

# Observatoire du documentaire Documentary Network

***Documentary Film:  
Art form and  
Projection of democracy***

Brief submitted to the  
**Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

**Canadian Film Industry**

Note: The Documentary Network would like to appear at the Committee's public hearings in 2005.

February 2005

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2600 PIERRE-DUPUY AVENUE, SUITE 206 \* MONTREAL, QUEBEC \* H3C 3R6  
TEL: 514 878 0588 \* FAX: 514 878 1597 \* [lucettelupien@sympatico.ca](mailto:lucettelupien@sympatico.ca)  
<http://www.ridm.qc.ca/observatoire>

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Documentary Network recommends that:

The **Government of Canada** cancel the cuts made in 2004 to Canadian audiovisual institutions, including Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, Société Radio-Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund.

### Production

**Telefilm Canada** immediately reinstate the documentary "genre" as part of its film assistance programs, that it create an independent feature length documentary assistance project and allocate substantial funding to that project (estimated at \$5 million), starting in 2005-2006.

**Canadian Heritage** renew the Canada Feature Film Fund in April 2006 for five years, and that feature films once again assume a central position in that fund.

**Telefilm Canada**, as regards feature-length documentaries, harmonize its regulations with SODEC's feature-length documentary assistance policy, in order to facilitate the financing of films.

The **Canada Television Fund** ensure that its funding regulations maintain and increase the presence of author-driven documentaries on television.

Canadian Heritage restore to the **National Film Board of Canada** funding that is consistent with its mandate for production, broadcasting, preservation and promotion.

**Canadian Heritage**, together with the advisory group on documentary policy, establish by 2006-2007, a real Canadian documentary film assistance policy, and that it accordingly harmonize the policies of various Canadian institutions, including Telefilm, the National Film Board, the Canada Television Fund, the CBC/SRC.

As regards author-driven documentaries and creators, this documentary film assistance policy give due consideration to the crucial role of institutions and agencies such as the **Canada Council for the Arts** (projects and bursaries component) and the **Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund**.

### Broadcasting

**Société Radio-Canada** create time slots specifically for documentaries, which would be open to creative and diverse opinions, styles and formats.

The **CBC** ensure that documentary one-offs retain their preferred slot on the airwaves.

**Private broadcasters** give author-driven documentaries the prominent position the CRTC has accorded them.

### Distribution

Those federal institutions involved in distribution, specifically **Telefilm Canada** and the **Canada Council for the Arts**, develop an assistance policy for the socio-cultural distribution of documentaries, in concert with provincial authorities and the association community.

**Canadian Heritage** contribute to the establishment of a network of digital projection theatres in Canada, and that part of their programming be reserved for documentaries.

Those **institutions** that fund film production develop a common set of rules to encourage the creation of quality extra features for DVD distribution.

### Promotion

The Government of Canada provide its **embassies** and **consulates** with collections of Canadian films in order to present audiovisual works all around the world.

**Canadian Heritage** continue to support Canadian documentary festivals, in keeping with their specific needs.

**Canadian Heritage** support organizations that defend and promote documentaries.

### Ongoing training of filmmakers

**Telefilm Canada**, drawing on its training budget and in conjunction with audiovisual associations, create a flexible national mentoring program (buddy system or tutoring) for documentary directors and producers.

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## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CANADIAN HERITAGE

The current study by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage seeks essentially “to identify the extent to which the Government of Canada’s Canadian feature film policy has helped to: develop and retain talented creators; foster quality and diversity of Canadian film; build larger audiences at home and abroad; preserve and disseminate our collection of Canadian films.”

### BACKGROUND

Documentary film must be able to continue to serve its role as a defender of democracy, tolerance and open-mindedness. It must continue to address the issues, aspirations and values of our society. To do so, documentary filmmakers must have the freedom, independence and time required for the thought and creative process.

Documentary film helps build ties among the country’s various cultural communities and present an alternative point of view internationally. A country’s film industry presents its filmmakers’ views on Canada and the world and thereby counters the American hegemonic perspective.

The documentary film genre has made Canada famous around the world since the advent of cinema direct in the early 1960s. Still today, films such as *The Corporation* (2003) and *Shake Hands with the Devil: the Journey of Roméo Dallaire* (2004) are part of this great tradition, having won awards at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival. Another example is *Ce qu’il reste de nous*, which has been in movie theatres since August 13, 2004. And the many Oscars and other awards won around the world by National Film Board of Canada films confirm the international recognition of Canadian documentary film.

In financial terms, documentary film accounted for 12% of all Canadian audiovisual production in 2002-2003, which represents \$366 million in total production volume, and led to the creation of 14,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada. It is a growth industry with an average growth rate of 12% over the last seven years, as compared to 6% for productions overall.

The industrialization of filmmaking however, which has contributed to this growth, has considerably altered the framework in which the art of filmmaking is carried out. These changes pose worrisome threats to freedom of expression and artistic creation.

According to the study entitled *La Production documentaire au Québec et au Canada, Phase 2*,<sup>1</sup> the advent of specialized networks contributed to an increased demand for documentaries, but the funding has not increased accordingly. The average production budget for a documentary has actually dropped by 20% from its level in the early 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documentary Production in Québec and in Canada, Phase 2*, Kirwan Cox, 2002.

The multiplication and diversity of funding sources now required to finance a film, as well as their bureaucratic requirements, create considerable extra work for small production companies – which produce the majority of author-driven documentaries – and makes them vulnerable.

Moreover, the pyramid has now become inverted so that now it is often the broadcasters who determine the subjects and dictate to filmmakers and producers the format and even the subject and treatment of documentary films.

As a result, filmmakers have lost considerable freedom, independence and time for the thought process. A good many of the respondents in the Cox study indicated that they have been working for more than five years, that they make less than they did five years ago and that they are making films of lesser quality and on smaller budgets.

These developments are of great concern to the members of the Documentary Network<sup>2</sup> and this is why we are submitting our thoughts and recommendations to the Committee.

We sincerely hope that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage give the full consideration due to documentary film; it needs the Committee's support in order to be able to continue to bear witness to the world around us.

## **HOLISTIC VIEW OF DOCUMENTARY FILM**

The Documentary Network has worked to develop a holistic view of documentary film, that is, one that includes all elements of documentary production.

Its significant elements are the following: the direction/production of documentary films, their dissemination, distribution and promotion, and finally the training of filmmakers and audience development. Our recommendations are presented under each of these headings.

## **PRODUCTION**

Documentary production in Canada in 2002-2003 had a total value of \$366 million. According to the study, *Toute la vérité/Getting real*,<sup>3</sup> the average production budget of a documentary has dropped by 20% from the level in the early 1990s. Although budget levels are stabilizing, the consensus is that this is a very worrisome development. A number of institutions invest in documentary production and all have a specific and complementary role to play. That is why we consider it very unfortunate that the Government of Canada has decided to slash the budgets of all Canadian audiovisual institutions. We believe that this decision has already had and will have a disastrous effect on documentary film.

**Telefilm Canada** is a Canadian institution responsible for supporting the Canadian film industry.

*"The Corporation provides financial assistance and strategic leverage to the industry in producing high-quality works - e.g. feature films, drama series, documentaries, children's shows, variety/performing arts programs, and new*

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<sup>2</sup> A description of the Observatoire du documentaire / Documentary Network is provided at the end of this brief.

<sup>3</sup> *Toute la vérité/Getting real*, study conducted by Nordicity on behalf of DOC (Documentary Organization of Canada), 2004, page 10.

*media products - that reflect Canadian society, including its linguistic duality and cultural diversity.*"<sup>4</sup>

Surprisingly, production assistance for feature-length documentaries destined for movie theatres is not part of Telefilm's programs.

As early as 2001, the lobby group *Urgence long métrage documentaire* called for the establishment of a feature-length documentary production fund, with a financial commitment from a distributor. The group also submitted a petition signed by 192 professional filmmakers to Canadian Heritage, Telefilm Canada, the NFB and SODEC. In 2003, SODEC responded to this need by establishing an assistance program for feature-length documentaries destined for movie theatres, with a financial commitment from a distributor.

It should be recalled that documentary film is the founding and triggering part of our national film industry. With documentaries now becoming incredibly popular again with audiences in Quebec, Canada and around the world, a program is urgently needed to provide funding for a significant number of feature-length documentaries destined for movie theatres.

We appreciate what the new Executive Director of Telefilm Canada, Wayne Clarkson, said on Prime Time, in February 2005:

*"I would add the need for funding in support of feature-length documentaries. No one would deny that documentaries helped build our early reputation on the world stage, and continue to capture hearts and minds around the globe, as evidenced by Peter Raymont's award-winning Shake Hands with the Devil."*

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- Telefilm Canada immediately reinstate the documentary "genre" as part of its film assistance programs, that it create an independent feature-length documentary assistance project and allocate substantial funding for that project (estimated at \$5 million), starting in 2005-2006.
- The Canada Feature Film Fund be renewed in April 2006 for five years, and that feature films once again assume a central position in that fund.
- Telefilm Canada harmonize its regulations with SODEC's feature-length documentary assistance policy, in order to facilitate the financing of films.

The **Canadian Television Fund (CTF)** is a major source of funding for documentaries in Canada. In 2002-2003, the CTF provided \$48 million for productions to all Canadian broadcasters.

*"The spirit and intent of the CTF is to support the production and broadcast of a specific type of culturally significant television and film production. These productions speak to Canadians about themselves, their culture, their issues, their concerns and their stories. They reflect the lives of Canadians across the country and reveal Canadians and their society to the viewer."*<sup>5</sup>

In the **CTF's** funding envelope for 2002-2003, documentary film accounted for 61% of productions, 38% of all broadcast hours but just 18% of the funding allocated.

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from Telefilm Canada's mission, <http://www.telefilm.gc.ca/01/11.asp>

<sup>5</sup> *Guidelines 2005-2006*, Canada Television Fund, Page 1.

The recent changes to the CTF guidelines (broadcaster performance envelope stream) have affected documentary film, although it is difficult to assess the exact impact at this time. Studies currently ongoing through the advisory group on documentary policy will provide more information and we will then be able to submit specific recommendations next year. In the meantime, the CTF must remain vigilant to protect and promote the author-driven documentary.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- The Canada Television Fund funding regulations serve to maintain and increase the presence of author-driven documentaries on television.

Does the **National Film Board** need an introduction? This institution maintains the great tradition of author-driven documentaries and has the expertise in this field in Canada. Through its prestige and bold productions, the NFB serves to counterbalance the growing importance of the industrial documentary. The NFB does not compete with the private sector; it is the centre of documentary research and development in Canada, the laboratory, the experimentation ground, the place where the most "risky" films are made. Once again, we are very concerned about the government's cuts to the NFB.

The Government Film Commissioner and Chairperson of the NFB, Jacques Bensimon, stated recently:

*"Because we reject the brave new world of cultural homogenization at the National Film Board, we will continue to take risks so a variety of voices can be heard. We will continue to give passionate filmmakers a place to call home. And we will continue to define our role as a producer of quality films to counter the proliferation of assembly-line programming."*<sup>6</sup>

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- Canadian Heritage restore to the National Film Board funding that is consistent with its mandate for production, broadcasting, preservation and promotion.

The **Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund** (CIFVF) receives applications from filmmakers who generally do not have access to Telefilm and CTF programs. The projects by these filmmakers, whether they are novices or seasoned professionals, are highly socio-cultural or educational and are intended for non-commercial distribution. In 2003, the government subsidy to the CIFVF was cut considerably, thereby reducing its ability to provide assistance for first works, a field that is especially vulnerable but nevertheless essential.

Since the spring of 2004, the Documentary Network and the documentary community have been working with federal and provincial institutions as part of the **advisory group on documentary policy**. This is the first time that all stakeholders have sat together to consider the future of documentary film in Canada.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- Canadian Heritage, together with the advisory group on documentary policy, establish for 2006-2007, a real Canadian documentary film assistance policy, and that it accordingly harmonize the policies of various Canadian institutions, including Telefilm, the National Film Board, the Canada Television Fund, the CBC/SRC.

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<sup>6</sup> Speech by Jacques Bensimon, before the Canadian Studies Association Conference, held in May 2003, in Montreal.

- As regards author-driven documentaries and creators, this documentary film assistance policy give due consideration to the crucial role of institutions and agencies such as the Canada Council for the Arts (projects and bursaries component) and the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund.

## **BROADCASTING**

*"By virtue of its CRTC license conditions, Radio-Canada is required to fund documentaries by private producers every year. Zone Libre has successfully performed this role since it was established in 1998. All the major public television networks in the world work the same way, and the BBC, TF1 France 2 or 3 or 5 television networks all broadcast this type of documentary, and much more of them than Radio-Canada does."*<sup>7</sup> [Translation]

On the public air waves, which French researcher Dominique Wolton describes as one of the most unifying social forces, documentaries play a fundamental role in defending democracy, tolerance and open-mindedness. The Documentary Network recognizes that Société Radio-Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation attach great importance to and devote constant attention to documentary film.

We believe however that the impact of the documentary must be enhanced in a number of ways. A more favourable environment could be established to afford documentaries greater visibility and influence, including the following:

- Time slots specifically for documentaries would give viewers a regular schedule, thereby increasing audience loyalty.
- Complementary programming (forums, debates, author interviews etc.) to stimulate viewers to think about issues related to the documentary.
- Catchy in-house advertising to remind viewers of the prominent position of documentaries on public television.

Moreover, with respect to the CBC, the Documentary Network expects that one-offs will continue to occupy a prominent position alongside series and documentary mini-series.

When Canada adopted a cultural policy for broadcasting, it created the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), whose mandate stipulates that the Canadian broadcasting system should:

*"encourage the development of Canadian expression by providing a wide range of programming that reflects Canadian attitudes, opinions, values and artistic creativity, by displaying Canadian talent in entertainment programming and by offering information and analysis concerning Canada and other countries from a Canadian point of view."*

The CRTC accordingly awards public and private broadcasters the privilege of using the public airwaves. In order to achieve its objectives, the CRTC may in turn impose conditions on broadcasters. The inclusion of author-driven documentaries is one of these.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Lalande, Director General of Programs (Information), Radio-Canada Television, as quoted in *Le Devoir*, February 10, 2005.

- The Government of Canada cancel the cuts made to public television (CBC/Radio-Canada) in 1994.
- Radio-Canada create time slots specifically for documentaries, which would be open to creative and diverse opinions, styles and formats.
- The CBC ensure that documentary one-offs retain their preferred slot on the airwaves.
- Private broadcasters give author-driven documentaries the prominent position the CRTC has accorded them.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

The distribution of documentaries is so worrisome that the Documentary Network intends to hold a forum on the subject in November 2005. On one hand, there are fewer and fewer documentary distributors in Canada, not to mention that most documentaries receive socio-cultural rather than commercial distribution, thus a very specific kind of distribution company. Secondly, it is more the exception than the rule for documentaries to be commercially successful in conventional movie theatres.<sup>8</sup> Changes must therefore be made to current programs (as per our recommendations to Telefilm Canada, under Production) and alternatives must be explored.

Since documentaries are primarily digitally produced and transferring them to 35 mm is very costly, avenues for distribution to movie theatres other than conventional distribution must be explored. Through the efforts of the group DocuZone, in the Netherlands, the Dutch Film Fund has contributed to the creation of 10 digital projection theatres, and specific time slots at these theatres are set aside for documentaries. The UK Film Council, for its part, is currently establishing a network of 250 digital projection theatres, with time set aside for non-Hollywood productions. The NFB and Telefilm Canada have commissioned a study on digital projection theatres and we are eagerly awaiting the results of this study. It should be emphasized that the funding to set up such a network should not come from the envelope earmarked for audiovisual production.

DVD distribution also has its own requirements. In addition to the main feature, DVDs include extra features such as biographical information, interviews and documentation that are becoming increasingly sophisticated. The cost of producing these extra features has not yet been recognized as eligible expenses in film production budgets.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- The federal institutions involved in distribution, specifically Telefilm Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts, together with provincial bodies and associations, develop an assistance policy for the socio-cultural distribution of documentaries.
- Canadian Heritage contribute to the establishment of a network of digital projection theatres in Canada, and that part of their programming be earmarked for documentaries.
- Institutions that fund film production and distribution develop a common set of rules to encourage the creation of high-quality extra features to be distributed by DVD.

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<sup>8</sup> The feature-length documentary, *The Corporation*, by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan, was very successful, earning \$1.5 million at the box office in Canada (and \$3 million US around the world), which means it ranks among the top five Canadian English-language movie releases (including fiction) in the last three years.



## **PROMOTION**

There are a number of aspects involved in the promotion of documentary film.

For instance, the Government itself could play a key role in promotion Canadian films abroad by providing its embassies and consulates collections of Canadian films that would available to the audiovisual industry, students and film-goers from all countries.

There are a number of film festivals in Canada that are devoted to documentary film or that feature documentaries prominently. These include the *Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal*, Hot Docs, the Vancouver International Film Festival. These festivals make an active contribution to raising the profile and recognition of documentary film.

Other organizations (DOC, Documentary Network) are working to improve the production and broadcast conditions for documentary film in order to reinforce its role as a defender of democracy, tolerance and open-mindedness, while also helping documentary filmmakers to continue addressing our society's issues, aspirations and values.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- The Government provide its embassies and consulates with collections of Canadian films in order to present audiovisual works all around the world.
- The Government continue to support Canadian documentary festivals, in accordance with their specific needs.
- The Government support organizations that defend and promote documentaries

## **ONGOING TRAINING OF FILMMAKERS**

In 2004, the Documentary Network contributed to a study on the training of documentary filmmakers, carried out by the Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC). The conclusions will be released to the public in the spring of 2005. Moreover, last November, as part of the *Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal*, the Documentary Network held a forum for documentary film professionals.

The Forum and the CHRC study pointed to the need to build bridges between the academic and the professional worlds, between the apprentice and the seasoned professional. Passing on the love of the craft and sharing experience are key aspects of training documentary filmmakers.

The Documentary Network recommends that:

- Telefilm Canada, drawing on its training budget and in conjunction with audiovisual associations, create a flexible national mentoring program (buddy system or tutoring) for documentary directors and producers.

## **AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT**

From early childhood, children are bombarded with millions of moving images, on television, at the movie theatre and on computer screens. School curriculums still teach children, and rightly so, to read, write and do arithmetic. We believe however that children should from a very young age also learn to decode images and audiovisual messages. Similarly, teenagers should learn about films and audiovisual productions, just as they learn about literature or the visual or performing arts.

Since education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the Documentary Network will not make any comments or recommendations here on building audiences and will instead send them to the appropriate institutions. We would however like to draw the Committee's attention to this very important topic for the future of young people.

The Documentary Network wishes to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for their attention.

### **Acronyms**

APFTQ	Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec
AQTIS	Association québécoise des techniciens de l'image et du son
ARRQ	Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec
IMAA	Independent Media Arts Alliance
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CFTPA	Canadian Film and Television Production Association
CHRC	Cultural Human Resources Council
CRTC	Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
QCDGC	Quebec Council of the Directors Guild of Canada
DOC	Documentary Organization of Canada
CIFVC	Canadian Independent Film and Video Caucus
CTF	Canadian Television Fund
DCH	Department of Canadian Heritage
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
RIDM	Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal
SARTeC	Société des auteurs de radio, télévision et cinéma
SODEC	Société de développement des entreprises culturelles du Québec
SRC	Société Radio-Canada

# Observatoire du documentaire

## Documentary Network

Created under the auspices of the *Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montreal* (RIDM) in 2003, the Documentary Network brings together the main audiovisual associations in Quebec and Canada, providing a meeting point for reflection and discussion in order to ensure that documentary film retains its essential position in the world of cinema.

The Documentary Network aims to ensure that documentary plays its rightful role in the defence of democracy, tolerance, and open-mindedness. It encourages people to talk about and debate films that tackle the issues, aspirations and values of society.

The Documentary Network works to improve the conditions for the creation and production of quality documentary film.

The Documentary Network has held an annual forum since November 2002. It publishes studies and briefs that may be consulted on its Web site.

The Documentary Network receives financial assistance from the following institutions and associations:

Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA)  
Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec (APFTQ)  
Association québécoise des techniciens de l'image et du son (AQTIIS)  
Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec (ARRQ)  
Canadian Film and Television Production Association (CFTPA)  
Quebec Council of the Directors Guild of Canada (QCDGC)  
Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC)  
Fondation Daniel Langlois  
National Film Board of Canada (NFB)  
Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal (RIDM)  
Société des auteurs de radio, télévision et cinéma (SARTEC)

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Respectively Producer, French Program, and Director, English Program  
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*Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal* (RIDM)

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that even though a representative of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) is a member of the Documentary Network's Board of Directors, submissions by the Documentary Network do not in any way represent the positions of the NFB.