real structural hybridity around questions of economic activity and ownership. Given the historical tension around the economic participation of the Other, originally as exploitable labour crucial to the Canadian nation-building project and then as an economic threat to that same rigidly defined project, it is significant that the economic life of these wartime “communities” is represented as exigent—as born in and out of a state of pressing emergency. Just as the Japanese Canadians arrived in the camps, “the winter proved exceptionally severe and it was necessary to organize all available help and equipment to turn out fuel wood for the new homes” (*Descent* 1945). This has the obvious strategic value of covering over the illiberal mechanics of confinement—the use of force and the obviously non-democratic nature of the process—by displacing our attention onto the seemingly natural spectacle of a community engaged in the urgent activity of its own physical reproduction. If the exigency of war functions as an alibi for mass internment then it is the idea of nature as itself exigent and unpredictable, a dangerous and inhuman Other, that here extenuates the bad conscience of breached legality. Memory of the force of law—the sovereign exception that Agamben, in *Homo Sacer* (1998), insists structures from within even the most consistent liberalism, but which nevertheless confronts it as a scandal—vanishes in the face of a seemingly broader (and more natural) form of tyranny—that of nature itself, the universal dictatorship of winter.

The film then works to generalize this urgency transferring the galvanized collectivity of the Japanese community onto the terrain of the national whole: “At this same time a shortage of fuel of all kinds developed in the country at large. The fuel wood-cutting operations were expanded with more men and more equipment to take care of the emergency” (*Descent* 1945). This is a crucial opening gesture which allows the autonomy of these displaced and disenfranchised people to be constituted, even as it reinscribes them into the economic imperatives of the national project at large. In

other words, the interest and autonomy of the part is here conflated without resistance or contradiction into the productive requirements of the whole; universal and particular come to occupy the same space, the spirit of collectivity engendered by emergency covering over the real racial fissures of the Canadian national imaginary.

At the same time, scarcity is here de-linked from Canadian governance—its own choice, error or malevolence—functioning instead as the site for a drama of self-constitution on the part of the relocated Japanese, a galvanizing emergency that echoes with all of the customary associations pitting virtuous settlers against the impassive brutality of the Canadian wild. The widespread liberal idleness and redundancy mentioned above are here utterly negated by the imperatives of survival, the gendered associations of unemployment with passivity and emasculation exchanged for virile images of classically masculine forms of labour. Trees are axed, sawed through and climbed, with the physical nature of this labour foregrounded; pre-industrial techniques (complete with horse-drawn decking lines) bind what could very easily be footage from a 19th-century logging camp to shots of an advanced milling operation outfitted with the most modern machines.

Crucial to the way “--*Of Japanese Descent*” works is the way the film erases historical Japanese Canadian experiences of immigration and settlement in Western Canada in the late 19th and early 20th century and replaces them with a cleaner, more familiar pioneer narrative. Interestingly, the order in which the film chooses to reveal the various roles of these men functions as an allegorical representation of civilizational history itself. First shown clearing the land, then working in mills, then engaged in agricultural production, by the end of the film, Japanese Canadian men have become butchers, bakers, storekeepers, barbers, shoemakers, electricians, welders, volunteer firemen and even doctors and dentists. The film’s own movement mirrors a developmental history of the world, internalizing the Japanese male into a grand civilizational project which culminates in high modern convenience. This imagined history provided by the film’s representation of camp life embeds Japanese Canadians into the Canadian pioneer narrative such that they can be reinstated into many of their former roles, in preparation for their reintegration into post-war Canadian society. Whatever their pre-war social status or profession, strong young men are both legitimized through honourable work and re-confirmed as productive labourers contributing to the national good.

At the same instant, these shots of seemingly autonomous and industrious Japanese labourers function as a means to preemptively address white anxieties—however absurd—about the use of taxpayer dollars to subsidize the camps. Japanese Canadians, of course, were paying for the cost of their incarceration in contravention of international law, often with proceeds garnered from the liquidation of their property, at a price significantly below market value, by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. The documentary is attempting to educate the Canadian population away from earlier perceptions around the idleness of the Japanese Canadian way of life

into an identity more cohesive with Anglo Protestant values and work ethic. Here one can discern echoes from the British Columbia Security Commission's 1942 report, titled *Removal of Japanese from Protected Areas*, that identified internment as the "frontispiece to the still unfolding story of the final relocation and rehabilitation of the whole Japanese-Canadian population" (18). In this respect, the film adheres largely to this earlier written report, addressing white viewers and preparing them to welcome Japanese Canadians into their post-war communities, as part of the assimilationist policy of dispersal.

There is never a clear sense of the kind of economic organization at work in these camps. Instead, a general ambiance of fervid collective productivity—shared, classless, national labour—replaces any distinguishable economic model. At one site, "small mills were installed to cut lumber for the houses and the various projects" (*Descent* 1945); just what body or agent installed this facility is left unspecified. In Tashme, an electrical plant, "built and installed" by "local men" comes with the euphemistic caveat that it was facilitated "with the help of the Commission" (*Descent*). At another site, we are told mysteriously and simply that "a large settlement has been built" (*Descent*). The passive voice here functions as to obscure the traces of government agency—the actual processes behind the mass displacement and internment of people—while at the same time generating a sense of communal action and effectiveness. We are told that at one mill, "employment is provided by [this] business," a suggestion which distinguishes productive liberal detainment from the dead time and wastage of the Nazi concentration camp, but also the widespread economic redundancy which plagued the inter-war years (*Descent*). Employment, social efficacy and moral utility are furnished, then, via business as usual, a fact which reframes Japanese Canadians as engaged in economic activity that is private and voluntary, rather than collectivistic and forced.

However, these notions of business as usual and freedom of movement sit uncomfortably with the narrator's suggestion that "highway building and general road work keep another large group occupied" (*Descent* 1945). Here, what is in fact forced labour is styled as a kind of New Deal public reconstruction program, echoes from the age of mass unemployment rendering the fairness and economic wisdom of this occupation axiomatic and unquestionable. Though other towns employ "established private businesses," we are told that in Tashme "the Commission must run everything"; its remoteness from other locations requires that it "must have within its own boundaries all the services required for life" (*Descent*). We are informed that "cooking is done in a communal kitchen," furthering the sense here of a breakdown of individualist economic patterns and relationships. At the same time, the film provides us with images of shelves overflowing with produce, and introduces a shot of individual bakers and butchers who supply the town's needs (whether for profit or at the behest of the state we are never told). In such moments, the film seems to be championing a kind of nationalist autarky, a system which has

fully internalized its physical reproduction and which, like God in Aristotle, relies for its existence on itself alone.

It is as if we are being presented with a highly sophisticated image of a statist paternalism that is at the same time little more than the sum total or aggregate of individual enthusiasm and effort. Though a general architectural reason and model is provided by the interventions of the state, “individual initiative and self-help” are the rule: “improvements by the residents, such as flower gardens, make things more attractive” (*Descent* 1945). An impression of perpetual, voluntary, yet at the same time social and shared productivity prevails: “improvements,” we are told, “are constantly in progress” (*Descent*). Life is here subsumed into the progressive time of technological modernity. We are continuously presented with images of people monitoring machines and constantly modernizing conditions, while at the same instant, as we explore below, technological progress and innovation are socialized, binding and unifying the community rather than sundering it into a million atomized parts.

Essential in all of this is the structuring nostalgia for a market society shorn of the anomie, fragmentation and moral duplicity of the large capitalist metropolis. This is a fantasy in which, as we have seen, a Jeffersonian/Protestant morality of the producer still holds sway and consumption has not yet crossed the threshold separating the legitimate fulfillment of needs to full-blown consumerist pleasure. One very well-stocked general store supplies the needs of the people and anchors the town’s social circulation in a way that is prominently foregrounded by the film. Here, a modest abundance, a sense of communal provision and well-being, stands apart from the imputed excesses and monopolistic associations of the big-city department store. This is a motif common to the era and perhaps best represented in the Canadian context by Claude Jutra’s classic film *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1942), in which the general store almost cosmically anchors communal space. There is, in other words, leisure in Tashme, but not idleness: pleasure, in this space, gravitates harmlessly to pastimes with a connotation of communal health (sport), mental probity (chess) or inoffensive cultural affairs (Japanese dance). Leisure, in this sense, remains somehow productive, shoring up rather than draining away and dissipating the energies of the communal whole. Nowhere is there any trace of the emergent youth cultures that were already fragmenting generational relations and perceptions by the late 1930s. Aggregative rather than dissipative, pleasure no longer endangers society, but freely reinforces and empowers it.

Inflecting all of this are the limits imposed on the situation by both the Canadian landscape and the political reality of internment. Though wilderness in the film functions to revivify and romanticize Canadian liberalism, reiterating the frisson, authenticity and adventure of settlement, it also operates here as a barrier which mutes and displaces echoes from the city. If each town appears linked into the productive schemata of the nation as a whole (responding, at one point, to a

country-wide shortage of fuel; at another, supplied by the federal government), they nevertheless retain an impression of de-linked locality, a separateness which lays down the conditions for communal solidarity and direct, democratic participation. The wilderness, in this sense, places a unifying envelope around the community, but also naturalizes internment by overlaying restricted rights to movement with the natural contours of uninhabitable or nonnegotiable terrain. Completely absent from the film are any traces of the communications technologies characteristic of the period: if both telephony and radio have been envisioned as instruments of national unity, they are also both agents of personalization which function to centrifugally disperse local culture, opening it to contagion from the outside. The only equipment seen is that necessary for physically productive purposes; these are shown alongside a foregrounded shot of a mill. Automobiles with all their associations of individual freedom and breadth of movement are largely absent; instead, town centres are shown thronged with strolling pedestrians and small groups of bystanders engaged in speech, a genuine resurrection of pre-modern sociality. Roads in and out of the community are few and patrolled by checkpoints, not “barbed wire, soldiers and bayonets” (*Descent* 1945).

Residents, then, are neither forcibly incarcerated according to a logic of totalitarian confinement, nor are they utterly mobile, ruled by the strict liberal principle of unfettered liberty. The checkpoint, then, is to the physical space of the film what arguments against “doing what one pleases” are in its moral sphere. They represent the putatively sensible imposition of limit, a restriction on freedom necessary to protect the integrity of the democratic whole. Liberty, but not license, as Locke famously put it (1821)⁸; mobility, but not the unrestricted freedom of dispersion so characteristic of the city. The film, then, is channeling a meme very much in the air of the time: this is precisely the dilemma of *It’s a Wonderful Life’s* George Bailey, caught between the enticements of urban modernity and travel and the confining, yet (ultimately) life-affirming meaningfulness of the small town. As Roy Miki puts it, the film “glosse[s] over the more brutal aspects of the uprooting to offer Canadians a reassuring narrative” (140).

Policing in this ambiguous post-liberal order becomes a matter of bureaucracy, of issuing permits and manning checkpoints. The film reframes confinement as normal life—or at least as normal as possible given the state of war—and not as imprisonment. The narrator tells viewers that Japanese Canadians were able to visit friends and celebrate their most important holidays together:

It should be made clear that Japanese residents in these towns are not living in internment camps. Travel between towns in the same group is not restricted. These relocated people should not be confused with those who were dangerous or had subversive tendencies and who were arrested and interned by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at the outbreak of the war with Japan. For Japanese, travel to points outside of the general relocation

district is by permit....Guards with bayonets and barbed wire fences have not been necessary. (*Descent* 1945)

Soft bio-political governance is here openly contrasted with the repressive machinery of classical modern sovereignty: bodies are not disciplined into obedience, but instead passively regulated in their own best interest. Checkpoints operate in the name of life and its flourishing: they are what stand between the internees and their own regression to the unhealthy, ghettoized forms of attachment (to themselves, to their culture) which began the film.

A complex picture begins to emerge of an economy that is neither market nor state, nor some Keynesian compromise between the two, but instead an organic, indeterminate system capable of wholly dissolving the tension between liberal privacy and public or social well-being. On the one hand, the Commission apportioned the general infrastructural space of these towns, laying out their gridwork in a manner which addresses the racialized privacy (that is, ghettoization) that began the film. It is precisely government control over the spacing of the camps, the state's capacity to govern civil space itself, which allows for the putative "improvement in the general health level" (*Descent* 1945); "the Japanese" are no longer crammed unhealthily into festering ethnic enclaves but exposed to modern standards of hygiene through the direct intervention of the bio-political state. Racial backwardness is here cleansed by the vertical, scientific gaze of the bureaucrat. The bracketing of pure market forces engenders a space emptied of consumerist identities and fragmentation, leaving intact a nostalgic, small-town culture as well as the imperatives of citizenship and moral unity which undergird it. At the same time, in these "towns" state control seems overlaid onto a system of voluntary labour and private initiative which combines all of the traditional coordinates of liberal individualism with a homogeneous moral structure and code. We are told in the film (a fact disputed by later accounts of how they experienced their conditions) that residents of these towns are free to leave at any time: in line with a key liberal principle established by Locke—and which allows for the radical reduction of democracy to mere representation—continued residence is construed as a tacit form of political consent. In "*Of Japanese Descent*," then, the full employment and economic vigour of communism along with the racial homogeneity and moral unity of fascism are grafted seamlessly onto liberal conceptions of the free individual; this ambiguous act of politico-cultural fantasy is perhaps best described as a post-liberal utopia (with the post, here, crucially signifying both continuity and supersession).

Harmless Pleasure: Domesticating Culture as Leisure

In "*Of Japanese Descent*," Japanese culture is integrated into the film in a doublespeak that foregrounds the subjects' Otherness while at the same instant absorbing it into an Anglo-Canadian vision of the nation. Clearly, the alignment of Japanese Canadian industriousness with the Anglo-Protestant work ethic, which we

have discussed at length, is one method of achieving this. Another is to represent culture as a form of leisure rather than as a diffuse social totality. In this sense, it comes to be depoliticized and sequestered as an inoffensive domain without claims to the radical difference represented by a fully developed alternative Weltanschauung. This depoliticization of culture is of a piece with its transformation into harmless Orientalist spectacle, one here very heavily reliant for its intelligibility on codes regulating the gendered Japanese body.

Part of the NFB's wartime mandate to explicitly address the Other, and the loyalty of the Other, through projects such as the *Peoples of Canada* series (1941), as well as the policies related to Japanese Canadian internment, involves clearly demarcating the nature of the foreign body. Evidence of "Japanese" Otherness, if erased by the representation of the film, would eliminate the justification for Canadian wartime policies. Therefore, the Japanese body must first be identified as a menace before being holistically reintegrated; separation and its logic must be countermanded by a protocol of internalization and assimilation. At the outset of the film, the authoritative male voice-over narrator emphasizes that after Pearl Harbour,

fear of attack became suddenly real...it came to acute nationwide attention that Canada had 23,000 resident of Japanese racial descent. It was well known that a large group of these people was engaged in the fishing industry on the West Coast...practically all of the 23,000 lived, worked and had their small businesses inside the western Number One defense zone. (*Descent* 1945)

Before the war the success of the Japanese fishing industry presented local white fishermen with direct economic competition. At the same time, there was public alarm about the potential for fishermen to use their strategically sensitive profession to engage in espionage, sabotage or reconnaissance for Japan. Later in the film, the transgressive status of the Japanese fisherman is neutralized by the same narrator when he explains a scene in which a man is shown "using a Japanese-style plane as he builds a boat for use in the lake nearby" (*Descent* 1945). The positioning of his craftsmanship as part of leisure activity—boat-building and recreational boating—neutralizes pre-war discourses of economic competition and professional jealousy and reinscribes them into the personal domain of private pleasure. Furthermore, the context of the camp, situated in the interior of the country and restricting the fishermen's free movement, eliminates linkages between his occupation and its potential for political espionage, sabotage and other matters strategically essential to the state. The confinement of the male body and its insertion into the ambivalent economy of the internment camp neutralize the threat (whether economic or strategic) it formerly posed in the open, opaque space of Canadian liberalism.

The female body is likewise depoliticized, but in very specifically gendered ways that contrast with the "rehabilitation" of the racialized male. The women, in a manner consistent with Orientalist discourse, are reconfigured as docile, physically pleasing

object of the white male gaze. If the male body's proximity to nature and labour has rendered it trustworthily Canadian—and rerouted long-standing fears associated with the duplicities of the foreign merchant—then the Japanese woman is assimilated precisely through her distance from work. Aside from the Orientalist visual and auditory frame of the film—complete with an “Asian”-sounding track and red snakeskin backdrop for the title at the outset and the final credits—the visual with the greatest Orientalist resonance is the scene of the Bon Odori festival. Directly following images of young Japanese Canadian men and women lying in hospital beds in the sanatorium, the film cuts to an image of two women and a young girl dressed in traditional kimonos. The narrator demystifies the scene for white viewers, explaining that the Bon Odori festival is the “festival for the spirits [that] came to Canada from the rural parts of Japan. Originally a Buddhist celebration, it is now observed in this country by Buddhists and Christians alike as a remembrance day for departed members of the family. After a *quiet* time together, with perhaps a visit to the cemetery, the families assemble at sundown for the dancing. It starts rather *formally* but as the darkness falls the mood changes to *mild merrymaking*” (*Descent* 1945, emphasis added). Juxtaposing images of illness and prostration (treated by the rectifying universality of modern Western medicine) with Japanese culture as such re-signifies the latter as inherently peripheral and uncivilized. The ritual is immediately codified as of the past, as arriving from a time without the instrumental efficacy of the modern.

At the same time, the dancing scene links images of Japanese Canadian women with a rhetoric of formal obedience, using vocabulary such as “quiet,” “formal” and “mild,” that echo with common Orientalist fantasies about the docile nature of Japanese people generally. The shift from formality to relaxed merrymaking, however, is at the same instant a movement from the disconcertingly foreign to the comfortingly mundane. Who can't, after all, identify with that pleasant slackening of the mind and body that follows a few glasses of whiskey (or saké): “mild merrymaking,” here, is neither off-puttingly formal nor licentiously debauched, but the joint in a turn from the enclosed formality of ethnic Otherness to a liberal domain of bodily pleasures and delights. Invoked is the putative universality of empiricist sensation itself, the neutrally shared ground of simply letting go. Just as pleasure slackens the hold of inherited social norms on the behaviour of an individual, so too does it loosen the linkages between a culture and its own formality. Let go of are not simply inhibitions, but Japanese-ness as such.

By feminizing Japanese culture—reducing it to dance, the kimono, the stylized female body—the film works to offset white associations of Japanese-ness with the violent, crazed Japanese male popularly indexed in the figure of the kamikaze. The film domesticates Japanese culture as an extension of the private sphere, linked to women and to a female genealogy that interrupts associations with the strong female creation goddess of Japan, or with the divine Japanese Emperor, predominant in Japanese and Canadian imaginary during this period. Instead, the Bon

Odori scene realigns the figure of the Japanese female with the stereotype of the geisha, who exists to entertain and satisfy (the gaze).

The final seconds of this scene include many women and young girls dancing in a circle against an iconically Canadian range of mountains; they dance under foregrounded lanterns decorated with the flags of Japan and the United Kingdom. The narrative has already explained that Japanese traditions have been transformed in Canada. This implies that the women and girls will also be transformed, not only in relationship to one another and Japan, but also in relationship to white Canadian culture. The scene, in other words, can be consumed simultaneously by white Canadians as images of a tranquilized, transformed, re-civilized Other, and by Japanese Canadians as possible “legitimate” variations on themselves.

The visual absence of men in this sequence highlights the very strange segmentation of the genders which takes place in the film more generally. Men and women are continuously separated visually into sexually homogeneous bands and groups. Cub Scout packs, throngs of wandering girls, all-male football games: sexual difference functions as the axis on which many of the images of daily cultural life turn in the film. In fact, the labouring male body is shown consistently in locations beyond the camp (in the mills, for instance). The domestic spaces of the camps themselves are dominated by images of older men, women and lots of children. One paradoxical effect of this editorial choice is the de-sexualization of Japanese Canadian men; it is as if their reproductive potential has been neutered and any of the cultural frisson around racialized sexuality decommissioned. In part, this ties in with the containment of the male body discussed earlier; though the Japanese male body is incorporated into a kind of broad national industriousness, it appears his virility stops short of personal sexual charisma or energy.

Also relevant here is the film’s attempt to transform the Japanese language itself into a domesticated cultural form wholly relegated to the private sphere. Before the war, the Japanese language presented a complex threat to the consistency of Anglo-Canadian dominance. To the nativist ear another language always traffics as conspiracy. This tendency was only exacerbated in a hyper-militarized context in which the capacity of the Japanese Canadian community to communicate beneath the gaze of state surveillance and control was the source of intense governmental anxiety. At the outset of the film, Japanese kanji graphically adorns the dilapidated storefronts used by the narrator to establish an association of Japaneseness with squalor; by the end of the film, kanji has all but vanished and with it perhaps the most obvious marker of cultural otherness. Part of what needs to be dispensed with in the transition between pre-war ethnic enclave and postwar assimilation is precisely the foreignness and inscrutability of the ideograph itself (after all, nothing better screams “alien” in science-fiction films than a non-phonetic ideograph!). The whole problem of language disappears from the concentration camp save for a scene in which we are shown a sign indicating that religious services there are held

in both Japanese and English. Japanese, then, is permitted as a language within the church because the church itself has already separated Japaneseness from its own alterity. Visually positioning the Japanese language within the space of devotion domesticates and neutralizes its usages. The message is clear: difference is allowed for as long as it is posed on the terrain of fundamental cultural sameness. *It is important to note as well that none of the Japanese Canadian subjects in the film ever speak in either English or Japanese*; they are silenced by the male voice-over narrative and the gaze of the camera. Abolished is the very sound of Japanese, but also any trace of an accented English. With this silencing disappears any sense for the subjectivity of the interned people themselves. They are reduced to silent bodies, elements in a *mise en scène* built by someone else.

Conclusion

“--*Of Japanese Descent*” is a fascinating example of mid-century Canadian political fantasy, one which very much reflects the ideological ambiguities of John Grierson’s own conception of the documentary as an instrument of national cohesion and greatness. Originating in the social and economic confusion of the interwar years, the film projects onto the exigency of the internment camp an idealized model of Canadian possibility which combines elements of communist and fascist ideology in an ambiguous post-liberal utopia shorn of anomie, unemployment and racial fission. At once voluntary, marketized and democratic, but also controlled, statist and morally homogenous, the liberal concentration camp is framed by the film as a work of modernist political art which resolves many of the extant social tensions operative in mid-century Canadian culture.

It is important to note, however, that this film does not merely model a possible systemic variation on existing Canadian liberalism, but also functions as a mechanism of policy intended to facilitate concretely the project of assimilation within the terms of the existing order. In this sense it is an incredibly ambivalent film. Though internment is a gesture of extreme separation—one caught up in classic fascist protocols of racial purity as well as liberal narrations of national patrimony and settlement—the camp as envisioned by the film is also the site for a managed reconciliation between the nation and its Other. Separation, in other words, paradoxically creates the conditions for the possibility of reintegration into the national whole, the space of the camp styled less as the site of extermination or even mere containment, and more as a voluntary acculturation in which the “Japanese” are transitioned into a deeper, irreversible Canadianness. Interestingly, this is a reconciliation which at no point involves actual contact between white Canadians and the Japanese themselves: it is as if the latter only needed contact with the purifying exigency of the wilderness to spontaneously evolve the skills and habits needed to be “properly” Canadian.

“--*Of Japanese Descent*” ends by paternalistically enjoining the Canadian public to the fulfillment of their national duty. Viewers are asked, as it were, to help participate as citizens in crafting a “solution” to the Japanese “problem.”¹⁰ The narrator explains that, “Like people all over the world, there are the good, the bad and the indifferent. The *problem* they [the Japanese Canadians] represent has been *solved* only temporarily by the war. The ultimate solution will depend on the measure of careful understanding by all Canadians” (*Descent* 1945, emphasis ours). This rhetoric evokes the xenophobic discourses of the first half of the 20th century in Canada—languages built around the “problem” of race—while simultaneously transforming the intention behind the identification of Otherness from a purely exclusionary position to one of colonial, multicultural recuperation of the Other. The NFB, in this sense, is readying the white majority for the introduction of Japanese Canadians into their communities after the war ends. “--*Of Japanese Descent*,” therefore, becomes part of a sophisticated visual management strategy, introduced by the government via the NFB, to reframe recent historical events according to imperatives resulting from the transition to a civilian society, no longer at war. Japanese Canadians had not, it is important to mention, been included in earlier NFB projects to introduce diversity, such as the 1941 Peoples of Canada series. “--*Of Japanese Descent*,” then, marks a new phase in the construction of Canadian myth through the Griersonian lens, capturing ethnic difference from an Anglo-Canadian colonial perspective that acknowledges rather than excludes difference, only to quickly subsume and domesticate it. The ambiguous construction of Japanese Canadian identity as simultaneously separate from and included within postwar Canadian identity illustrates the inception of official multiculturalism—and illustrates the colonizing impetus out of which the multicultural national project was conceived.

Japanese Canadians, once alive in enclaves complete with autonomous or semi-autonomous economic power and wielding limited forms of threatening cultural autonomy (spaces and professions they called their own) are moved by the film into an incipient multicultural frame which has already shifted the definition of culture from a people’s entire way of life to a very limited register of specific activities (rituals, dances, language, food and so forth). This is a remarkable point which brings us to an obviously disconcerting observation: that it is precisely the liberal concentration camp which comes to be fantasized in mid-century Canadian culture as the ideal (or even necessary) bridge between an older regime of white nationalist normativity and an inchoate, economically productive multiculturalism (that is still somehow one or whole). In other words, it is in the concentration camp, under the total control offered by sequestration, that the figure of a modernist state liberalism (or post-liberalism), one which integrates difference without utterly exterminating it, is optimally articulated.

The need for this imaginary solution can be understood by taking into account that in the 1940s it is not yet possible to think of an intercultural nation held together by nothing more than the bonds of atomized commerce itself. Still imagined as

necessary was some sense of shared national destiny and history, the bonds of language and culture. The idea that a nation could be unified precisely through its own atomization—a neoliberal hypothesis famously signaled in Margaret Thatcher’s claim that there is “no such thing as society” (1987)—was still very far away from the political imaginary of the time.

What should fascinate us about this important mid-century Canadian text is the way the liberal concentration camp stands at the ambiguous intersection between an older imagination of the nation as spiritual (Hegelian) whole and a later, tolerant, multicultural order not yet aware of the ways neoliberalism will come to fill the void introduced into national spirit and unity by globalization. On this imbroglia linking Canadian multiculturalism, the nation and the stark figure of the (exceptional) liberal concentration camp, a great deal of scholarly work remains to be done. Agamben has argued that it is not the city, but the (Nazi) concentration camp that is the “fundamental bio-political paradigm of the West” (1998: 181). It may, in fact, be the case that the concentration camp’s liberal variant, the camp dressed up as an inoffensive Canadian town, offers the better model for contemporary forms of bio-political regulation and control.

Notes

1. This is quoted from Bentley’s article. The original citation is as follows: Scott, F. R. “The State of Work as Art.” R. R. Scott Fonds. MG30 D211, box 82, file 24. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
2. In Canada, the term “internment” has become synonymous with the Second World War experiences of Japanese Canadians subjected to civil rights abuses motivated by racist government policies. While this term is useful, insofar as it signifies a specific Canadian cultural referent, it is also highly problematic as it elides the multiple policies and complex experiences of the 23,000 Japanese Canadians who were forcibly removed from the West Coast after Pearl Harbour to detention centres, road camps, tuberculosis sanatoriums, farms in the interior and “internment” camps or towns, and then again obliged to relocate post-war—either deported to Japan or dispersed across Eastern Canada. BC politician Ian Mackenzie’s 1944 slogan was, “No Japs from the Rockies to the seas.” Deportation was euphemistically referred to as “repatriation,” regardless of the fact that some deportees were Canadian-born, never having been to Japan. It should also be noted that during the war, “internment” was not the official term used to refer to the mass relocation, because it is against the Geneva Convention to detain (intern) citizens without a trial, and Japanese Canadians were not accorded due process of law. In contravention of international law, Japanese Canadians were forced to pay for their illegal detainment. Cognizant of these complex historical realities, we have opted to use the term “internment,” as it is culturally understood in the Canadian context, but with the understanding that this term refers to a complex set of experiences.
3. As Joyce Nelson has already argued, there is reason to believe the Canadian government had knowledge of the German concentration camps, and yet they did not act. In fact, MacKenzie King’s cabinet remained silent on “the Jewish question,” and the Canadian immigration department refused to accept Jewish refugees up to and during the war.

These government policies and practices align with the “NFB’s wartime silence on Nazi racial policy and persecution” (1988: 125).

4. According to archival research by Robert Aitken (*n.d.*), this appears in correspondence dated January 17, 1943, from Dallas Jones to Ross Mclean (assistant to John Grierson).

5. By spring 1944, two prisoners, Vrba and Wetzler, had successfully escaped from Auschwitz-Birkenau and the resulting report warning of Nazi plans to kill 800,000 Jews from Hungary was circulating in Europe. By summer 1944, Soviet soldiers had entered several camps, including Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, and on January 27, 1945, Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau followed by Stutthof, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrueck. British forces liberated Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen in the spring of 1945. Starting in the spring of 1945, U.S. forces liberated Buchenwald, Mittelbau, Flossenbuerg, Dachau and Mauthausen (Linn 2004: 4).

6. According to Aitken (*n.d.*), this appears in correspondence dated February 25, 1944, from Dallas Jones to Mr. A. H. Brown, Department of Labour Ottawa.

7. The term “repatriation” was a euphemism, given that some of the deportees to Japan were born in Canada and were being sent to a country they had never seen.

8. Locke’s actual quote is, “But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence” (191).

9. The term “rehabilitate” was used in the aforementioned BCSC report, specifically in reference to the “final relocation and rehabilitation of the whole Japanese-Canadian population” (1942: 18). However, it must be noted that this word is typically used in reference either to recovery from a medical condition or injury, or in relationship to transformation due to incarceration. Both these problematic associations are also explicitly made in the film itself to justify illegal government policies.

10. This rhetoric is, of course, reminiscent of Nazism. Ann Gomer Sunahara, in *The Politics of Racism* (1981), details the commonalities between Canadian and German government rhetorics. She explains that throughout the 1930s, “while Nazi propagandists had been promoting the ‘big lie’ of a Jewish conspiracy to overthrow Germany, B. C.’s public figures had promoted the ‘big lie’ of a Japanese conspiracy to overthrow British Columbia” (Sunahara 1981: 30).

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