

FILMMAKING AND THE POLITICS OF REMOTENESS:

The Genesis of the Fogo Process on Fogo Island, Newfoundland

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Abstract

The Fogo Process was an early project in participatory media first developed on Fogo Island, Newfoundland in the late 1960s. Through a series of experiments in the political uses of interactive film and video Fogo islanders resisted resettlement of their island community and an imposed, top-down 'modernisation' of its way of life. Today, these early experiments with remote island populations raise interesting questions about the politics of media. In an age of subject generated media, when anyone anywhere can produce and distribute video, what is the relation between political collectivity and our ability to 'cognitively map' our place in the larger geo-political system?

Keywords

Fogo Process, subject generated media, media and remote populations, National Film Board of Canada, Newfoundland

Introduction

In the late 1960s The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) carried out a series of experiments with political uses of interactive film and video in remote, underdeveloped places. The idea was to train isolated populations with little exposure to media in the use of film (and later video) so that they could create a collective image of themselves and their social problems, which they might then exchange with distant decision makers, such as governments and financial institutions. This early experiment in participatory media became known as the "Fogo Process" because it was first developed on Fogo Island, Newfoundland. The experiments on Fogo stand out as an early example of a community island project that used innovative media practices to resist what seemed to be an otherwise unstoppable movement toward resettlement of their community and an imposed, top-down 'modernisation' of the island's way of life. Villagers on Fogo eventually resisted government plans to resettle them and formed a cooperative to run their fish plant.

The problems that the Fogo films addressed were directly related to its status as a small coastal island in complex political and economic relations with another larger island (Newfoundland), which was undergoing the twin forces of decolonisation and modernisation. The Fogo Process was later exported with great success to North

Crocker – The Fogo Process

American indigenous reserves, rural India, Bangladesh and other places. It has since been embraced by development agencies around the world and is widely regarded now as the forerunner of many more recent developments in participatory communication and subject generated film and video.¹

What can we learn from the Fogo Process now in the age of new super-light nomadic technologies that seem to render nearness and distance obsolescent? This successful use of film and video to address problems of 'information poverty' and help islanders 'cognitively map' their situation was not only a result of the technology made available to them but of the way that it was integrated into their lives. For this reason we still have much to learn from the Fogo Process. Because the Fogo experiments concerned the social and political uses of media, they raise a question that has become more rather than less pertinent: what are media good for? As the means of communication become more widely available, what can we do with them? Now that it becomes possible to represent everything, why would we? For what purpose? The Fogo Process points us to the most basic problem in the politics of media. What role can media play in the formation of collective, political structures?

To understand the genesis of the Fogo Process in Newfoundland and its export to other locations we should situate it both in the context of the kinds of social problems that were visible on Fogo and the history of various attempts to use film to promote social change. The Fogo Process responded to social and economic problems that, while not peculiar to islands, were nevertheless visible there in a more concentrated form and so, in addition to being an important chapter in the history of film, it offers us insights into media and collective action among remote populations.²

Historical background: The production of 'remoteness'

In the late 1960s Fogo Island was a remote place, geographically and socially separated from the larger system in which it participated. Fogo's isolation and its limited communication with the outside world was, however, as much a function of political economy as geography. Fogo is a small island off the northeast coast of Newfoundland that has a series of smaller islands associated with it. Like other remote parts of Newfoundland, Europeans settled Fogo because of its proximity to the rich cod fishing grounds. Much of Newfoundland's population was scattered around 6000 miles of remote bays and coves that were largely inaccessible except by sea and were often isolated from one another. This scattering of the population worked well when the economy was centered on fish production and the main transport routes were marine.

For the first several hundred years after European discovery of the island, the fishery at Newfoundland was a migratory one. Europeans laborers were carried out to these remote locations in the Spring and, with the exception of a few who stayed over to maintain fishing premises, they were sent back to Europe in the Autumn. The initial British interest in Newfoundland was in the extraction of marine resources that lay around it. Newfoundland was often thought of as a fishing station moored in the mid-Atlantic. It was a place not intended for the diverse, unstructured encounters of civil society but was reserved for specific instrumental forms of organisation; somewhat like an oilrig might be today. The British were hesitant to expend anything on the development of civil society – such as a governor, buildings, roads, jails or any of the

Crocker – The Fogo Process

basic infrastructure visible in other burgeoning colonies. For this reason, settlement of early Newfoundland was actively discouraged. Despite the restrictions of this 'retarded colonisation' as it was known, a population slowly started to emerge in Newfoundland. Visiting officials often complained that the lack of civil institutions had produced a backward, barbaric people who were unfamiliar with the basic institutions of civil society. So, from the very beginning, Newfoundland's outports were geographically and socially isolated from the larger system in which they were embedded.³

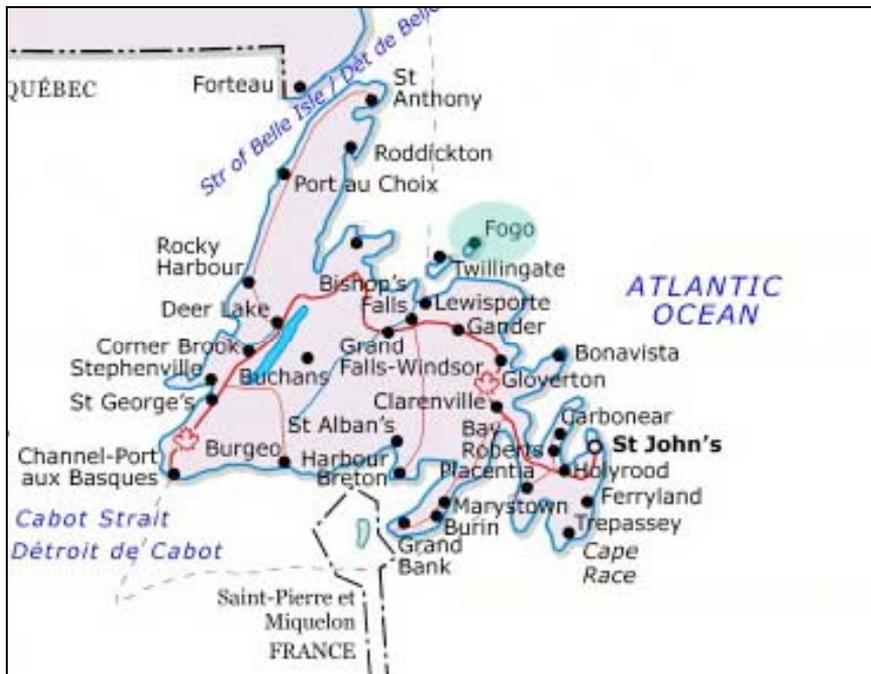


Figure 1 – Map of Newfoundland showing location of Fogo

By the early 19th Century the island had a sizeable resident population and the economy, for reasons too complex to detail here, evolved toward what is known as a 'truck system'.⁴ Truck was a near feudal and cashless system of exchange. Merchants who operated this system did not directly control the productive activities of fishermen; they simply advanced credit in the Spring on the understanding that fishermen would sell their fish to them in the Autumn. At that time, when accounts were settled, the price paid for fish and the price owing for supplies already advanced were determined. Apart from these moments of exchange, fishermen were allowed and required even, to arrange their affairs as they wished in order to fish and produce the goods needed to pay off their debts. Who worked with whom, where, when, under what conditions, how crews were arranged, what women did and what men did, how children were raised, all these details of daily living were left to villages and became the elements of a 'folk culture' that was centered on the production of fish and the arrangement of life to that end. There were of course hierarchies and inequalities within a village, but these seemed to be self-generated and organised in a 'traditional' framework of village culture. Merchant credit

Crocker – The Fogo Process

encouraged local leaders in these very different places to make use of their distinctiveness and separation from the system, at the same time that it continually threatened to undermine them with weak prices and no protection from the vagaries of the world market. So, the economics of the system appeared to support an 'autonomous' way of life separate from the modernity of Europe when, in truth, the wealth produced in remote corners of Newfoundland directly linked it to the world system and financed factories in Manchester, sugar plantations in Barbados, palaces in India and military expeditions to Africa. In this way, the truck system of exchange played a part in the production of isolation and 'remoteness' that was certainly as important as the geographical isolation of Newfoundland and its outlying islands.

In 1949 Newfoundland gave up its status as an independent nation and joined Canada. It then went through many of the same changes taking place in other former colonies. The semi-autonomous way of life that had formed around truck exchange now became an anachronism, and an obstacle even, in the way of the new project of post war modernisation. The geographical separation, the sense of autonomy, the peculiar dialects and lexicon, the range of specialised skills - such as boatbuilding, house construction and subsistence production - that had made it possible to eke out a living under the truck system now became an impediment to the new program of modernisation. Whatever remained of the older island culture now seemed to be a useless, outdated appendage. And just as the British had refused to fund civil society in early Newfoundland, the new Canadian government refused to support a way of life that had no economic future. For the outlying islands around Newfoundland, it was a particularly difficult time. One solution to the problem of remoteness, developed by the Canadian and Newfoundland governments was the (still) deeply resented program of resettlement, which involved the forced movement of communities from isolated outports to 'growth centres', where modern infrastructure and factory-based wage labour employment were to be made available. In 1957 Premier Joey Smallwood announced plans to resettle as many as 50,000 people from remote settlements that had, as he put it, "no great future". By 1965, more than 1000 communities had been moved. Many of these were islands on the northeast and south coasts of Newfoundland. By the late 1960s several smaller islands around Fogo had already been resettled. A powerful set of photographs from that time shows villagers floating their homes across the inlets and ocean channels to their new destinations. In one especially poignant picture a house sinks as it is floated from Deep Bay to 'Fogo proper', giving us a powerful metaphor for the villagers' attempts to integrate their existing lives into the new industrial future that they were being directed toward.

On Fogo itself, there was a general sense of social decline. More than 60% of the population depended on welfare. The fishery was in a state of crisis and the inshore technologies with which the fishermen plied their trade were becoming obsolete. Basic services such as road repair, maintenance of water and sewage, school infrastructure and electrical lines were in a state of deterioration. Government was slow to commit funds to these developments in an effort, many thought, to force residents to resettle.

Here then is the general context for understanding the genesis of the Fogo Process. The life that had grown up around merchant credit did not easily adapt to the new massive project of modernisation and reconstruction that accompanied Newfoundland's confederation with Canada. This problem was not specific to Fogo, though it seems to have been given there in an especially concentrated form. As political and economic

Crocker – The Fogo Process

forces are separated from the places they regulate, it is often difficult for communities to represent the larger - and largely abstract social processes - that affect everyday life. The social and geographic remoteness of Fogo made it difficult for the population to 'cognitively map' their place in the new postcolonial world order and to participate in the changes affecting them.⁶

Modernisation and 'Cognitive Mapping'

The NFB's Fogo project was one of the most interesting and innovative attempts to understand what role film might play in addressing the problem. Even in its simplest forms, film has always had a 'sociological' importance since it can present a mass of details about distant places in a way far more immediate than print and other media. The Lumière brothers, the inventors of cinema popularised their cinematograph in the 1890s by traveling around the world's major cities and displaying 'actualities' which presented visual evidence of everyday life in other parts of the world. The Russian film-maker Dziga Vertov thought it would be possible to develop a universal film language (*kino-Pravda*) that, unlike print based media, would not be bound to particular languages or communities and would be intelligible to any viewer anywhere. In the same spirit, Vertov's *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* (known in English as *Man with a Movie Camera*) (1929) was made with 'real people' to document life in Russia. Later the Italian 'neo-realist' filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica began to film live action in the streets based on scripts that addressed actual social and economic problems.

Until the invention of small portable video cameras in the 1960s, though, the technical and financial demands of film tended to make it a centralising force. Film images circulated from metropolitan centers to peripheral areas in a way that paralleled the commodity market. In remote places the images provided information about distant worlds to which local populations were articulated through a complex political and economic circuitry. But they did not necessarily make the local situation more intelligible, or provide any significant resources for collective action. In fact, film images arrived as pre-formed products whose origins were as mysterious as the frozen meals and mass-produced commodities that circled the globe.

In his 2002 show 'To the Wall', the Newfoundland comedian Andy Jones tells a true story about his father, who was one of the first film distributors in Newfoundland in the 1950s.⁷ People from the remote parts of the island (to whom he had already sold film projectors) would write to his office in St. John's to request films. Many of the remote outports (as they are known in Newfoundland) were accessible only by boat, and remained largely isolated from the rest of the world. For these communities, the film image provided a whole new source of sensations from, and information about, the wider world. Films, however, were not the only things unavailable in the remote parts of the island. The general range of commodities common in more cosmopolitan places was also inaccessible. Often, customers in remote places would include a note in their order requesting Mr. Jones to purchase in St. John's items which were not available in the outports, and to ship them along with the films. "Could you please send a print of *Witness for the Prosecution* and a pair of winter boots?" One man sent in three lengths of string, which corresponded to the dress size of his daughter, and requested that the distributor arrange for a wedding dress to be fitted according to the sizes and sent in the

Crocker – The Fogo Process

package with the film. The story shows the common link between the circulation of commodities and images. Film images, like commodities, arrived from some distant unknown place. Film conveyed the image of the outside world in the same way that the market conveyed goods. This distance of the film image from the reality of the place in which it was screened could ultimately serve to reinforce a sense of separation and isolation from the system.

Film Activities Among the Poor: The Genesis of the Fogo Process at the NFB

The Fogo Process is a more complex phenomenon than any of the documentary forms that preceded it because it was not only the informational content of the finished product, but the process of filmmaking itself that was employed as a tool of social change. This meant that it would not only provide a 'cognitive map' of the distant places to which Newfoundland was articulated. The activity of film making itself might provide a form of collective action as well. In this way, the Fogo experiments carried the mandate of the NFB in new and interesting directions. The initial purpose of the NFB was to create films about social problems that would make Canada better known to Canadians. In the 1960s there was an increasing desire that the films not only document social issues in communities, but play an active role in them as well. In other words, instead of an outside film industry making top down films 'about' people, could films be made by the people about their own social problems?⁸

The NFB's 'Challenge for Change' program represented the emergence of a new kind of socially engaged film that offered a very different method for the production and reception of film. The program aimed to produce three new kinds of films:

- Films for government departments and the general public explaining a problem;
- Films for social workers and change-agents; and
- "Film activities among the poor" (Jones, 1981: 159)

The 1967 NFB film *The Things I Cannot Change* was one of the first films made in this new program and is often thought of as a forerunner to the films created on Fogo. It was a film meant to explain the social problem of poverty to a wide Canadian audience. The film documented the trials and tribulations of a Montreal family caught in a cycle of poverty. When it appeared, it caused the family great embarrassment and they became the subject of ridicule in their own neighborhood. *The Things I Cannot Change (1967)* did not achieve its own goals but it did provide a valuable lesson for all future "film activities among the poor": if film was to be a catalyst for social change it would have to be not only "about" the poor but "by" them as well.

Producer and director Colin Low, who headed up the Fogo team, wanted to give the people a more active opportunity to define and represent their social problems. So, instead of simply using the community as material for film, Low wished to place the tools of filmmaking in the service of the collective expression of the community. In Newfoundland, Low worked with Donald Snowden, a community development worker who ran the MUN's Extension Service. This was an outreach branch of the university,

Crocker – The Fogo Process

which helped to promote social and economic change in rural Newfoundland. Both Low and Snowden cite the appearance of the 1965 Economic Council of Canada's *Report on Poverty in Canada* as a direct catalyst of their work on Fogo. The Council's report was essentially a document about urban poverty in central Canada that simply transposed its findings on to rural Canada. It defined poverty as net income of less than \$4000.00. Snowden said that it displayed the distance of central bureaucrats from the problems of rural Canada. In rural Newfoundland, Snowden recognised many other dimensions of poverty not mentioned in the report. These included what he called a poverty of information and organisation. Snowden suggested to Bob Phillips, head of the Privy Council of Canada and the Trudeau era War on Canadian Poverty program that they sponsor a series of films that would explore the reality of poverty in rural Newfoundland. A year later, the NFB decided to begin its proposed 'film activities among the poor' in rural Newfoundland.⁹

Colin Low, who was chosen for the project, was widely regarded as one of the most talented of the young filmmakers at the NFB. Low toured Newfoundland with Snowden and together they eventually chose Fogo Island as the site of the first experiments. On Fogo, five thousand people lived in ten communities in relative isolation from each other, and were further divided again by religious denomination. The communities had neither a common voice amongst themselves, nor an effective channel of communication with the government to address the enormous political and economic forces bearing down on them.

Low and producer John Kenemy initially intended simply to make a documentary about poverty and in the process teach young Newfoundlanders the art of filmmaking so that they could then make films themselves. They did not yet envision any of the feedback techniques of participatory communication for which the Fogo Process would become famous. On Fogo, Low and Snowden worked with a community development officer, or 'social animator' Fred Earle. Earle was working there for MUN for over a year, well before there had been any talk of a film project. His job was to help the community to identify and define social problems about which they could communicate with each other and with the government in St. John's. The field worker spent time in the community getting to know the people and their problems. He tried to determine what kinds of information or resources the people required, and who might be a good spokesperson for a given community. When the NFB arrived on Fogo, it was Earle who helped introduce them to the community and helped the community to decide what social problems would be the subject of their films. The field worker was thus seen as a mediating link between the filmmakers and the community. This role was quickly recognised as a central, defining element of what became known as the Fogo Process. When films were screened in communities, for example, it was the field worker who helped lead discussion. In fact, in subsequent 'Fogo' style projects it was not the filmmaker but the field worker/social animator who took on the role traditionally assigned to the director of documentary films. It was the field worker who helped focus and guide communication on the part of the community, and it was hoped that field workers might in turn bring films (and later videotapes) to other isolated communities so that people could recognise and reflect on common problems.

Low produced 28 short films on Fogo. The titles give a sense of the kinds of material they covered. These included: *The McGraths at Home and Fishing*, *The Founding of the Cooperative*, *Citizens' Discussions*, *Tom Best on Cooperatives* and *Discussion of*

Crocker – The Fogo Process

Welfare. In addition to films that dealt with difficult social problems, there were also more lyrical productions such as *The Songs of Chris Cobb*, *Jim Decker's Party* and *The Children of Fogo*.¹⁰ Low and Snowden learned to intersperse screenings of uplifting, affirmative films such as *Children of Fogo* with material on more somber and difficult topics, such as those that dealt with the co-operative, or fishermen-welfare relations. This, it was thought, would help initiate community discussion and dialogue after the films were shown. Above all, they wanted to avoid bombarding people with too much serious material that might deaden the atmosphere.

Community input into the editing of material and feedback between the community and decision makers are now recognised as key ingredients of the Fogo Process. However, neither of these was originally intended when the NFB arrived in Fogo. After several months of shooting, Low decided that it would be beneficial if people could see some of the material produced. He screened material for the communities and received feedback. Only one short film on education in Fogo was cut because people objected to the tone of the interview. Nevertheless, the precedent of community feedback and control of the image that became a hallmark of participatory film and video was born.

The development of a 'feedback loop' between the communities and government was also fortuitous. Originally, the film project was co-sponsored by the NFB and Memorial MUN. When the material was first screened for Lord Taylor, the university president, and to the board of the NFB, Taylor expressed some concern that it would not be well received by the government and might cause problems for the University. A screening was eventually arranged for government officials and university academics. The material was well received. A film was made of the fisheries ministers' response to the films and when this was shown on the island, the feedback that would become hallmark of the Fogo Process was in place.

The people of Fogo successfully resisted government attempts to resettle them and formed their own successful fishing co-operative. To what extent this can be directly attributed to the Fogo Process is a matter of debate, but it cannot be denied that the filming process played a large role in opening channels of communication both among island communities and between the island and the government.

Filmmaking as political activity

What was really unique about the events that transpired on Fogo was that the process of filmmaking became more important than the actual films produced. What was political about these films was not only the messages they generated about specific problems but the sense of community and cooperation necessary to make the films. In fact, it is clear that the importance of the process of community involvement and politicisation - of which I will say more in a moment - had a direct effect on the kinds of films produced. Low claimed that the Fogo films had an important formal difference that distinguished them from most documentary images. He claimed to be making 'vertical' films. This reflected a perception that most films had a 'horizontal' structure, which consisted of a montage of scenes from different situations edited together to give an overall effect. In other words, they were based on an issue for which they collected evidence from several people. It was thought that this horizontal structure was less effective for the kind of socially engaged process that they hoped to promote on Fogo. In the traditional

Crocker – The Fogo Process

'horizontal' structure any individuals' story tended to get swallowed up as a part of a larger story, which might not be what the interviewee envisaged. Low's so-called vertical films avoided techniques of cross cutting and montage and consisted of a single film based on a single interview. Instead of making one or two regular length documentaries that cut back and forth between various speakers, Low made films about individuals whose opinions were representative of more widely shared positions in the community. In all, he made 28 short 'vertical' films, each about 10 minutes long. He later explained:

When I went to Fogo I thought that I would make one, or perhaps two or more films. But as the project developed, I found that people were much freer when I made short vertical films: each one the record of a single interview, or a single occasion. In the end I did not do any intercepting at all, because if you intercept people on the basis of issues, what usually happens is that you get one person who is all wrong, one person who is partly right, and a third person who is right. He becomes the smart guy, who puts the others down. This putting down can harm people in a community. (in Gwyn, 1972: 5)

Self Reflection and Collective Image in the Fogo Process

It is clear that the process was driving the product on Fogo, but it is not always clear what exactly that process was. There are two different elements that we should distinguish between in the Fogo Process. The first of these is relatively straightforward and concerns the establishment of channels of communication among isolated communities, and between these communities and distant decision makers. The creation of these networks of communication proved immediately effective in Fogo, throughout Newfoundland and around the world in places where print and other media were relatively absent. Having effective communication links with governments and financial institutions is crucial as the sources of power and capital become globalised, or simply more distant from the places they effect. Film is especially important in this respect in communities where the written word does not have the same currency as it does in urban areas.

There is another element of the Fogo Process that is more complex, although it is often thought to be the more empowering element of the process. It seems that everyone who has reflected on the "Fogo Process" has identified the 'empowering' effects of seeing one's life on film – or, more precisely, on screen. The effect is said to promote feelings of confidence, self worth, and better self-image all as a result of seeing yourself as others see you. This self-reflexivity, which may be the core of the Fogo Process, remains under-theorised and not clearly understood. Anthony Marcus, a psychologist who used the Fogo Process of video feedback as a therapeutic treatment of dangerous sexual offenders explained the power of self-reflection in this way:

Confronting himself on camera gradually helps a person develop an internal image of himself... Most individuals have difficulty communicating their emotional 'hang-ups' but video taping and the playback evoke a response on the emotional level. The simple device of reflecting an image magnifies the individual's self image. The emotional dilemma induced by the gap between the image on screen and the

Crocker – The Fogo Process

subjective feeling of the viewers, produces a crisis in which the person attempts to bring the two aspects into harmony, thus increasing his self-knowledge. He cannot remain aloof to himself and he is caught in the conflict between actual conduct and inner fearfulness. ...He confronts himself and remains at the same time less defensive than when someone else confronts him. (in Gwyn, 1972: 34)

In other words, screening one's image produces a division between what George Herbert Mead (1934) called the "I" and the "me": effectively my own understanding of myself and my motives, and other people's image of whom and what I am. It is necessary to recognise a distance between these two parts of the self. In the account Marcus gives here, what is valued is a greater harmony of the two. But we could equally argue, as much contemporary psychoanalytic theory does, that it is important that we be able to recognise a difference between these two elements of the self so as not be swallowed up in the socially created images that others have of us.

At any rate, the psychological (or even psycho-social) explanation is compelling but it does not explain why it is that the process seems to work better in rural places where there is little history of exposure to mass media. As a sociologist, what seems decisive to me is that individuals were able to overcome their isolation from one another and see a collective representation of their community. The creation of a sense of community depended on the ability to project a collective image where none had existed previously. I would suggest that the process of seeing oneself on film is empowering because it creates what Benedict Anderson (1983) called an "imagined community", which he claims is necessary for the formation of a sense of collectivity that exceeds one's immediate geographical location. Anderson traces modern nationalism to the emergence of 18th and 19th Century European American newspapers and novels that present information from distant places that are all thought to be part of a common national experience. In reading the newspaper, for example, people in one geographical place are made aware of the presence of others and feel that together they constitute a community - an imagined community. The effect is quite powerful. The nation is an imagined entity but one that is quite real. In fact, it is one of the few things that people are willing to die for.

In Fogo and rural Newfoundland film and video played an analogous role. The social and political organisation of rural Newfoundland militated against a strong sense of collectivity. People were geographically isolated and the 'truck' credit system pitted community against community, and even family against family.¹¹ When communities needed to react against centralising forces that treated a region or community en masse - as happened at Fogo - people had little collective sense of themselves to draw on. The Fogo films were unifying both at the level of process, in bringing the communities together through the auspices of the extension/community worker, and by providing a collective representation of the community. Through film, isolated island communities could imagine themselves as a part of a single common community. Thus, the films created an external 'virtual community' that could act as a reference point for people to give them an image of themselves. This not only aided in the development of long term community strategies, but also in smaller and important matters of community organisation. For example, in a project in Lord's Cove on the Burin Peninsula the process of self-reflection had dramatic results. Playback of a community meeting provided those present with an opportunity to view the appalling lack of participation

Crocker – The Fogo Process

and to look at their own apathy. As a result of this realisation the meeting was rescheduled, received greater participation and resulted in a new election of officers.

Working in Deep Bay, Fogo extension worker Stan Kinden found something similar:

The people in Deep Bay wanted to organize an improvement committee meeting but they couldn't get anyone to stand up and speak. So they asked me to organize a five-night workshop on public speaking, and I brought along VTR. The first night only five people would stand up and say as much as 'I'm John Jones from Deep Bay', I played the tape back - and I think a lot of people were ashamed to see themselves sitting there not saying anything; the reaction was, 'if he can do it, I can'. At the end of the third night, the last people got up and said their names. On the fifth night, we organized a mock meeting. The person who had taken three nights to say his name was the one who offered to be chairman. (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service (1972: 7)

In sum, the Fogo Process allowed people to form an ideal common image of themselves as a collectivity, something that their material conditions of life had made difficult to achieve.

The Fogo Process after Fogo

The NFB continued their Challenge for Change work in Fogo for a year and a half. They then moved onto other projects in other places in Canada and abroad. In all, the Challenge for Change program lasted for about a decade. First Nations' rights and culture became a central focus. *You are on Indian Land* (1969) was produced by an all Native American crew and dealt with treaty rights on the US Canadian border. There were also *Cree Hunters of the Mistassini* (1974) and *Our Land is our Life* (1974). Later projects involved urban problems, prison groups and even, as mentioned earlier, group therapy with dangerous sex offenders. In addition to the playback of videotape in small settings there were attempts to develop local cable community broadcasting services. But these were very different from the initial Fogo experiments since they involved broadcast to a wide anonymous audience, instead of the face-to-face discussion that characterised the original experiments in Newfoundland.¹² Colin Low and Don Snowden also collaborated on several projects in the United States. They were asked by the US Office of Economic Opportunity to carry out projects in Farmersville (California) Hartford (Connecticut) and Skyriver (Alaska). These projects did not receive the same kind of enthusiastic response. Snowden believed that this was because these places had already been bombarded by images and sounds through television and film. This suggests, as Snowden often pointed out, that the Fogo Process works best in communities that do not have access to mass media and have only restricted access to important external information.

Meanwhile, MUN created its own film unit and continued the work begun on Fogo. Snowden remained director of the extension service which now devoted a great deal of its efforts to film and video work. Harvey Best headed up the film unit of the extension

Crocker – The Fogo Process

service and Tony Williamson was head of the community development branch. Paul McLeod began to work with the group in various projects and later on many international projects. It was the MUN crew who exported the process to Africa and Asia. In fact, while it was as a MUN - NFB collaboration that the whole thing began on Fogo, it was the MUN team who perfected the 'Fogo Process' and eventually exported it around the world. The MUN unit now formalised many of the techniques that had emerged by accident or good fortune on Fogo as elements of an empowering use of media in social change.

Video became the favored medium in the late 1960s when the first 'portapak' kit, with lightweight video cameras and portable playback equipment, became available. Video greatly aided the Fogo Process since it allowed for more immediate feedback between the community and its taped image. The remarkable results, such as those mentioned earlier in Lord's Cove, are only possible with the immediacy of video. It was the use of the Fogo Process in radically different cultural and social contexts, however, that proved that its techniques were not peculiar to Newfoundland or Fogo, or even island cultures, but had a portable and global applicability, particularly in conditions of uneven development where there had been little exposure to mass media.

The Fogo Process goes Abroad

By the early-mid 1970s the Fogo Process was beginning to gain international recognition. An international conference on film, videotape and social change was held at MUN in 1972 that gathered scholars and community activists from all over the world. Reading the transcript today, one gets the sense of a shared feeling of being on the verge of something new and important that could make a real difference in community development. In October of 1973, Tony Williamson, head of the MUN extension service presented a paper on the Fogo Process and the Extension Service's work at the UNESCO meeting of the Planning and Management of new Communications Systems in Paris. Five years later in 1978, Professor V.K. Dubey, now of Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, India came across Williamson's paper. He wrote to the Extension Service at MUN and asked them to share their expertise in India. Don Snowden and Paul McLeod eventually visited India in 1979. With Dubey, they began preliminary work for a project involving a co-operative at the National Dairy Research Institute in Karnal, Haryana. In Taprana they collaborated on a related project, about which the film *Eyes See, Eyes Hear* was made. In this project, video was used to establish channels of communications between rickshaw drivers in the small village of Taprana and bank officials in a distant city. Because they had been unable to secure loans to purchase their own rickshaws, the drivers were forced to rent their vehicles at considerable cost. Using video they made a tape on which they spoke about what they found wrong with the bank's dealing with the village and why they believed they were good credit risks. The tape was shown to the bank officials who in turn made a tape inviting the villagers to visit them and discuss their finances. Eventually the drivers were able to secure loans. In Bangladesh, a similar project was used to establish communications between physical engineers and social groups concerned with small-scale water control. Other similarly small-scale projects were carried out in Uganda, Guyana, Nepal and elsewhere, all with great success. The seeds of all these projects lay in the experiments carried out on Fogo.

Crocker – The Fogo Process

In a paper that he wrote shortly prior to his death in India in 1984, Snowden summarised some of what he had learned about the process over more than 15 years of video based participatory communication all over the globe. Among populations who do not regularly practice reading and writing, he suggested, video could function as a new form of literacy. It can facilitate the establishment of lines of communication within a village or area, and between the village and distant decision makers. Apart from its informational content, it can also be used to demonstrate processes such as the use of technology. The success of its use will depend on the number of factors that proved themselves over time and around the world. Foremost among these is the use of a community worker, or social animator. Snowden suggested that the social animator get to know the community first, before introducing video technology, and identified that the manner of its introduction will determine whether or not it is thought of as a part of the community, or as a foreign intrusion. Thus, Snowden suggested that the equipment first be set up in a central location that people will traverse in the course of their daily interactions. Villagers should be encouraged to look through the camera, to get used to seeing their image on screen. The showing of films should similarly be in a familiar, common place where people are comfortable to congregate and talk about social problems. But apart from the viewing of the final product it is again the process that matters most. As Snowden contended:

The very presence of a community worker with this technology shows or provides a sense of caring and involvement which enhances the willingness of village people to become involved in new ways of learning and doing. The community worker and the video process bring people together for a common cause, create new information channels and insure a belief and confidence in self-help.(1984: np)

Since these early experiments in participatory video, many other similar programs have developed, some growing out of the Fogo Process and some with their own independent history. Professor Dubai's National Council of Developmental Communication for example, continues to exist and to be involved in media based development projects in India. There is also the Village Video Network of New York started by Martha Stuart. Stuart's work prompted the establishment of Video SEWA, a branch of the Self Employed Women's Association, a trade union of rural Indian women founded in 1972. Stuart worked in India on projects using film and video to promote community health. In 1984, at about the same time that Snowden, McLeod and the MUN team were invited to India, Stuart was invited to Ahmedabad to train SEWA in the use of video. Since then, SEWA has produced more than 400 films on topics ranging from sanitation and health to labor organisation. While many of these films have been screened at international festivals, and won awards, the process of filmmaking is - just as in the Fogo experience - as important as the films produced. For example, in one instance rural *bidi* workers (women who roll tobacco leaves) used video to address their exploitation by traders who paid less than the minimum wage established by the government. The women were apprehensive about taking the matter to court because they believed that the courts would favor the traders and because they were unfamiliar with the legal process. The organisation videotaped a moot court in which the women presented their cases. In this way they came to feel surer of the process, and eventually fought and won their cases.

The Future of Participatory Communication

Back in Newfoundland the Fogo Process was developed in new and interesting ways by the Extension service of the university. It spawned various offshoots such as an educational television station, a magazine (*Decks Awash*) and a video databank connecting the Newfoundland's most remote populations. Unfortunately, most of these projects are now defunct. Like many other socially useful developments, funding for these was cut in the mean 1990s and the University's mandate to provide service to the community was increasingly tied to entrepreneurial activities and business interests. Nonetheless, we still have a lot to learn from the Fogo Process today because it reveals something significant about both the means of communication themselves, and their role in the formation of political collectivities.

What took place in Fogo is the genealogical ancestor of much of what is now called subject-generated media, ranging from 'reflexive' anthropological style films and reality programming, where the documentary subject plays a creative role in the production of the image, to more recent, and ultimately more interesting developments where the media provide less and less content and offer themselves simply as a pure means of communication. The Internet, for instance, evolves from a network of central web pages that provide information to Web 2.0 services such as youtube or facebook where the medium does not offer any content as such but presents itself instead as a pure means of mediation.

The evacuation of content from subject-generated media raises a difficult problem: when anyone anywhere is able to do anything with media we have to face the fact that we may not know what we want from them and for what reason. After all, how and why we use technology is not itself a technological problem. It is a political question and one that is more important as media devices become more integrated in our daily lives. Zigmunt Bauman (2000) has said that we are now a society with endless means but - as a result of privatisation, deregulation and the decline of public space - ever fewer ways of collectively deciding on what end they might serve. If that is true then the Fogo Process leads us to one of the most important problems in media politics: does the potential of media reside in its capacity to represent an already existing collective, or can media play some direct role in the formation of a 'people'? In his *Cinema* books (1986, 1989) Gilles Deleuze argues that after the Second World War the central problem that political filmmakers encounter is that the people who supposedly were represented by pre-war classical film do not really exist. They have to be invented. Or, rather, they have to invent themselves, and what role film might play in this invention becomes an even more important question, particularly in the developing world.

Rodowick has contended that:

Classical cinema is for the most part social democratic, regardless of its nation of origin or its political ideology. Its goal is to represent the masses or "the people"... imagined as an organic collective, unified by a single ideology (whether American democratic populism or Soviet Socialism)... the image of the collective is given organically as a great teleological unfolding. The people are figured as homogenous force waking to its collective power. The belief in a preexisting collective identity, which unifies a people and is the basis of their unflexed power,

Crocker – The Fogo Process

was the great progressive ideal smashed historically by the rise of National Socialism, the violent repressions of Stalinism, the history of colonialism, and the continuing failure of American democracy to integrate and enfranchise fully its minority peoples and immigrants. Political cinema in the classical period was based on the assumption that this ideal collectively actually existed outside of its construction in images, and that it conforms or could conform to the ideals those images presented. (1997: 152-153)

The National Film Board of Canada's original mandate "to make Canada better known to Canadians" fits the general template Rodowick describes here. The assumption is that Canadians, as a people, exist and may be represented. The state, for instance, is the political apparatus in which the people find expression and the NFB's films are descriptions of the various ways in which this relation transpires. Newfoundland's relation to these Canadian images is of course even more complex since, before joining Canada in 1949 we had already had a century of various projects of state formation and 'nationalisms' of one kind or another that defined Newfoundland as a distinct political and cultural entity.

Perhaps the most important legacy of the Fogo Process is the way it developed a politics of media that was based neither on a description of an already existing people nor an image of some future vision of themselves that they might embrace and identify with. Instead, it asked whether a people could create itself through the very act of creating an image of itself. This helps clarify why Snowden always insisted that the 'process' was not only about the delivery of technology to remote locations but the work of social animation that would help people figure out to what end they might use it. Now that we are well beyond the physical restrictions of large cameras, film stock and projectors it may become easier to train people to be filmmakers, video technicians, or Internet browsers, but that does not mean that they will become social animators in their own communities who can direct media to useful ends. For that reason, we still have much to learn from the Fogo Process.

Endnotes:

¹ For analyses of the Fogo process that situate it in the history of reality-based media see Marchessault (1995a and 1995b).

² For more on the origins of the Fogo Process see Crocker (2003).

³ On social and political life in early Newfoundland see Pope (2004), Bannister, (2004) and O'Flaherty (1999).

⁴ The decisive change involved regular access to credit, which facilitated an ongoing system of indebtedness to local merchants. There is much debate about the timing of this change and its significance in the social development of Newfoundland. For a good cross section of the debate see Sider (1986), Cadigan (1995) and Pope (2004).

⁵ The photographs, along with other interesting documents on resettlement, are available at <http://www.mun.ca/mha/resettlement/index.html>

⁶ I am using the idea of cognitive mapping here as it is developed by Fredric Jameson (1992). Jameson uses the term to describe a community's ability to represent to itself its position in the world system.

⁷ Andy Jones, 'To the Wall', a one man show held at the Resource Center for the Arts, St. John's, Newfoundland, January, 2002.

⁸ For a good overview of the history of attempts to create subject generated or participatory film see Ruby (1991).

⁹ For Snowden's account of the genesis of the Fogo project see Quarry (1984).

¹⁰ Many of these films are available for preview and purchasing at:
<http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/resultat.php>

¹¹ On the divisive effects of the truck credit system in outport Newfoundland see Sider (1986).

¹² For a good overview of these developments see Wiesner (1992: 65-99).

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