APPROPRIATION OR ACCOMMODATION?

RECONTEXTUALIZING ENGLISH-CANADIAN AUTEUR CINEMA, 1984-1992

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship in film production between text and context, employing a thematic analysis of English-Canadian auteur cinema from 1984 to 1992. Specifically, it asks: how do the contextual particularities of film-making in Canada infuse Canadian film texts?

In an industry dominated by vertically-integrated Hollywood film companies, Canadian feature films account for between one and six per cent of screen time in Canadian movie theatres. This share has remained constant throughout the twenty-five years the federal government has funded feature-film production, despite occasional production booms. The 1980s renaissance of English-Canadian feature film has been inconsequential to its share of screen time in Canadian theatres.

The thesis asserts the validity of its methodology and its theoretical orientation in Part I. It draws on methodological precedents in critical writing about literature, television and film to support its analysis. Citing the work of Raymond Williams, it responds to neoclassical economic theory by pointing to cinema as a social practice.

Part II establishes Canadian cinema's marginalization through an assessment of the context of

its production. The political-economic context is a vertically-integrated oligopoly centred in Hollywood. The historical context is cultural dependency and a century-long struggle to create space in the mediascape for indigenous cinema. The public-policy context is limited government intervention; Canadian governments have subsidized film production, but they have demonstrated a fundamental faith in market economics by refusing to tamper with distribution and exhibition.

Finally, the thesis establishes a correlation between contextual themes and the discernible preoccupations of sixteen English-Canadian film-makers in an analysis of twenty-four films. This analysis reveals the following recurrent themes: mediation and representation; the struggle to define community; art as a vehicle for self-discovery; the desire to escape "here"; and Canadians' American dream.

This thesis challenges the preoccupation with feature film as profit-maximizing entertainment commodity by addressing cinema as a social practice. It proposes a way of seeing Canadian cinema through the cognitive filter of its own history, the particular circumstances of its production, and its semiotic function in the mediascape.

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This thesis is dedicated to Dianne Arbuckle.

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PART I

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis evolved from one simple statistic -- Canadian films account for between one and six per cent of screen time in Canadian movie theatres -- and one simple question: Why? It began in 1985 when I attended the Genie Award screenings at Robson Square Media Centre in Vancouver and discovered what has been described as Canada's "invisible cinema". Canadian cinema's marginality initiated a search for answers to complex questions about the political economy of cultural production in Canada and the theoretical conception of nation as symbolic and communicative space.

As preliminary questions were answered, this thesis became a study of the relationship between the context of feature-film production, distribution and exhibition in Canada, and the films themselves. Can, in other words, the distinct textual preoccupations of English-Canadian feature film-makers be traced to contextual conditions?

This thesis, then, looks at films not strictly as works of art in any formal sense, but examines Canadian cinema as a site for the contestation of ideas about

nation and national community and a site for the assertion of representations of Canadian experience.

The celluloid stock exposed to light that characterizes film as a material substance only becomes film as a medium of communication by the process of its projection onto a screen through time and space. Almost anyone can make a movie, particularly in the age of accessible and cheap video technology. But access to distribution, and therefore to an audience, is another matter. For this reason, the thesis addresses cinema as a social practice. As social practice, cinema embodies the historical, political-economic and sociological context of its production. Canadian film-makers, quick to apply themselves to this new medium shortly after its invention in the last decade of the nineteenth century, have exposed thousands of spools of celluloid. The failure has been the process of distributing and exhibiting Canadian films to Canadian audiences, a process which is always political and economic.

A prevailing explanation for Canadian cinema's marginality is Canadians' inability and/or unwillingness to make films that a mass audience will pay to see. Canadian films, according to this view, are boring and parochial and demonstrate poor production values. This explanation enjoys great currency. Steven Globerman (1991), for example, argues that Canadian film-makers

need only make more films that audiences want to see to garner more screen time.

Another interpretation, however, invokes the political economy of the Canadian film industry, and concludes that vested interest on the part of the major Hollywood studios reserves Canadian theatre screens for foreign films. In a vertically-integrated industry the major Hollywood studios dominate all sectors: production, distribution and exhibition. Manjunath Pendakur (1990), for example, argues that the reason for Canadian cinema's invisibility is not aesthetics, but politics and economics.

Cinema is distinguished among Canadian cultural practices by the extent of its marginality and by the role distribution plays in the feature-film industry. Feature film-making is a capital-intensive practice restricted in its exhibition opportunities. Distribution is necessary to both the funding of production and access to theatre screens. The distribution sector becomes the site where political and economic power relations are exercised to screen in certain films and to screen out others.

The ascendence of neoclassical economics has tightly bound cultural policy in Canada to industrial policy (i.e., cultural production as industrial production), trade policy (e.g., free trade) and economic policy

(e.g., deficit reduction). Where historically Canadian film-makers have looked to governments to promote and to protect Canadian cinema, they find increasingly the primacy of private-enterprise principles. Canadian governments continue to subsidize feature-film production, but they fail to take decisive action to interfere with market economics in the distribution and exhibition sectors.

Cultural policy concerns itself with Canada's symbolic order, its communicative space, and with the issues of Canadians' self-representation. But government policy is always produced in a context of competing interests, and in Canada cultural policy has historically been secondary to industrial, trade and economic imperatives. Repeatedly throughout the twentieth century, for example, film has been perceived by governments as a means to attract immigrants, tourists and investment capital, a propaganda tool to bolster home-front support during two world wars, and a medium through which to forge a sense of nation among its constituents. Rarely has film been deemed important in and of itself.

The cinema with which Canadians are most familiar is Hollywood cinema, as Canadians may also be most familiar with American cultural products across the mediascape. Canadian cinema is rendered marginal, alternative, even

oppositional in its own country. Public policy related to the film industry is drafted in this context, and the growing body of literature on Canadian cinema speaks from this perspective.

But what has been most interesting as English-Canadian feature film has enjoyed a renaissance in the past ten years, has been Canadian film-makers' preoccupation, too, with meta-cinematic themes. This thesis extends Manjunath Pendakur's 1990 survey of the political economy of the Canadian film industry by combining political economy, cultural studies and film studies methods. It asks, how does English-Canadian cinema speak to its industrial, social and historical context?

At the same time, this study of the relationship between text and context responds to the prevailing climate of neoclassical ideology -- articulated most forcefully by Steven Globerman -- by asserting the relevance of the particularities of time and place to cultural production, and the redefinition of film beyond that of profit-maximizing entertainment commodity.

Part I orients the thesis methodologically and theoretically. Chapter Two cites methodological precedents in critical writing about Canadian literature, television and film to support the invocation of context in the analysis of Canadian cinema texts. At the same

time, the method broadens the notion of context to include Canadian cinema's industrial, historical and political circumstances. Chapter Three outlines relevant aspects of Raymond Williams's theory of cultural materialism, which insists upon the analysis of culture as a social practice within its particular material, historical and social environment.

Part II establishes Canadian cinema's marginality. Chapter Four characterizes the political-economic context of film production in Canada as a vertically-integrated oligopoly dominated by transnational corporations whose film activities are centred in Hollywood. This chapter also examines Globerman's neoclassical economic critique of the Canadian feature-film industry. Chapter Five chronicles the historical context of long-term cultural dependency, Hollywood's dominance of the Canadian film market and Canadian film-makers' century-long struggle for space in the mediascape. Chapter Six describes the public-policy context, in which successive Canadian governments have favoured promotional measures to protectionist legislation. Canadian governments have supported indigenous film activity through subsidies and tax incentives, but they've consistently refused to countermand market economic principles in the crucial distribution and exhibition sectors.

In Part III, the thesis reframes contemporary English-Canadian auteur cinema by establishing a strong correlation between the contextual themes outlined and the recurrent preoccupations of the film-makers. A thematic analysis of twenty-four films by sixteen directors reveals five prevalent themes which speak to the context of film production in Canada: mediation and representation; the struggle to define community; art as a vehicle for self-discovery; the desire to escape "here"; and Canadians' fascination with American popular culture.

This thesis challenges the preoccupation with feature film as profit-maximizing entertainment commodity by addressing cinema as a social practice and by extending the notion of context to political-economic and historical spheres. It proposes a way of seeing Canadian cinema through the cognitive filter of its own history, the particular circumstances of its production and its semiotic function in the mediascape.

CHAPTER TWO

Putting Canadian Cinema in its Place

This thesis counters neoclassical economic theory as an explanatory framework for the marginality of Canadian film with a method that combines political economy, cultural studies and film analysis in order to: address film production as a social and cultural practice; undermine the notion of the capitalist marketplace as meritocracy; and establish the indissoluble relationship between context and text.

Considerable scholarly ground has been covered in describing the political economy of the Canadian film industry, particularly with the publication of Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control: the Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (1990). This followed earlier work by Crean (1976), Harcourt (1977), Feldman and Nelson (1977) Morris (1978), Véronneau and Handling (1980), Audley (1983), and Pratley (1987).

But a gap exists between the political-economic analyses which have gained increasing prominence in Canadian cinema scholarship and analyses of the films

themselves. What does the political-economic context of film production in Canada imply in terms of the kinds of films Canadians produce? Where in the past, Canadian cultural production -- especially painting and literature -- has been studied in relation to context, this tradition has restricted context to, first, Canada's natural environment, and later, the socio-political climate. For example, the program for the 1993 Canadian cinema exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris states that Canada's cinemas have been "façonées par des géographies, des modes de vies, des traditions et des cultures distinctes" (Bourgault, 1993, p. 5). This thesis insists they are conditioned as well by their political-economic context.

The capital-intensive nature of feature-film production, its large-scale commercialization, and the oligopolization of the industry's distribution and exhibition sectors, give the political-economic environment of film-making singular importance. This thesis, therefore, attaches particular significance to the industrial context of Canadian film production as part of the larger social context. It poses the question: How does Canadian cinema's marginalization by the Hollywood oligopolization of the industry influence English-Canadian feature-film practice?

i) Literature:

Methodological precedents for treating text in context have been established in critical writing about Canadian literature, painting, television and film. Literary theorist Northrop Frye, for example, has studied Canadian writing in terms of both its cultural-historical and its environmental contexts. In his "Conclusion to The Literary History of Canada" (1971), Frye argues that a "garrison mentality" pervades Canadian poetry, the product of physical and psychological isolation in a "huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting" (p. 225). In a subsequent, revised "Conclusion" (1976), Frye explains "the colossal verbal explosion that has taken place in Canada since 1960" as part of a self-aware nationalism which evolved largely in response to the cultural and economic penetration of Canada by the United States (p. 318).

In *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971), Frye addresses the relationship between the natural environment and the literary imagination, characterizing Canadian writing as a regional literature because of regional environmental particularity (pp. ii, 164). Describing Canada as "colonial in psychology as well as in mercantile economics" (p. iii), he concludes: "Canadian poetry is

at its best a poetry of incubus and cauchemar, the source of which is the unusually exposed contact of the poet with nature which Canada provides" (p. 141).

Following Frye, Margaret Atwood (1972) sets Canadian literature in its "place". Seeking an answer to the question, "What's Canadian about Canadian literature?" (p. 14), she argues that survival is the central theme in Canadian fiction. Atwood treats the texts as though they were written by Canada rather than by individual authors, treating authors as "transmitters of their culture". Atwood seeks "patterns of theme, image and attitude which hold our literature together" (p. 12).

Robin Mathews (1978) sets Canadian writing in its colonial context, arguing that it is conditioned by Canada's colonization by the United States. The colonial milieu "shapes character and situation in the works of major Canadian writers" (p. 1). Because Canadian writers work in a community which has always been under threat, he writes: "The novel and its related forms always, at one level, deal with questions of community, with society, and with the choices open to people regarding the kind of power they will choose, or reject" (p. 1).

Gaile McGregor (1985), finally, looks at how factors of environment, geography and history produce "a final cultural difference" in her study of Canadian painting and literature. In Canadian painting, she argues,

"purely public factors" shape "not only the dictates of convention but the supposed 'subjectivity of vision'" (p. 10). The literature of a community, she concludes, expresses common ideas, values and attitudes as well as a tendency to express similar visions in similar forms (p. 11).

> The factor that has been of primary importance in the evolution of our contemporary world view is not the object of our apprehension -- the landscape -- but the mode of that relation, considered as a prototype for our relation not merely with nature but with the world at large. Both the structure and the focus of our vision have, in other words, been not merely influenced but in a sense determined by our idiosyncratic experience of the self/other interface (p. 76).

Setting Canadian literary texts within the context -- environmental, cultural-historical and political -- of their creation has been a central method in the study of the Canadian literary corpus.

ii) Television:

This method has been applied to television "texts" as well. Lianne McLarty (1988), for example, assesses the CBC television program *Seeing Things* in the larger context of the centre-margin relationship between the United States and Canada. *Seeing Things*, McLarty argues, is an example of Canadian resistance to the dominant

model of American popular culture (p. 103). The program's self-consciousness "can be understood as a challenge to dominant codes of television normalized by the American model" (p. 104).

> ...the position within the margins creates a form of self-consciousness; it is a consciousness of difference, the difference between the experience represented in American popular culture and the lived experience of marginality which characterizes the Canadian reality (p. 108).

The series' main character, Louis Ciccone, subverts viewers' expectations of "normalized codes of behavior and dress" for television heroes. Dumpy, dowdy, a balding middle-aged man who can't drive a car, Louis "is on the outside looking in, a position that parallels the Canadian viewer's relationship to American popular culture" (p. 108).

McLarty's essay brings us closer to the kind of analysis needed in Canadian film studies, an analysis which confronts Canada's relationship to American popular culture on both the textual -- Hollywood as dominant film code -- and contextual -- Hollywood as dominant film industry -- levels.

iii) Film:

The first history of Canadian and Quebec cinemas -- *Le Cinéma Canadien* by Gilles Marsolais (1968) -- refers to the need to study film texts in context, but never adopts this method in any explicit way. Marsolais writes:

> Pour comprendre le cinéma d'un pays donné, il est nécessaire de connaître les contextes social, culturel, politique et économique dans lesquels il s'insère. Nous avons donné des aperçus de ces divers aspects, dans cet essai, mais nous n'avons pas insisté sur l'aspect économique puisqu'il devrait faire l'objet d'un livre à lui seul et qu'il peut dicter une méthode historique autre que celle que nous avons adoptée (p. 10).

Marsolais, for example, cites the powerful American presence in the industry, but not in relation to the films Canadians produced. Similarly, he alludes to Quebec cinema's place in the Quiet Revolution -- citing Gilles Carle's description of the films produced by the National Film Board's French unit as "une appropriation passionnée du milieu" (p. 64) -- but he does not elaborate. He writes only: "L'éclatement de notre littérature et de notre cinéma à ce moment précis de notre histoire n'est pas une pure coïncidence" (p. 86).

Other writers have engaged this method more explicitly. Robert Fothergill (1977) studies English-

Canadian feature films in the context of their temporal and spatial milieu (pp. 354-359). Fothergill, for example, describes Rick Dillon, the central character in Peter Pearson's *Paperback Hero*, as a creation of his rural Saskatchewan community, "inconceivable in isolation from its ethos" (p. 352). A recurrent theme in English-Canadian cinema, Fothergill argues, is "the dramatization of complex social currents catching up the lives of individuals" (p. 360).

Peter Harcourt (1977) ties film-making to national mythology and national identity, arguing that mythology is essential to the achievement of a national identity. "When a group of people become [sic] aware of its own mythology, its own sense of history, its particular customs and habits of speech, it is on the way towards discovering itself as a nation and not just a colony" (p. 145). Harcourt further suggests that "any individual film might most profitably be understood in relation to the culture that has produced it" (p. 4).

Martin Knelman (1978) considers text within a socio-political context. English-Canadian cinema's ubiquitous victims and losers, Knelman writes, are characters dealing with "cultural deprivation" within the larger context of Canada's cultural dependency on the United States (p. 114). *Paperback Hero*, for example, renders explicit "the incongruity between the crude realities of

life in the boondocks and the escape fantasies of semi-educated dreamers whose imaginations have been fed by American mass culture" (p. 106).

Knelman sets Quebec cinema in its particular time and place in chapters devoted to directors Claude Jutra, Denys Arcand and Gilles Carle (pp. 47-88). Arcand, especially, is characterized as a political film-maker, and his films are addressed within the context of Quebec nationalism. Of Arcand's film *Réjeanne Padovani*, for example, Knelman writes:

> Padovani is among other things a striking case study of what comes from the radicalization of someone [Arcand] who has grown up at the NFB in the technical professional sense while being intellectually and emotionally shaped by events in Quebec during the decade between the death of Maurice Duplessis and the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte (p. 74).

Peter Harcourt (1980) sets two NFB feature films -- Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Good-bye* and Gilles Groulx's *Le chat dans le sac* -- in their socio-political context, in part to differentiate English-Canadian and French-Canadian film production in the 1960s. Harcourt describes the films as "distinguished representations of their respective cultures", noting that they "sum up a number of characteristic attitudes that were dominant at the time -- not only about the cinema but about the culture as well".

> Whatever their achievements as personal creations, they are even more significant as cultural artefacts. In each film, the culture speaks through it -- telling us about the dilemmas and the anguish of our Canadian way of life, whichever our language (p. 76).

James Leach (1984) seconds Marsolais and Harcourt in distinguishing between Canada's two cinemas. In a broad survey of English-Canadian and Québécois production, Leach sets the films in their cultural and political contexts.

> The basic difference between the two cinemas can perhaps be seen in the relative ease with which the film-maker and his characters in Quebec can identify the source of oppression, while their English Canadian counterparts seem to function in an environment in which psychological pressures are real but political solutions difficult to envisage (p. 105).

In a theoretical treatment of the concept of a national cinema, Quebec film-maker Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (1987) insists cultural production cannot be separated from its "milieu". Lefebvre establishes a link between cultural production and nation, arguing "toute création est nationale, parce que toute nation est créatrice, s'invente un imaginaire traduisant le milieu ambiant" (p. 90). The communicative component of film produced by a particular community creates a sense of "appartenance" among constituents of that community (p. 91).

R. Bruce Elder (1989) invokes Frye and Atwood in a largely theoretical work which sets Canadian film practice within its philosophical and ideological context. The Canadian intellectual tradition insists on the importance of community, defining the individual as a social product. Canadian cinema's "empirical style", Elder argues, is rooted in realist traditions of art in Canada and the influence of French photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson on NFB documentary film-makers in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Using Don Shebib's 1970 film *Goin' Down the Road* as a case study, Elder insists the film is missing a "crisis scene" which would explain Pete and Joey's motivation in stealing a cart of groceries in a climactic scene toward the end of the film. The absence of that crisis scene is debilitating to the story, Elder argues, because there is no clear explanation for the theft or the violence that ensues. Shebib's insistence upon maintaining the appearance of reality "is purchased at some cost to the film's dramatic structure".

> Why would the filmmakers have felt compelled to sustain this realistic illusion (and naturalist form) when it is essential to neither of the film's narratives and downright harmful to that story which is the film's primary source of drama? The only possible answer is apparently that this choice conforms with the dominant style of English-Canadian cinema, the empirical style. The dominating power of this is testified to by films such as this, in which

> the style has so hardened as to become unquestionable, to seem so natural it is used even when it is out of place (pp. 146-147).

Finally, Gaile McGregor (1992) responds to the "source-blindedness" of critics who address David Cronenberg's oeuvre "within the general framework of international horror/scifi/fantasy". McGregor rejects the professed universality of genre categories, which attributes anomalies in Cronenberg's films to idiosyncracy rather than the fact Cronenberg lives and works in Canada (p. 44). McGregor's paper seeks to demonstrate "the extent to which the Canadian filmmaker elucidates the idiosyncracies of the Canadian megatext" (p. 48).

This brief survey testifies to a tradition in Canadian film studies of setting text in context. The thesis, however, strives to elevate the political-economic component of that context, a distinguishing factor in Canadian feature-film practice. Production of a film is not complete until a film is exhibited for an audience, and Canadian film production is interrupted at the distribution and exhibition stages. Canadian film-makers confront the exclusivity of distribution and exhibition on a practical level in their struggle to reach audiences.

iv) Methodological Principles:

This thesis distinguishes between English-Canadian and Quebec cinemas, for reasons of scholarly precedent, but primarily for reasons of theoretical consistency. Since 1968, film scholars have insisted upon the recognition of two cinemas in Canada, as expressions of distinct cultures. It is particularly imperative to separate Canada's cinemas in this study, which bridges text and context. While English-Canadian and Quebec films may be similarly excluded from the vertically-integrated Hollywood oligopoly, differences in language, culture, history and politics introduce new factors to the formula. While a study of Quebec cinema in context would be instructive, it would have to be a separate study, and is not addressed here.

At the same time, this thesis distinguishes auteur cinema from more industrially organized film practice in Canada.[1] Auteur cinema has most obviously appropriated the task of articulating quotidian Canadian experience, and English-Canadian auteur cinema has taken on the meta-cinematic preoccupations of film practice in Canada. At the same time, English-Canadian film auteurs have restricted themselves to the industry's production sector, declining to become involved in distribution and exhibition through their own vertically-integrated

companies. They stand in contrast to Canadian film companies such as Alliance Communications Corporation, Astral Communications and Atlantis Films Limited, which both produce and distribute motion pictures (Thompson, Patricia, 1991).

This thesis concentrates on a period of film-making from 1984 to the present. The principal reason for this temporal choice is the renaissance of English-Canadian feature film-making. The starting point of this renaissance, of course, is impossible to fix precisely, but it was in the early 1980s that a number of film-makers who have proven important to this study made their first films. Bruce McDonald's short *Let Me See (...)*, for example, was chosen best film at Toronto's CNE Student Film Festival in 1982, and he released the feature *Knock! Knock!* in 1985. William MacGillivray's first feature, *Stations*, was released in 1983. Atom Egoyan's first feature, *Next of Kin*, was released in 1984. Although both women had made documentary films and short features in the 1970s, Sandy Wilson (*My American Cousin*, 1985) and Anne Wheeler (*Loyalties*, 1986) made feature-film debuts in this period.

Contextually, the time frame coincides with: renewed, yet unsuccessful attempts by Canadian governments to address Hollywood's oligopolization of the film industry in Canada; the ascendence of neoclassical

economic values in Great Britain, the United States and Canada; constitutional crisis in Canada (1982, 1987, 1992); and free trade (first with the United States, then with the United States and Mexico).

v) Pros and Cons:

The greatest drawback to this kind of study is its cumbersomeness. Graeme Turner describes the combination of the two traditional approaches to film study -- textual and contextual -- as "very unwieldy", because it is beyond our capacity to address all the determinants necessary to understand fully the cultural relationships which inform a particular film (Turner, 1990, pp. 129-131).

At the same time, however, this approach allows us to study what Bennett and Woollacott describe as the "complex of relationships between texts and the social conditions of their production and consumption", as well as the process by which cinema is defined by film institutions (Turner, 1990, pp. 123-132). Turner writes:

> Film institutions have political interests which ultimately determine what films are made, let alone what films are seen. The examination of the operation of these institutions reveals the nature of the interests they serve, the objectives they pursue, and what their function means for the audiences, the industry, and the culture as a whole (Turner, 1990, p. 132).

He adds: "Understanding a movie is not essentially an aesthetic practice; it is a social practice which mobilizes the full range of meaning systems within the culture" (Turner, 1990, p. 179). Further, it enables us to understand why Canadian film-makers have adopted a strategy of appropriation (of their own cinema) rather than one of accommodation (to prevailing Hollywood film practice).

Canadian cinema has traditionally been studied within disciplines -- film studies, history, political science, economics -- which inhibit the holistic treatment this thesis demands. The advantage of a comprehensive approach is that it necessitates the assessment of film as text, as process and as mediator of reality (Silverstone, 1988, p. 20). The communications medium that is cinema, in other words, is governed by "the nexus of economic, political and social forces" which govern the culture in which it functions (Thorburn, 1988, p. 53).

Notes

[1]Auteur cinema is used here to mean a *personal* film-making practice, in which a film bears the authorial stamp of its director. This is the conventional use of the term auteur in writing about Canadian cinema (See:

Véronneau, 1991). A number of the films discussed in the thesis, for example, are written, directed and produced by the same individual (Egoyan, 1984, 1987, 1989; Lazaro Pacheco, 1989; Rozema, 1987; Shatalow, 1987; Viszmeg, 1990; Wheeler, 1989; Wilkinson, 1984; Wilson, 1985, 1989). The thesis distinguishes auteur cinema in Canada from an industrial style of film production, in which the director is hired by a film production company to realize a project the company has initiated.

CHAPTER THREE

Cultural Production as Social Practice: A Theoretical Orientation

The work of British cultural theorist Raymond Williams bridges the gap between conventional applications of political economy and film studies by engaging the interrelationships among: a) the institutions -- political, economic and cultural -- which govern cultural practice; b) the social context in which the institutions are defined and function; and c) the cultural texts themselves.

Canadian cinema scholarship profits from the analysis of feature-film production in Canada as a practice set in particular social and historical circumstances because it addresses Canadian cinema's place in a dialectical struggle between public purpose and commercial enterprise. It introduces factors to the film-making process which reach beyond both personal artistic vision and market imperatives, and it encourages the redefinition of Canadian feature film beyond the strict confines of the capitalist commodity mould and profit-motivated industry.

This chapter orients the thesis theoretically by describing Williams's theory of cultural materialism. Williams extends political-economic analysis by expanding its contextual bounds, insisting upon the comprehensive study of the interrelationships within the "complex unity" of institutions, formations and communicative relationships (Williams, 1986, pp. 139-140). It is an analysis of the production of society and political, economic and cultural institutions -- communication being a central productive force in society --, taking nothing for granted, or as "natural". It is a theory of production rather than consumption, a theory which examines not only the production of cultural texts, but the ongoing production of society itself.

Williams collapses Marxism's base-superstructure duality -- comprised of a determining economic base and a determined legal and political superstructure -- by insisting that communication and cultural expression are productive activities, not merely reproductive, and are therefore infrastructural (Williams 1982, p. 274). The key to Williams's rejection of this fundamental duality is Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which accounts for meanings, ideas and beliefs as a "lived social process" (Williams, 1986, p. 109).

Williams defines both culture and communication broadly, emphasizing the central place of communication

in society. Society, he argues, is a form of communication. The institutions of communication are therefore valuable objects of study because they manifest broad and complex social relations.

Williams's oeuvre informs this thesis in a number of ways. It insists upon the indissolubility of communication, culture, politics and economics. It portrays film-makers, as all artists, as social beings with a social as well as an individual point of view. It historicizes capitalism and the commercial organization of cultural production. It defines production as a social practice and insists that both social institutions and cultural texts are themselves produced within a specific social context. It asserts, therefore, that an analysis of cultural production must consider social context as it informs, and is informed by, cultural texts. Williams's work, finally, enables us to see films as the expressions of film-makers' lived social relations and as the expressions of the general social relations of feature film-making in Canada (Williams, 1986, pp. 203-204).

i) Collapsing Duality:

Raymond Williams is committed to the development of a political economy of culture "distinct from, but

complementary to, a cultural sociology" (Williams, 1989a, p. 32). Williams centres both communication and cultural production by collapsing the dualities of base and superstructure, and art and reality, insisting that art is material production. "How people speak to each other, what conventions they have as to what is important and what is not, how they express these in institutions by which they keep in touch: these things are central" (Williams, 1989b, p. 23).

Williams describes the Marxian notion of individuals making themselves through the production of their own means of life as "the most important intellectual advance in all modern social thought" (Williams, 1986, p. 5). Invoking Marx, Williams insists that artists do not operate in a social void, but are born into, trained within, and ultimately practise under particular social circumstances. "No man [sic] is the author of himself... As a physical individual he is of course specific, though within a determining genetic inheritance. As a social individual he is also specific, but within the social forms of his time and place" (Williams, 1986, p. 193). To begin to understand artists' formal and thematic preoccupations, then, we need to comprehend the contextual particularities in which they practise.

Williams notes that the word "culture" has a complex etymological history and retains three distinct meanings:

"a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development"; a particular way of life, "whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general"; and, "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity". In all its earliest uses, culture "was a noun of process" (Williams, 1989d, pp. 87-93).

Williams insists upon a reconciliation of the definitions of culture as a creative activity and culture as a whole way of life in order to emphasize his holistic and dynamic view of society. The definition of culture as a whole way of life emphasizes "the integrated nature of social institutions and customs" (Johnson, 1987, p. 164). This definition privileges the whole over its parts, and demands that specific cultural forms and practices must be analyzed within the context of the wider social formation (Robinson, 1991, p. 82). Williams writes: "Thus the social organization of culture, as a realized signifying system, is embedded in a whole range of activities, relations and institutions, of which only some are manifestly 'cultural'" (Williams, 1989a, p. 209).

> When we have grasped the fundamental relation between meanings arrived at by creative interpretation and description, and meanings embodied by conventions and institutions, we are in a position to reconcile the meanings of culture, as 'creative activity' and 'a whole

> way of life', and this reconciliation is then a real extension of our powers to understand ourselves and our societies (Williams, 1965, p. 56).

Williams's definition of culture is consistent with his overall project of breaking down dualities: art and society, communication and society, base and superstructure. He insists the "fatally wrong approach" is the assumption that political institutions and conventions belong to "a different and separate order" from artistic institutions and conventions. "Politics and art, together with science, religion, family life and other categories we speak of as absolutes, belong in a whole world of active and interacting relationships, which is our common associative life" (Williams, 1965, pp. 55-56).

The institutions of mediated communication are valuable objects of study because they are concrete manifestations of social relations. But we need also to understand Williams's insistence on defining both culture and communication as central activities in society, and art as a primary human activity. "Many people seem to assume as a matter of course that there is, first, reality, and then second, communication about it. We degrade art and learning by supposing that they are always second-hand activities: that there is life, and then afterwards there are these accounts of it."

Williams argues that "the business of society" cannot be confined to politics or to economics. "What we call society is not only a network of political and economic arrangements, but also a process of learning and communication" (Williams, 1962, p. 11).

Williams's conception of culture centralizes communicative acts. For Williams, that is, society is a form of communication. Communication is the process of community. "Thus our descriptions of our experience come to compose a network of relationships, and all our communication systems, including the arts, are literally parts of our social organization" (Williams, 1965, p. 55).

Williams defines communication broadly, as "the institutions and forms in which ideas, information, and attitudes are transmitted and received. I mean by communication the process of transmission and reception" (Williams, 1962, p. 9). Communication, then, comprises institutions, forms and processes.

Traditional political analysis asserts that the central facts of society are power and government, while traditional economic analysis defines the central concerns of society as property, production and trade. The new emphasis Williams proposes is "that society is a form of communication, through which experience is described, shared, modified, and preserved" (Williams,

1962, p. 10). Hence the necessity of studying the institutionalization of the means of expression in modern society, institutions which are typically controlled by minorities (i.e., managers, capitalists). People's relations to that society can be seen via these institutions of communication. Who owns them? Who speaks through them? How are they organized? To be heard, individual artists must maintain a relationship with these institutions and institutional communication processes (Williams, 1962, p. 87).

Art, as a medium of communication, is a primary human activity for another reason; reality is created through perception. Our way of seeing is our way of living. Art is, then, a central medium through which we understand our reality. "... we must start from the position that reality as we experience it is in this sense a human creation; that all our experience is a human version of the world we inhabit" (Williams, 1965, p. 34). Meaning is always produced in society; it is never simply expressed.

> No expression, that is to say -- no account, description, depiction, portrait -- is 'natural' or 'straightforward'. These are at most socially relative terms. Language is not a pure medium through which the reality of a life or the reality of an event or an experience or the reality of a society can 'flow'. It is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an

> activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so (Williams, 1986, p. 166).

Thinking and imagining, Williams insists, are also "social processes" (Williams, 1986, p. 62).

Society is in turn created by constructing common meanings and values among its constituents; each member of society participates in creating the social reality, "and art is one of the highest forms of this process" (Williams, 1965, p. 315).

> Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land (Williams, 1989b, p. 4)..

A culture is both traditional and creative, composed of "both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings" (Williams, 1989b, p. 4).

Finally, we need to establish that images are produced by social realities. Reinforcing his theory that society cannot be separated from its communication, Williams notes that "the 'social system' and the 'signifying system' can only ever be abstractly separated, since they are in practice, over a variable range, mutually constitutive" (Williams, 1989a, p. 217). Arts have "a necessary social basis" because, as "certain

intense forms of communication", they must be interpreted and described to be seen (Williams, 1965, p. 41).

ii) Cultural Materialism:

Williams's theory of cultural materialism calls for "the analysis of all forms of signification, and quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their practice" (Robinson, 1991, p. 4). Cultural materialism is "a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism" (Williams, 1986, p. 5). Williams treats cultural practices as forms of material production. His materialism is both "integrative and holistic", deconstructing the dualistic categories of culture and society, art and reality, individual and social, base and superstructure, determination and practical activity, consciousness and matter (Robinson, 1991, p. 13). Williams seeks to "reconstruct" historical materialism by recognizing the complex meaning of determination, by recognizing that consciousness and its products are material in nature, and by acknowledging the vital role of praxis in the production and reproduction of material life (Robinson, 1991, p. 55).

Williams argues that, as it has been rigidly interpreted, the base-superstructure metaphor renders

cultural activity as secondary, reproductive, reflective and therefore diminishes the value accorded "intellectual and imaginative creation" (Williams, 1982, p. 274). He insists instead that communication and culture are productive activities, and are therefore infrastructural. A productive force is "all and any of the means of production and reproduction of real life" (Williams, 1986, p. 91).

> As a matter of general theory it is useful to recognize that means of communication are themselves means of production. It is true that means of communication, from the simplest forms of language to the most advanced forms of communications technology, are themselves always socially and materially produced, and of course reproduced. Yet they are not only forms but means of production, since communication and its material means are instrinsic to all distinctively human forms of labour and social organization, thus constituting indispensable elements both of the productive forces and of the social relations of production (Williams, 1980, p. 50).

At the same time the social and political order must be seen as material production. "From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities" (Williams, 1986, p. 93).

Williams's collapse of the base-superstructure duality is not a rejection of the metaphor as devised by

Marx and Engels, but merely a reinterpretation, insisting that the elements of base and superstructure are "indissoluble" (Williams, 1986, pp. 80-81). The process of signification must be considered a "practical material activity" and a means of production; it's "the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs" (Williams, 1986, p. 38). Base is not a "fixed economic or technological abstraction", but "the specific activities of men [sic] in real social and economic relationships". Superstructure is not "a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content", but "a related range of cultural practices" (Williams, 1980, p. 34).

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is the key to collapsing the base-superstructure duality. As against "reflection theory", which posits forms of consciousness as direct expressions of an already formed social, material and economic formation, hegemony acknowledges the crucial role of consciousness in that formation. Williams defines hegemony as follows:

> It is a lived system of meanings and values -- constitutive and constituting -- which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a

> 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes (Williams, 1986, p. 110).

Ideas and values, that is, are lived as real material practices, not merely reflections (Robinson, 1991 p. 54; Williams, 1986, pp. 110-111). David Robinson explains that "dominant culture is conceived not as a reflection of an already constituted hegemonic formation, but as actively engaged in the process of winning consent for dominant values and beliefs" (Robinson, 1991, p. 124).

The "true condition of hegemony", for Williams, is the "self-identification with the hegemonic forms", an "internalized socialization" (Williams, 1986, p. 118).

> 'Hegemony' goes beyond 'culture', as previously defined, in its insistence on relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of power and influence. To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society these are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process.
>
> It is in just this recognition of the wholeness of the process that the concept of 'hegemony' goes beyond 'ideology'. What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values (Williams, 1986, pp. 108-109).

What is attractive for Williams about the theory of hegemony is that it is comprehensive, operating as, in effect,

> a saturation of the whole process of living -- not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense (Williams, 1986, p. 110).

The theory of hegemony removes cultural practice from the realm of the merely superstructural. Hegemony "supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology" (Williams, 1980, p. 37). Hegemony is at the same time an active process. "It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (Williams, 1986, p. 112). It is expressed through traditions, institutions and formations by a process of selection (Williams, 1986, p. 115). Major communication systems, for example, "materialize selected news and opinion, and a wide range of selected perceptions and attitudes" (Williams, 1986, p. 118). Williams concludes:

> The theoretical model which I have been trying to work with is this. I would say first that

> in any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective.... In any case what I have in mind is the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived.

Hegemony "thus constitutes a sense of reality for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives" (Williams, 1980, p. 38).

Finally, too, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is the key to Williams's notion of determination as the "setting of limits and the exertion of pressure" (Williams, 1980, p. 34). Hegemony is never total; emergent, alternative and oppositional practices are always possible. "The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony" (Williams, 1986, p. 113).

Two further points are worth considering here. First, Williams studies communication and culture as production, avoiding the tendency of cultural theory to study communication and culture via theories of consumption. Consumption theories, he argues, objectify art, in contrast to the alternative view of art as a practice (Williams, 1980, pp. 45-47). Secondly, Williams accentuates the social relations of production, refusing to accept production as merely economic, and thus refuses

to separate the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a cultural text. He insists, that is, upon the relationship between a project and its formation.

iii) Specificities of Time and Place:

Communication and culture as social practices must further be studied in specific terms of their time and their place. Temporally, this means a consideration of how these practices are organized in terms of capitalist production. Williams cites four ways of organizing communication: authoritarian, paternal, commercial and democratic, corresponding chronologically to historical periods (Williams, 1989b, p. 23). The prevailing means of organizing communication at present is commercially. Yves de la Haye notes that the "birth certificate" of the modern means of communication, all developed in the late nineteenth century, "was issued and signed by capital" (de la Haye, 1980, pp. 28-29). "The first mass utilisation of the modern means of communication, and the first constitution of information networks are related to the needs of capital" (de la Haye, 1980, p. 29).

Capitalism organizes society after the image of its own organization of production; society is organized as a market in which market imperatives prevail. Williams writes: "Capitalism's version of society can only be the

market, for its purpose is profit in particular activities rather than any general conception of social use, and its concentration of ownership in sections of the community makes most common decisions, beyond those of the market, limited or impossible" (Williams, 1965, p. 327). All forms of social organization are thus "reshaped in the light of this dominant economic activity [production and trading]" (Williams, 1965, p. 124). "We have become so habituated to market relations that it can seem merely banal to observe that types of work which make a loss will, within market production, be reduced or discontinued, while types which make a profit will be expanded" (Williams, 1989a, pp. 104-105). This effect is most noticeable in the most highly capitalized forms of production: newspapers, paperback book publishing, cinema, the record industry, and art reproduction (Williams, 1989a, pp. 104-105).

Organized commercially, the goal of communication becomes profit (de la Haye, 1980, pp. 34-35). The market, then, "either determines, or emphasizes and de-emphasizes, prevailing types of production" and an asymmetry results "between the notion of plural ('liberal') culture and the actual profit-governed market selection of what can be readily distributed or even, in some areas, offered at all" (Williams, 1989a, p. 107). Production for this market "involves the conception of

the work of art as a commodity, and of the artist, however else he [sic] may define himself, as a particular kind of commodity producer" (Williams, 1989a, p. 44). Capitalist organization of communication thus imposes "commercial constraints" on artistic freedom, "where you can say that at times freedom in our kind of society amounts to the freedom to say anything you wish, provided you can say it profitably" (Williams, 1989b, p. 88).

Cultural production results in the same alienation as other kinds of commodity production: the loss of connection between a worker's main purpose and the work he or she is hired to perform; and the loss of the work itself (Williams, 1986, p. 161). At the same time, the capitalist organization of society as a market renders citizens as consumers. This results in pressure on institutions, originally designed to serve social rather than individual needs -- for example, schools, hospitals, roads, libraries --, to conform to the market model (Williams, 1965, pp. 323-324).

Publicly-funded communication and cultural practices are marginalized within capitalism and are always subject to the reimposition of commercial principles. Williams writes: "An economy is determined by its major dominant structure and what has been hopefully taken out to work on different principles is eventually drawn back into the

major orbit, or is at best made marginal and, in its explicit funding, vulnerable" (Williams, 1989c, p. 146).

Capitalism organizes communication and cultural practice on the basis of maximizing profitability. "From this it becomes one of the major purposes of communication to sell a particular paper or programme. All the basic purposes of communication -- the sharing of human experience -- can become subordinated to this drive to sell" (Williams, 1989a, p. 24). The use value of communication becomes equated with consumption; communication's exchange value, in other words, becomes its use value (de la Haye, 1980, p. 35).

> The irony is that the only practical use of communication is the sharing of real experience. To set anything above this is in fact quite unpractical. To set selling above it may seem normal, but is really only a perversion to which some people have got used: a way of looking at the world which must be right and normal because you have cut yourself down to its size (Williams, 1962, pp. 24-25).

Based on the rules of the market, commodities are validated through their sale. Goods the public won't buy, or won't buy in sufficient quantity, are deemed not worthy of the market. The success of cultural commodities is evaluated in the same way. "Best-selling" books, "blockbuster" movies, "hit" records and plays are deemed valid, little matter their content. Works that don't attract a mass audience are thus invalid. Williams

writes: "To the reduction of use to consumption, already discussed, we must add the widespread extension of the 'selling' ethic -- what sells goes, and to sell a thing is to validate it ... (Williams, 1965, p. 328).

Concentration of ownership, Williams argues, goes hand in hand with the centralization of industries, and twentieth-century commercial communication has created "cultural centres" in London, Paris, New York and Los Angeles. These "communities of the medium" have become transnational capitals of art and have encouraged widespread immigration to the metropolis. The development of new communications technologies in urban centres rendered those cities centres of cultural production, which distributed their products around the world. These "centres of the ... new imperialism" became "transnational capitals of an art without frontiers" (Williams, 1989c, pp. 33-34).

> In certain areas, notably cinema and television production, conditions of relative monopoly, not only internally but internationally, have led beyond simple processes of export to more general processes of cultural dominance and then of cultural dependence (Williams, 1989a, p. 230).

The politics of place are especially complex when an increasingly integrated international economy challenges notions of nation and national cultural expression. The capitalist organization of production clashes head on

with the notions of independent nation states and/or sovereign communities. Capitalist exchange injects confusion into the terms nation, community, sovereignty, refusing to respect geographical boundaries. Williams, whose own sense of place was informed by growing up in a Welsh border town and subsequently teaching at Cambridge (Williams, 1989b, pp. 113-115; Williams, 1983, p. 196), insists on the relevance of "place" to culture.

There is no easy way to define Williams's sense of place; he seeks a reconciliation of nationalism and socialism in the notion of "national community" (Williams, 1989b, p. 116). His conception of a "common culture" opposes "a notion of community to a notion of competitive individualism" (Williams, 1989c, p. 194).

Williams begins his essay, "The Importance of Community", by underlining the problematic nature of such terms as nation, people, nation-state and society. The word community, while somewhat abstract, evokes a sense of physical proximity, human contact, obligation and responsibility (Williams, 1989b, pp. 110-119). Community is also, he remarks, "the one term which has never been used in a negative sense" (Williams, 1989b, p. 112).

The confusion in terms such as nation, people, nation-state and society is based in large part on the loss of direct human relationships, "which put certain of the basic elements of our social life beyond the reach of

both direct experience and of simple affirmation" (Williams, 1989b, p. 116). The roots of this confusion, Williams argues, can be traced to capitalism itself (Williams, 1983, p. 184). Under capitalism, "traditional forms of identity and community" have been "dislocated and relocated, within enforced mobilities and necessary new settlements" (Williams, 1983, p. 185). At "most active social levels", people live as "private small-family units" or as "private and deliberately self-enclosed individuals" (Williams, 1983, p. 188).

Social identity in contemporary terms must account for modern social relations which "happen in complex ways over very large areas", relations which are often "distinct and dehumanized: the apparent opposites of community." Williams argues that the "projection of simple communities" on modern nation-states is a projection of reductions and simplifications (Williams, 1989b, pp. 116-117). We must consider social identity as it is lived through "the cultural struggle for actual social identities" and "the political definition of effective self-governing societies" (Williams, 1983, pp. 193-196). The idea of community, then, must be produced by lived social relations.

Williams argues that modern nation-states are, in this sense, both too large and too small "to develop full social identities in their real diversity". They are too

large in the sense that any "imposed general 'patriotism'" can override or contain unequal social and economic development and the protests and resentments of neglected and marginalized regions and minorities. Nation-states are at the same time too small to resolve the trading, monetary and military problems "which have so heavily encroached on the supposed 'sovereignty' of the nation-states" (Williams, 1983, pp. 197-198).

iv) Cinema as Democratic Communication:

With the first application of electricity to communication in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, cinema, along with the telephone, phonograph, electric light and wireless, was seen to hail "the dawning of complete cross-cultural understanding" (Marvin, 1988, p. 194). Cinema's initial silence reinforced this belief by transcending language barriers (Polan, 1988).

Yet the advent of cinema, Williams argues, prompted alternative visions of the medium's development (Williams, 1989c, p. 107). The "honest way to see the real cultural history", he writes, "is that the new conditions and the new technologies made possible two wholly alternative directions of development" (Williams,

1989c, p. 109). The left perspective envisioned a medium that "bypassed, leaped over, the class-based establishment theatre and all the cultural barriers which selective education had erected around high literacy." It was "a harbinger of a new kind of world, the modern world: based in science and technology", a popular medium, "perhaps even a revolutionary medium".

The entrepreneurial class saw in cinema "new audiences", and later recognized "a symmetry between this new popular form and typically capitalist forms of economic development" (Williams, 1989c, pp. 107-109).

> The infinitely reproducible print, though structurally similar to the transforming technology of the press, could be used in new ways: to bypass the problems of literacy; to bypass, in the silent era, the old limitations of national languages; but above all to ensure rapid distribution of a relatively standard product, over a very much wider social and geographic area (Williams, 1989c, p. 109).

Williams, however, cautions against a determinist argument, emphasizing instead the contest between these antipodal paths of cinema's development. "All we can say, at this level, is that an available symmetry gave the actually developing forms an important though not finally decisive competitive edge" (Williams, 1989c, p. 110).

Historically, cinema began with small, local entrepreneurship. Theatre chains and "closely

interlocking ownership" in the distribution and production sectors developed later (Williams, 1962, p. 21). The historical trends of expanding audiences and the organization of communications media around corporate capitalism structured communication's profit orientation. Under such organization, barriers to entry are considerable, and ownership tends to become increasingly concentrated (Williams, 1965, p. 365).

At the same time, other forms of the division of labour crystallize. As artistic techniques become more complex and lead to higher degrees of specialization, divisions between participants and spectators develop (Williams, 1989a, p. 91). Within the cultural industries themselves, divisions are created between cultural workers and owners and managers. "Every kind of cultural and productive worker, within the highly capitalized systems of these advanced technologies, becomes an employee of owners or managers who need not be directly concerned with cultural production at all" (Williams, 1989a, p. 116).

The exchange-value orientation of the cultural industries informs the "selective tradition": the emphasis and amplification of certain meanings, values and practices and the marginalization of alternative meanings, values and practices. The arts and learning, for example, become "minority interests" when the

"ordinary use of general communication is to get power and profit" (Williams, 1962, p. 129).

Williams insists upon a close relation "between the possibility of a practice and the conditions of wage-labour, themselves derived from the privileged ownership of the necessary means of production within a capitalist or state-capitalist system." It is the inherent tension between structural power and social possibility. Even "radical amendments to the terms of these relations" are "compatible with the still effective reproduction of the deep form of privileged ownership and the consequent general condition of wage-labour" (Williams, 1989a, p. 189). Williams cites the examples of newspapers and television, in which there has been a

> predominant integration of cultural production with the general conditions of privileged ownership of the means of production and the consequent (wage-labour) employment of the actual producers. Thus, except in certain marginal cases, to practise is to enter these conditions of practice (Williams, 1989a, p. 192).

Williams argues that Darwin's theory of natural selection is inappropriately extended to social and political theory as a means of rationalizing the selective tradition within capitalism. The "survival of the fittest" ethos makes two assumptions about capitalism: that it is truly competitive, and that the

"fittest" competitors have then some universal claim to being "best" (Williams, 1980, pp. 86-91).

> ... nobody could look at the nineteenth century and suppose that it was a society in which one day somebody fired a pistol and said: 'Go on, compete economically, and the strongest will come out at the top of the heap.' Quite evidently, huge fortunes were there at the start of the play, and the great majority of the players came to the table bearing nothing but their hands. If there is really to be competition in the full ruthless sense, then you must all come to the table with empty hands (Williams, 1980, p. 91).

"Fittest", in the Darwinian sense, of course, means best adapted to environment. The application of the theory of natural selection to accommodate modern society is a distortion. It fails to account for the production of the social environment (Williams, 1980, p. 96). Hollywood, for example, invokes not simply a collection of motion pictures, but at the same time a particular industrial practice. The symbiosis between Hollywood as industrial practice and Hollywood as film practice is a social and historical construction.

Carolyn Marvin argues that "the early history of electric media is less the evolution of technical efficiences in communication than a series of arenas for the negotiating issues crucial to the conduct of social life; among them, who is inside and outside, who may

speak, who may not, and who has authority and may be believed" (Marvin, 1988, p. 4).

> ... the focus of communication is shifted from the instrument to the drama in which existing groups perpetually negotiate power, authority, representation, and knowledge with whatever resources are available (Marvin, 1988, p. 5).

v) Conclusion:

The project of this thesis is to explore the relationship of cultural practitioners -- in this case, English-Canadian feature film-makers -- to their conditions of practice, by setting their practice within its historical, social and political-economic context. In turn, this thesis seeks to examine the relationship between the broad context of Canadian feature-film production and the texts which result from that practice. Because of communication's centrality in society, Williams argues:

> The relations between people in the society are often seen most easily by looking at the institutions of communication -- how the people regard each other, what things they think important, what things they choose to stress, what things they choose to omit. And so, from the beginning, we cannot really think of communication as secondary. We cannot think of it as marginal; or as something that happens after reality has occurred. Because it is through the communication systems that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms and is interpreted (Williams, 1989b, pp. 22-23).

This thesis addresses the films as expressions of the film-makers' real social relations and expressions of the general social relations of film-making in Canada (Williams, 1986, pp. 203-204).

The thesis rejects the "taken-for-grantedness" or "naturalness" of Canadian society and its political, economic and cultural institutions, recognizing that Canadian society and its institutions are produced. It establishes the relevance of film texts in its insistence that communication and cultural expression are productive activities. It establishes the relevance of context by arguing that the producers of communication and cultural expression are at the same time produced by their society.

The thesis addresses the specificities of time and place by describing the commercial industrial organization of feature film-making in Canada and Canadians' persistent struggle to define community in the complicated context of a global economy. At the same time, the thesis addresses the historical dimension of the context of film production in Canada, pointing specifically to its tradition of public enterprise and its semiotic function of representing Canadian experience.

Finally, Williams's oeuvre informs the portrayal of English-Canadian auteur cinema as an oppositional film practice. Its public enterprise opposes a predominantly commercial enterprise. Its semiotic function -- it contributes to the production of society by engaging questions of Canadians' social relations as they are lived -- opposes commercial cinema's commodity exchange function. Its non-industrial organization opposes the corporate organization of feature-film production and resists the alienation inherent in capitalist commodity production. And Canadian cinema validates "here" in its struggles to define community, to sort out some of the confusions of place which Williams outlines.

PART II

CONTEXTUALIZING CANADIAN FILM PRODUCTION

Introduction

A thematic preoccupation in Canadian cultural studies is the struggle to achieve a distinct, indigenous voice in the mediascape. It is an obsession in Canadian film studies. In a period of redefinition of nationhood, at a stage of unprecedented challenge to notions of national cultural expression, Canadian cinema remains a marginal medium in Canada, accounting for between one and six per cent of screen time in Canadian movie theatres.[1] Maurice Yacowar writes: "The Canadian film experience proves that a whole nation can feel itself a silenced, even invisible, Outsider in its own home" (Yacowar, 1986, p. 13).

Canadian cinema struggles to assert particular Canadian stories and images within the context of an increasingly global mediascape, a mediascape largely dominated by American imagery. It is a struggle Canadian film historian Peter Morris describes as "this stubborn insistence, that won't go away, of wanting to make our

own films here" (Morris, 1986a, p. 322). The context of film production in Canada is a commercial, industrial structure organized around vertically-integrated Hollywood film companies, its private-enterprise foundations tempered by state support.

Michael Dorland notes that "the constitution of cinematic language" in Canada, as elsewhere, is "structurally trifunctional", responding to medium, state and industry (Dorland, 1986, p. 316). The context of Canadian cinema is specifically characterized by: an oligopolistic and vertically-integrated industrial structure hostile to independent films; a capital-intensive industry which demands foreign sales to recoup production costs;[2] an exhibition sector in which screen time is at a premium; the marginalization of Canadian feature film in Canada; and ambivalent state support which intervenes by funding production, but allows market rules to prevail in the industry's distribution and exhibition sectors.

Canadian film scholarship has traditionally examined Canadian cinema through an optic of power relations between a colony (Canada) and an empire (the United States), forging a link between Canadian cinema and Canadian nationalism. Defined by the tension between commercial enterprise and public purpose, Canadian cinema is portrayed as a medium of nation-building and Canadian

feature films as voices in the ideological or imaginary construction of nation and community.[3]

Beginning with economic recession in the early 1980s, however, Canada has experienced ascendent neoclassical economic values, in which nationalism is increasingly an oppositional ideology. If one of the first signs of a change in ideological course was the Mulroney government's 1985 conversion of the protectionist Foreign Investment Review Agency into the more accommodating Investment Canada (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 267-268), the Conservative government has continued along a path of privatization, free trade and reductions in cultural spending.[4] Economist Steven Globerman has introduced neoclassical ideology to Canadian film scholarship in his prescription of free-market principles for the Canadian feature-film industry.

The following three chapters establish Canadian cinema's marginality by examining the political-economic, historical and public-policy contexts of its production. If the basis of the power of the media is the power of definition, these chapters illuminate how the power of definition has been exercised in various fields (See Gurevitch *et al*, 1990, p. 201).

Chapter Four details the structural impediments Canadian cinema confronts in seeking access to an industry dominated by vertically-integrated Hollywood

film companies. The two major theatre chains in Canada are controlled by the same transnational corporations that own major Hollywood production and distribution companies, establishing a climate of vested interest.

Chapter Five describes Canadian cinema's historical context. It traces the roots of Canada's cultural dependency beyond film to nineteenth-century theatre, outlines the origins of film's continentalist and commercial industrial practice, historicizes Hollywood primacy, and documents Canadian governments' functionalist view of film production. Film in Canada has never been considered important in and of itself, but as a tool to attract immigrants, tourists, industry and capital to Canada, a weapon with which to fight world war on the home front, and a vehicle for the creation of a national identity.

Chapter Six addresses Canada's film policy record. Called upon to counter Hollywood hegemony, Canadian governments have opted to promote Canadian film within the existing industrial structure through subsidies and tax incentives. Successive governments have refused to tamper with free-market economics in the distribution and exhibition sectors, rejecting, for instance, the imposition of screen quotas. This chapter argues that cultural policy is always produced in a context of

competing policy interests, and historically, film policy has been secondary to economic and trade policy goals.

Notes

[1]Three per cent is the figure generally attributed to Canadian cinema's share of screen time in Canadian theatres, yet the source of this figure is a mystery. Manjunath Pendakur (1990, p. 29) and Jean-André Leblanc (1990, p. 288) quote this figure, without indicating their source. The *Report of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture* (Canada, 1992, p. 71) also quotes this figure, citing a brief from the Canadian Film and Television Production Association. I wrote to eight organizations on January 21, 1993 in an attempt to locate exact figures, which I assumed would vary from year to year and from market to market within Canada. I received six replies -- from Statistics Canada, the federal Department of Communications, the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, the Independent Film and Video Alliance, and L'Association des Propriétaires de Cinémas et Ciné-Parcs du Québec -- all of which stated that no such data are kept. The Department of Communications said the most reliable indicator of screen time is Statistics Canada data on film distribution. In 1991, for example, distributors in Canada earned six per cent of their total theatrical revenues from Canadian films. Between 1981 and 1991, the share of theatrical revenues from Canadian films ranged from 1.1 per cent (1984) to six per cent (1991), an average of 4.08 per cent (Perrier, 1993; Statistics Canada, 1993).

[2]According to Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, thirty-eight per cent of U.S. film, television and home video revenues come from foreign markets ("The domino game", 1988, p. 20). Alliance Communications Corp., the closest Canadian equivalent to a major studio, generates more than half its revenue outside Canada (Enchin, 1992, pp. B1-B2).

[3]The first books on Canadian cinema appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period of fervent nationalism in both Canada and Quebec. Characterized historically by the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, the

nationalist economic policies of federal Minister of Finance Walter Gordon, Canadian centennial celebrations and Expo '67 in Montreal and the October Crisis of 1970, it was also a period of tremendous growth for Canada's film culture. Between 1960 and 1976, film festivals were established in Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa and Toronto, the Quebec cinema journal *L'Objectif* was published from 1960-67, the Canadian Film Development Corporation was founded in 1968 to sponsor feature-film production, the Council of Canadian Filmmakers was formed in 1973 to lobby governments in Canada for Canadian film quotas and special taxation of American film companies' earnings in Canada. It was a time of burgeoning feature-film activity by Claude Jutra, Michel Brault, Denys Arcand, Clément Perron, Gilles Groulx and Gilles Carle at the National Film Board. Two germinal feature films date from this period: Don Shebib's *Goin' Down The Road* (1970) and Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971) (Harcourt, 1993).

[4]Elected in September, 1984, the Mulroney Conservatives slashed $121.5 million from the culture and communications sector in their November, 1984 budget. The government cut: the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's budget by $85 million (9.5 per cent); the Secretary of State by $9.8 million; the Department of Communications by $7 million; the Canada Council by $3.5 million (five per cent); the National Film Board by $1.5 million (2.4 per cent); the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission by $1.5 million (5.9 per cent); and the National Arts Centre by $1 million (2.7 per cent). The only cultural agency untouched was Telefilm Canada and its $60-million broadcast fund (See: "Conservatives take bite out of culture", 1984, p. 36).

CHAPTER FOUR

Mediated Marginality:
The Political-Economic Context

Canadian film scholarship has explained Hollywood's domination of the Canadian exhibition market by its overwhelming strength in the distribution sector of the film industry. The most profitable sector, distribution is the industry's link between production and exhibition. Distribution companies are key sources of investment in film projects -- thus determining at the outset which film scripts are developed -- and they are the gatekeepers through which films are passed on to theatres -- thus determining when, where and on how many screens films are shown. A direct correlation has been established between Canadian films' lack of access to distribution networks and their failure to gain screen time.

From the first published history of the film industry in Canada (Marsolais, 1968) to the most recent studies by the federal government's Department of Communications, American film companies' domination of the distribution networks has been cited as the principal cause of Hollywood's predominance on Canada's theatre

screens. Gilles Marsolais, for example, refers to "La Toute-Puissante-Exploitation-Distribution américain" (p. 30) and to the "système vicieux de distribution" (p. 74) which inhibited Canadian film-makers' transition from documentary production to feature production in the 1960s (pp. 101-102).

In a more focussed political-economic survey which sets the Canadian film industry within a discussion of U.S. imperialism and Canadian nationalism, Susan Crean (1976) describes how Canada, beginning as early as the 1920s, was "rationalized as part of the continental 'domestic' market and was sectioned off for distribution and exhibition only" (p. 74). Canada's creative talent, Crean writes, was exchanged for American cultural products, "just as our natural resources have been swapped for manufactured goods -- and with identical results: the colonization and dependence, and eventually by the disappearance of the Canadian industry" (p. 18).

In 1985, the federal government's Film Industry Task Force identified "three major structural problems" inhibiting a viable Canadian film industry: foreign domination of film and video distribution in Canada, "which prevents Canadian producers from taking their rightful place in their own market"; "chronic under-capitalization" of production companies, owing largely to their exclusion from distribution and exhibition; and,

the concentration of theatre ownership and the vertical integration of distribution and exhibition, which "reduces competition" in those sectors (Canada, 1985, p. 7).

i) The Neo-Classical Argument:

Rejecting the conclusion by public policy-makers that foreign ownership of film distribution adversely affects the development of an indigenous feature-film industry, Steven Globerman (1991) argues: the industry is highly competitive; because it is highly competitive, foreign-owned distributors cannot afford to discriminate against commercially viable Canadian feature films; and, the way to ensure Canadian film's visibility is to produce more films that moviegoers want to see (pp. 204-205).

To begin, Globerman argues that there is "no bias" on the part of film distributors "against distributing commercially promising Canadian films" (p. 191). He describes the production sector as "workably competitive" (p. 193) and, while conceding that distribution revenues in the industry's theatrical sector "are largely concentrated among a few foreign-owned firms" (p. 199), Globerman insists that the evidence is only "suggestive" of a market power problem and may in fact reflect foreign

distributors' economies of scale. He cites data reflecting a "fairly aggressive rivalry" among the major Hollywood film studios for screen time in Canadian movie theatres (pp. 201-202). "In sum, it is inappropriate to link any dissatisfaction that policy makers might have with the commercial performance of Canada's feature film industry to the concentrated presence of distribution majors in the theatrical sector of the industry" (p. 202).

Secondly, Globerman argues it is in the major distributors' economic interest to handle commercially viable Canadian feature films (p. 193). "Commercially promising Canadian films will be distributed by the majors, since it is in the majors' self-interest to do so" (p. 204). He cites the example of the Canadian film *Meatballs*, which enjoyed "major commercial success" (p. 198) after its American and Canadian theatrical rights were secured in 1978. The film's box-office gross was $55 million (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 209-210).

Globerman rejects the assertion that foreign-owned distributors underrate the commercial capacity of Canadian features and impose unfair terms on Canadian producers (p. 194). Besides, Globerman argues, economies of scale suggest "that concentrated ownership of the theatrical distribution sector can promote efficiencies" (p. 201). "In short," he writes, "it is simply not

credible to argue that a reluctance on the part of the majors to invest in Canadian production is a significant determinant of the international competitiveness of Canada's feature film industry, when one is considering commercial feature films" (p. 203). Globerman encourages Canadian producers wishing to gain access to international film distribution channels to make concessions to Hollywood tastes because the "major distributors are for-profit organizations whose competitive advantage resides in the international distribution of mass appeal feature films" (p. 198).

Finally, Globerman reveals his subtext: make good films and your problems are solved. He quotes culture critic Robert Fulford:

> Are there good Canadian movies on the shelves, callously ignored by U.S. distributors? Every year I attend the Genie Award screenings and see most of the Canadian features, and every year I come away convinced that, with rare exceptions, the films that are not distributed do not deserve distribution. The problem is with the producers who make so many bad films, rather than with the distributors; when good Canadian movies are made they usually get into theatres and find appropriate audiences (p. 204).

Globerman himself concludes: "Improving the competitiveness of Canada's feature film industry quite simply requires making more films that a greater number of people want to see" (p. 204).

ii) Vertical and Horizontal Integration:

Globerman's argument ignores the political economy of the Canadian film industry; he makes no mention of the vertical integration of the principal Hollywood film companies. By treating feature films exclusively as economic commodities, Globerman subsumes their cultural value; government subsidies to Canadian cinema are justified primarily, not by cinema's economic value to Canada, but by its cultural value. Finally, his analysis employs the kind of meritocratic argumentation commonly used to discount the cultural production of disempowered groups: women, native peoples, blacks. The prevalence of Hollywood tastes in the production, distribution and exhibition sectors of the film industry reveal a failure of the market to accommodate cultural difference.

The principal characteristic of the film industry in Canada is its vertical integration. The majority owners of the two major theatre chains operating in Canada, Cineplex Odeon Corp. and Famous Players Ltd. Canada, are American transnational corporations which also own Hollywood film production and film distribution companies. These interlocking empires have a vested interest in using their theatre subsidiaries to show their own film product.

Further, the two Canadian theatre chains have historically enjoyed a first-run film-allocation policy between them "to keep intraindustry rivalry contained among competing theater chains" (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 98-99). Famous Players, that is, has had exclusive first-run rights in Canada to all MGM, Paramount, United Artists and Warner Bros. films. Cineplex Odeon has had exclusive first-run rights to all Columbia and Universal Studios films. The two chains have shared Twentieth Century-Fox films: two-thirds for Famous Players, one-third for Cineplex Odeon (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 98-119; Weinzweig, 1987, pp. 173-174). Traditionally then, Canada's theatre chains have competed to attract people to their theatres, but they have not competed for film product.

Cineplex Odeon Corp. is fifty-per-cent owned by MCA Inc., an integrated film, television, broadcasting and publishing company whose subsidiaries produce, market and distribute motion pictures and home videos. MCA owns Universal Studios Hollywood and Florida (Hanson, 1990, pp. 5920-5922). MCA is in turn owned by Japan's Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., which purchased MCA Inc. for $6.1 billion US in November, 1990. Matsushita is the world's largest consumer electronics firm (Castro, 1990, p. 48).

Cineplex Odeon operates 1,750 theatre screens in 400 locations in the United States and Canada. Cineplex Odeon Films Canada is Canada's largest independent film distribution company (Canadian Press, 1992, p. C4; Cineplex Odeon Annual Report, 1990).

Famous Players Ltd. Canada is 100-per-cent-owned by Paramount Communications Inc., which is in the business of producing, financing and distributing motion pictures, television programs and home videos, operating movie theatres and publishing. Paramount Pictures is one of the major Hollywood film studios (Hanson, 1992, pp. 6078-6081). Famous Players owns and operates 469 screens in 118 locations across Canada (Harris, 1993), and owns approximately twenty-five per cent of C/FP Distribution (Shaw, 1991).

The industry that Globerman describes as highly competitive, therefore, is in fact an industry dominated by two transnational corporations whose subsidiaries operate in all three industry sectors: production, distribution and exhibition. Further, those two companies' theatre chains have had a long-standing pact to share, rather than compete for, the product of the seven major Hollywood studios.

But MCA and Paramount are not merely vertically integrated; they are horizontally integrated through joint ventures. Since 1981, for example, MCA, Paramount

and MGM/UA Communications Co. (which owns two Hollywood studios: MGM and United Artists) have been equal partners in United International Pictures, distributing films to theatres and pay television outside the United States and Canada (Hanson, 1990, pp. 5920-5922).

In 1989, Paramount subsidiary Paramount Domestic Television and MCA subsidiary MCA TV agreed to form PREMIER Advertiser Sales, a joint venture to sell advertising in programs distributed by the two companies (Hanson, 1990, pp. 6060-6063).

In December 1990, MCA, Paramount subsidiary Paramount Pictures Corp. and United Artists Communications Corp. announced a joint venture to purchase, develop and operate cinemas in the United Kingdom and Ireland, acquiring American Multi-Cinema Inc.'s British circuit of twenty-two theatres. The three partners subsequently agreed to form a new "major cinema chain" in the same territories (Hanson, 1992, p. 6079).

These so-called competitors, then, who share the film product of the major Hollywood studios, are business partners in film industry joint ventures.

iii) An Exhibitors' Market:

Globerman argues that because the film industry is so competitive, distribution companies operating in

Canada cannot afford to ignore Canadian films with commercial potential. While this is a logical argument when presented in abstract economic terms, it is not the case when we examine the structure of the Canadian film market.

To begin, we must acknowledge that it's an exhibitors' market. There are a finite number of screens, the same film plays in several theatres within the same market at the same time, many screens are limited to two screenings per day, and the same film can play on the same screen for weeks or months at a time. Theatres, therefore, cannot handle all the films produced in a given year.

Nicholas Garnham explains that because film production companies' return on investment is tied directly to the rate at which investment capital is recouped, it is economically advantageous that a film play in a multitude of theatres concurrently (Garnham, 1990). Distribution and exhibition thus become the most important factors in a capital-intensive, high-risk industry, contributing to the film industry's "tendency to monopoly" (p. 183). Because film production demands great capital investment "in a heterogeneous, highly perishable product" for which demand is "uncertain", and because films are exhibited for relatively small crowds of people each paying a relatively small price of

admission, film companies "amortize production investment over a very short release period." Speed of sale is profoundly related to profitability. The longer it takes to pay back borrowed money, the greater the interest costs; conversely, the *quicker* the return on investment, the *greater* the return on investment. Because the circulation of commodities "proceeds in time and space", Yves de la Haye argues, "[t]he product is really finished only when it is on the market" (de la Haye, 1980). Compared to the costs of production, the costs of distribution are very small, whether a film plays in ten theatres or two thousand (Garnham, pp. 183-185). It's therefore advantageous to occupy as many screens as possible with your film.[1]

A further complication in what Globerman would have us believe is a competitive market for first-run films is the practice of "block booking". Certainly, theatre operators would prefer to exhibit one blockbuster after another, no matter the source. But in order to win exhibition rights to commercially-prized films, through the practice of block booking theatre chains have historically been obligated to buy the studios' flops. As Pendakur argues, this practice creates a minimum market for the studios' "lower-grade pictures" but also occupies screen time that might otherwise be available to independent films. "Through their block-booking policy,

the leading American producer-distributors controlled almost all of the screen time available in the Canadian first-run market" (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 119-120).

Pendakur argues that the theatre chains' debt to the major studios leaves few holes for independent productions. Independent films are used primarily to fill scheduling gaps, with no choice of theatres, dates, or publicity (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 154-157). Globerman cannot accurately claim that Canadian feature films are not commercially viable when they can't even find room on the shelf.

iv) The Universally Good:

Charges of discrimination by foreign-controlled distributors and exhibition chains have long been met with the kind of response Globerman forwards: the theatres will show "good" Canadian films if and when they are produced. Pendakur dismisses the argument by referring to the record. Canadian films such as Don Shebib's *Goin' Down The Road* (1970) and Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971) only received commercial distribution after having won international awards. None of the seven top-grossing Canadian films between 1968 and 1978 were released during prime exhibition times. Canadian films that are performing well in the theatres

-- Pendakur cites the example of George Kaczender's *In Praise of Older Women* (1978) -- are sometimes pulled to accommodate a major distributor's film (Pendakur, 1990, p. 155). Quebec film-maker Rock Demers said his popular *La Guerre des tuques* was pulled from a Cineplex Odeon theatre to make way for a Disney film, even though *La Guerre des tuques* was still playing to capacity crowds (Fraser, 1988, p. C8).

Besides, in what is acknowledged as a high-risk industry, it sets a double standard to demand that Canadian feature films perform commercially at a standard that Hollywood itself can't meet. Jean-André Leblanc notes that the accepted wisdom in the United States is that one film in ten makes money, four or five others meet their expenses, and the remainder lose money (Leblanc, 1990, p. 287). Globerman is asking Canadian features to outperform consistently the industry average to have any hope of commercial distribution.

The meritocracy argument grossly oversimplifies Canadian cinema's struggle to assert its voice in the mediascape and ignores significant structural impediments in the industry. Competition in the Canadian film industry has been severely compromised by the vertical integration of the production, distribution and exhibition sectors of MCA Inc. and Paramount Communications Corp., by first-run film allocation

agreements between the Cineplex Odeon and Famous Players theatre chains, by block-booking practices, and by joint ventures in other cinema projects which make MCA and Paramount industry partners. These practices may make the Canadian film industry economically efficient, as Globerman argues, but they do not render it competitive.

Dana Polan writes:

> In a liberalist ideology of culture, communication occurs in a free and open space where everyone can have access to paths of transmission and reception. But such a conception ... can only inevitably ignore the connections of communication and power -- the ways in which a communication always take place in a certain field of authorized possibilities (Polan, 1988, p. 89).

Film only becomes a medium of communication through its projection to an audience. To reserve movie screens only for certain kinds of film -- features rather than documentaries or experimental films, American "commercial" rather than Canadian "non-commercial" films -- is to impose a rigid and exclusive definition of the medium itself. Further, it ignores the question of cultural difference in the social construction of media. Bernard Miège cautions: "A communication model, artistic production, cultural forms or communication strategies cannot be analysed outside their historical conditions of production or reception" (Miège, 1989, p. 18).

Globerman's argument would be more convincing if the marginality of indigenous cinema were unique to Canada. But it is not. Hollywood cinema is the world's dominant cinema, crowding the theatre screens of France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain and Japan, countries we associate with strong indigenous cultures (See: Stratton, 1993, pp. 14-16).

Notes

[1]In its first three weeks of release in the Canada-U.S. market, for example, the Columbia film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* played 2,491 screens ("Weekly Box Office Report," Nov. 23, 1992, p.8; Nov. 30, 1992, p.6; Dec. 7, 1992, p.12). Twentieth Century-Fox's *Home Alone 2* played 2,222 screens its first week and 2,231 screens its second week ("Weekly Box Office Report," Dec. 7, 1992, p.12). By comparison, *Black Robe*, opened in twenty Canadian theatres in October, 1991, grossing over $1 million in twenty-four days. By the last week of October, 1991, the film was playing on forty-four screens ("$1-million Robe," 1991, p. C3). *Shadow of the Wolf*, at $32 million the most expensive Canadian film ever made (Conlogue, 1993, p. C3), was released the week of March 5, 1993, and opened on 373 screens in Canada and the United States ("Weekly Box Office Report," March 15, 1993, p. 10). A more modest Canadian film, *Masala*, occupied one screen in its third week of North American release ("Weekly Box Office Report," April 5, 1993).

CHAPTER FIVE

Seen But Not Heard:
The Historical Context

The history of Canadian cinema is a century-long struggle to create space for Canadian films in Canadian movie theatres in the face of Hollywood hegemony in the distribution and exhibition sectors. José Arroyo writes:

> We not only see American films almost exclusively but we have a long history of doing so. Canada has been considered part of the American domestic market since the 1920s because exhibition and distribution in Canada have been vertically integrated with American production since then. As long ago as 1925 95 per cent of all films exhibited in Canada were supplied by major U.S. film companies (Arroyo, 1992, p. 77).

While shutting out Canadian films, this has also had the effect of defining the film medium -- in terms of both form and content -- according to Hollywood's model. When Canadian audiences do see Canadian feature films, they often seem "foreign".

Three points are worth considering here. First, the roots of Canadian cultural dependency can be traced to film's immediate predecessor, nineteenth-century theatre.

Second, motion pictures were developed in North America at the turn of the century by entrepreneurs rather than artists, who shaped the medium for commercial purposes (Harcourt, 1977, pp. 50-51). Finally, the catalyst for Canada's most productive periods of film-making has been nationalism.

i) Filmed Theatre:

To trace the origins of Canadian cultural dependency we must look beyond the last decade of the nineteenth century, when most film histories begin. For one thing, Canadian cultural dependency has as much to do with Canada's colonial status in the nineteenth century, and its lack of any sense of independent nationhood, as it has to indigenous cultural production. But secondly, as film historian Charles Musser reminds us, motion pictures were not born in a moment of technological discovery in the late nineteenth century. The medium's -- and, indeed, the industry's -- ancestry is a long evolution of public performance, projected imagery, shifts in authorship and shifts in purpose. Musser writes:

> The history of projected images and their sound accompaniment has its origins in the mid seventeenth century. The beginning of screen practice does not, however, privilege a moment of technological invention -- such as the invention of the magic lantern or the

> cinematographic apparatus -- but rather a fundamental transformation in the mode of production. Screen practice began in the 1640s when the process of projecting images was no longer concealed from the unsuspecting viewer. Instead of being an instrument of terror and magic known only to a select few, the projecting apparatus became an instrument of cultural production that was known to all (Musser, 1991, p. 9).

Among the fundamental transformations of the past century was the transfer of the responsibility for editing from the exhibitor to the film-maker, "facilitating a shift in both narrative responsibility and authorship from exhibitors to the production companies" (Musser, 1991, p. 9). One result of this, from an industrial perspective, was the centralization of North American movie production in the United States. (And within the United States, the eventual concentration of film production in Los Angeles.)

Canadian cinema history, too, predates the first public exhibition in 1896 of motion pictures in this country. Germain Lacasse documents Panorama and Diorama presentations in Quebec as early as 1836. Among the presentations were: "Dr. Johnston, African explorer"; "M. le Comte de Périgny, archéologue et voyageur"; "Mlle Martha Craig, recruteur de touristes pour le C.P.R."; and "MM. Buisson et Carufel, propagandistes pour la Société de colonisation de Montréal" (Lacasse, 1985, p. 5). The roots of many of the issues facing Canadian cinema today

can be traced to theatre, vaudeville and music-hall history of the nineteenth century.

In terms of the film texts, much of early cinema was merely "filmed theatre", featuring brief, often staged segments from vaudeville acts, theatre scenes, circus acts and opera. The Edison group in 1894, for example, shot films of strongman Eugene Sandow, dancers Carmencita and Annabelle Whitford, contortionist Mme. Ena Bertoldi and "high kicker" Ruth Dennis (Musser, 1991, pp. 39-41). One of the first motion pictures shown publically in Canada, in Ottawa's West End Park on July 21, 1896, was *The May Irwin Kiss*. This fifteen-second scene was the culminating episode in a popular New York musical, *The Widow Jones*, and starred Canadian-born actress May Irwin (Morris, 1978, pp. 1-3; Musser, 1991, p. 65).

During this novelty period for the medium, motion pictures were often shown as part of vaudeville shows on music hall stages. Edison's Vitascope, for example, had its premiere at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York in April, 1896. Entrepreneurs purchased both their projectors and their films from production companies such as Edison and Biograph, then rented halls or theatres in which to exhibit them. Movies were one among many novelties presented to vaudeville patrons, part of a varied program which typically included singers, dancers and animal acts (Musser, 1991, pp. 77-81).

The North American theatre circuit was integrated; stage shows toured both sides of the Canada-United States border. Foreign touring theatre companies first visited Canada in the late eighteenth century. As Canada's population grew and its transportation networks improved, such tours reached their peak in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century (Benson & Connolly, 1987, p. 31). By the turn of the century, dozens of shows -- Canadian, American and British -- criss-crossed the border with their vaudeville acts and their movies. At that time, films had to be purchased -- at $100 per reel -- instead of rented, and it was therefore more practical for exhibitors to change locations instead of introducing a new film when audience interest waned (Morris, 1978, pp. 17-19). Film exchanges, the forerunners to today's film distribution companies, were introduced in 1902 and the first permanent movie houses were opened later that year (Morris, 1987, pp. 18-19).

Canadian entrepreneurs, of course, also crossed the border to conduct business in the U.S. Ottawa businessmen Andrew M. Holland and George C. Holland ran Kinetoscope parlours in Boston and New York (Musser, 1991, p. 45) and later served as exclusive agents for Edison's Vitascope in Canada (Morris, 1987, pp. 4-6).

If the film medium's context at the turn of the century was theatre-based and comprised integrated touring circuits on both sides of the border, the texts borrowed the "language" of the theatre. James Hurt notes:

> The earliest film-makers used film strictly as a medium, to record either "found" real events or stage events (or what could easily have been stage events). In staged films, the camera remained fixed at what would have been third row center, actors entered and exited from the sides or the rear of a continuously visible space, and the action was arranged horizontally and pointed toward the camera-audience (Hurt, 1974, p. 4).

Both theatre and film were narrative and mimetic, and both were "poised on a borderline between entertainment and art" (Hurt, 1974, p. 8). Film's earliest representational system was "presentational", the predominant mode of nineteenth-century theatre. Verisimilitude was limited, sets were only suggestive of locale, and acting embodied "highly conventionalized gestures that expressed forceful emotions", as in live theatre (Musser, 1991, p. 8). Early films took great liberties with temporal/spatial relations, condensing action as in theatre (Musser, 1991, p. 189), and with a stationary camera, the edge of the picture frame was cinema's answer to theatre's proscenium arch (Musser,

1991, p. 211). Early films, too, were aimed at theatre/vaudeville/music hall audiences.

Theatre created a "climate of acceptance" for motion pictures. Hurt writes:

> The history of primitive film, from the early 1890's to about 1915 ... was marked by a gradual conquest of the theatrical audience and by the rapid development of a cinematic style clearly distinct from that of the theatre (Hurt, 1974, p. 3).

Theatre also established a pattern of industrial practice which cinema would emulate. Productions originated outside Canada, they were staged by entrepreneurs and they were road shows following an integrated, Canadian-American theatre circuit.

Early cinema in Canada reproduced the theatre environment in terms of both text and context; it was simply a change of media. As "filmed theatre", movies replaced stage performances to a significant extent and, just as "early theatre in Canada owed its existence to outside forces", the movies were imported (Edwards, 1968, p. 166). Canadians were not making their own films. Murray D. Edwards writes:

> When the movies began to replace stage performance, the effect on the theatre in Canada was severe, but the replacement didn't represent a deterioration in the dramatic form, it was a change of media merely. The early movies were essentially an extension of stage melodrama, and the advantages of this were

> obvious. The film could travel in a can at a fraction of the cost of a touring company, and the product was superior. Canadians willingly gave up one form of dependency and immediately accepted another (Edwards, 1968, p. 166).

When motion pictures arrived, Canada had no indigenous theatre tradition. Most countries which developed film industries already had well-established stage traditions. Peter Morris writes:

> But Canada had no such traditions. Most of the plays staged in Canada in the nineteenth century were "stock company" productions on tour from Britain, France, or the United States. Canadians who wanted to develop their careers in acting, writing, or producing for the stage almost inevitably found it necessary to base themselves in the United States, Britain, or Europe. Thus, when the movies had developed to the point of needing a particular kind of trained personnel, Canada had none. This is a crucial fact which was to haunt Canadian production (Morris, 1978, p. 28).

The practice of staging "well-tried plays from abroad as the standard repertoire, usually under the auspices of visiting professional companies from Great Britain or the United States" became entrenched with early "garrison theatre" productions in the eighteenth century (Benson & Connolly, 1987, p. 11). In a period in which there was little or no sense of Canadian nationhood, imported arts from recognized cultural centres were embraced. Canadians performed amateur

theatre, but stood aside to watch foreign professionals. Referring to the late eighteenth century, Edwards notes:

> At the time local amateur groups should have been developing to professional status, encouraging playwrights, actors and directors of their own, Canadians were sitting back and applauding the American or English stars, with the result that the growth of theatre in Canada was largely an artificial one (Edwards, 1968, p. 5).

The wide-scale construction of opera houses and theatres from the 1890s until the beginning of the First World War merely provided apprenticeship venues for Canadian actors who subsequently graduated to foreign stages. Edwards writes:

> English and American companies, always searching for a larger audience, naturally took advantage of the lack of local competition, and by the turn of the century, Canada had become not much more than an appendage of the two older cultures.... Unfortunately once this trend was established, the growth of native talent was severely curtailed. Canadians developed the habit of waiting for the foreign stars and neglected their own potential leading actors (Edwards, 1968, p. 36).

Benson and Connolly acknowledge: "Theatrically speaking, Canada was an occupied country for most of the nineteenth century and nearly half of the twentieth" (Benson & Connolly, 1987, p. 32).

By the turn of the century, Canadian stages were dominated by two American cartels: The New York

Theatrical Syndicate and The Shubert Theatre Corporation (Edwards, 1968, p. 37). "The American and English touring companies, similar to the movie companies of today, sent the shows in and took the money out" (Edwards, 1968, p. 37).

There was, nevertheless, some resistance. The London-based British Canadian Theatrical Organization Society arrived in 1912 to relieve Canadian audiences of "the wretched stuff" performed by the American cartels. This amounted to the substitution, in essence, of British theatre, not then perceived to be "imported" or "foreign", for American theatre. It was replaced in 1919 by the "not-so-successful" Trans-Canada Theatre Society (Tippett, 1990, pp. 141-142). John Pringle founded a stock company in Saskatoon in 1907 and Carroll Aikins created the Canadian Players in 1920, whose Home Theatre was based at a ranch in Naramata, British Columbia. Aikins intended to develop "a company of actors, set designers and writers which, as the name of the group suggests, would be Canadian in every respect" (Tippett, 1990, pp. 20-21). They survived two seasons of competition with British and American touring companies (Benson & Connolly, 1987, pp. 48-49).

The net result of this cultural occupation of Canada was an "other-directed culture", a colonization of the Canadian theatres and a colonization of the Canadian

imagination. Raised on a restricted diet of imported theatre, Canadian playwrights adopted the literary trend of the Romantic melodrama. Edwards writes:

> We find almost constantly that Canadian dramatists were incapable of attaining originality of expression or form. Too often the dramatists reached out for models from other countries without attempting to inject new life into the old forms (Edwards, 1968, p. 166).

ii) An Occupied Country:

Canadians' experience of the early movies replicated their theatrical experience. Particularly in the era of silent films, movies crossed borders with ease; the same silent movies that enthralled anglophone Ontario charmed francophone Quebec. American and French film companies, at the forefront of motion pictures' technological development, monopolized Canadian theatres.

When subject matter demanded, film production companies crossed borders with their cameras, often at the behest of Canadian sponsors. As early as 1897, Niagara Falls attracted film-makers from France and the United States. In 1899, film-makers representing Edison, American Mutograph and Biograph filmed Canadian troops training and departing for the Boer War (Morris, 1978, pp. 244-245). Edison licenced the Klondike Exposition

Company in 1899, sending Thomas Crahan and Robert Kates Bonine into the Yukon gold fields to shoot three movies (Musser, 1991, pp. 144-145). In 1901, James White, head of Edison's Kinetograph department, shot two films for the Canadian Pacific Railroad in British Columbia (Musser, 1991, pp. 191-192). Edison licencee William Paley shot a series of actuality films in Montreal in 1901 and 1902 (Musser, 1991, pp. 194-195). When agricultural machinery manufacturer Massey-Harris of Toronto decided in 1898 to use film to promote its products, the company hired Edison (Morris, 1978, p. 32). Canadians didn't need to make their own films; there were abundant foreign production companies for hire.

Canadian production at the turn of the century was almost exclusively devoted to attracting immigrants to the Canadian west. The CPR sponsored a tour of Britain by independent Manitoba film-maker James Freer in 1898-99 to promote Canadian immigration (Morris, 1978, pp. 30-32, p. 128). Freer made a number of films depicting prairie experience. The federal government sponsored a second Freer tour of Britain for the same purpose in 1902 (Morris, 1978, pp. 30-32). However, when the CPR decided to sponsor further film production, they contracted British producer Charles Urban (Morris, 1978, p. 32).

As rentals through film exchanges replaced outright sales of films in the first decade of the twentieth

century, the strategic links between film production and distribution and exhibition became apparent. Producers needed theatres and theatre-owners needed good films. Canadian-based theatres established partnerships with American film suppliers to ensure a steady stock of crowd-pleasing movies.

Brothers Jules and Jay Allen were among the first to integrate their exhibition and distribution activities in Canada with the formation of a wholly-owned film exchange company, Allen Amusements Corporation. The Allens had opened a store-front theatre in Brantford, Ont., in 1906, and by 1920 had developed the largest chain in Canada with forty-five theatres. Through their film exchange, the Allens secured exclusive rights to distribute Pathe and Independent Motion Pictures productions from the U.S. By 1915, the Allens had expanded their distribution activities nationally and switched to a better source of films: Paramount Pictures (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 52-56).

N.L. Nathanson bought his first theatre in Toronto in 1916 on his way to building the Paramount Theatres chain to rival the Allen brothers (Hoolboom, 1991, pp. 72-74). The same year, Adolf Zukor, who owned the production company Famous Players-Lasky and the distributor Paramount Pictures, began to buy theatres across North America to ensure the exhibition of his movies (Hoolboom, 1991, pp. 72-74). His offer of a

fifty-fifty partnership with the Allens was refused (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 56-57). Zukor instead bought into Nathanson's rival chain in 1920, incorporating the Famous Players Canadian Corporation. When the Allens' distribution agreement with Zukor's Paramount Pictures expired, Famous Players gained exclusive rights to Paramount films for twenty-five years (Pendakur, 1990, p. 58).

The key to the success of the Allen brothers' chain had been their access to Paramount films. Aligning themselves with First National, they now found themselves trying to compete with Famous Players' Paramount films. After three years, the Allen chain was bankrupt, and Famous Players took over twenty of its largest theatres (Pendakur, 1990, p. 62).

The battle between the Allens and Nathanson in Canada was part of a larger struggle between Zukor's company and First National, vertically-integrated film companies in the United States (Morris, 1978, p. 310). By the early 1920s, three companies had come to dominate the industry in North America: Paramount, First National and Fox, all of which owned or had exhibition contracts with theatres (Morris, 1978, p. 124).

The entrenchment of vertical integration coincided with the end of Canada's film production boom. Three dozen Canadian film companies had formed between 1914 and

1922 in response to public demand for more Canadian (or British) stories (Morris, 1978, p. 63). But the flurry of nationalism prompted by the reciprocity debate and Canada's role in World War I had waned, too many investors had been burned, and Hollywood had increased its output of stories adapted for Canadian audiences (Morris, 1978, p. 91). Pendakur writes: "By 1925, five years after vertical integration with an American major film corporation began, 95 percent of all films exhibited in Canada were supplied by major U.S. film companies" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 59).

The American impact was similar around the world. Until the First World War, France and Italy had thriving film industries. But war forced France, Italy, Britain and Germany to reduce production and the United States moved into markets previously dominated by the Europeans, including Latin America and Japan. By the end of the war, the U.S. produced approximately eighty-five per cent of the world's movies and enjoyed a ninety-per-cent share of its huge home market (Turner, 1990, pp. 9-11).

iii) Propaganda and Nationalism:

Initially, Canadians were content to watch American-made "interest films" depicting Canadian scenes. But as narrative films became the standard fare, there was a

demand for stories representing Canadian experience. In the years before 1914, Canadians exhibited films and owned theatres, but theatre content was divided approximately sixty per cent American, forty per cent British. Canadians saw Canadian images -- forests, waterfalls, lumberjacks, Mounties -- but very few of these films were Canadian-made (Morris, 1978, p. 26). From 1907 to 1914, American companies produced 100 Canadian-content films, and Hollywood's image of Canada became the world's image -- and Canada's image of itself (Morris, 1978, pp. 40-41).

By 1911, coinciding with fervent national debate on trade reciprocity with the United States, there was considerable opposition to American dominance of Canadian movie theatres (Morris, 1978, pp. 54-56). The First World War intensified anti-Americanism -- the U.S. didn't enter the war until 1917 and then flooded the screens with American war movies -- and amplified demand for films which reflected a Canadian or British Empire point of view. Just as significantly, "the war was to create a new awareness of the Canadian identity as something distinct from 'British' or 'North American'" (Morris, 1978, p. 56).

Two thematic streams in the history of Canadian cinema coincided with the outbreak of the First World War: propaganda and nationalism. Canadian cinema was

born shortly after Confederation itself, in a disparate political culture, in an epoch in which national sentiment had not yet had a chance to take hold. If there existed a sense of patriotism among English-Canadians in this period, it was in their membership in the British Empire. As discussed above, Canadian cinema was born into a climate of well-entrenched dependence on imported culture.

If nationalism was vital to the development of an indigenous cinema, it came during wartime, and it served the war effort. Morris writes: "The outbreak of war in 1914 stimulated government film activities just as it stimulated private film production" (Morris, 1978, p. 129). The movies had been used to depict war since 1898. The sinking of the U.S. battleship Maine and the Spanish-American War "were a boon to the American film industry, as cinema regained a wide audience" (Musser, 1991, p. 126). Charles Musser writes:

> As President McKinley wavered between war and reconciliation with Spain, the "new" or "yellow" journalism of William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World worked hand in hand with the music halls and theaters to incite Americans' warlike spirit.... A film of the American flag at the conclusion of each program guaranteed long, hysterical cheers (Musser, 1991, p. 127).

Such public enthusiasm encouraged Edison and Biograph to send film-makers to Cuba (Musser, 1991, pp. 127-128).

"The Cuban crisis and the Spanish-American war brought moving pictures into an unprecedented number of metropolitan theaters" (Musser, 1991, p. 133).

Edison shot film footage of Canadian troops departing for the Boer War in 1899 (Morris, 1978, p. 129), and the Canadian Patriotic Fund sponsored a Biograph film show covering the Boer War at Massey Hall in 1900 (Morris, 1978, p. 12). The Kalem Company, the first American firm to shoot Canadian dramas on location in Canada, shot a narrative film in 1909, *The Girl Scout*, which depicted Canadian participation in the Boer War (Morris, 1978, p. 40).

Three dozen film companies formed in Canada between 1914 and 1922 (Morris, 1978, p. 63). Newsreels, Morris writes, were the first expression of Canadian self-awareness. "With the outbreak of the war, Canadians had a natural interest in seeing events related to it, and the newsreels were created to satisfy this demand in a manner American newsreels would not or could not" (Morris, 1978, p. 57).

If film in Canada had been used for propaganda from the outset -- to lure immigrants, industry, capital, tourists -- it would become an explicit instrument of mass persuasion during the First World War. Gary Evans writes: "If war films were crude politically and almost totally lacking in ideological content, the war

established the potential of film as a persuasive tool" (Evans, 1985, p. 20).

Canada posted Max Aitken to Canadian Armed Services' general headquarters in France "[t]o publicize its position as an independent nation expressing imperial solidarity" (Evans, 1985, p. 20). Aitken started a newspaper for Canadian troops, hired an official war photographer, and worked with the Canadian war memorials fund, which commissioned artists to depict war scenes. Aitken also chaired Britain's War Office Cinematograph Committee, working in tandem with an official film production unit created in 1916 (Evans, 1985, pp. 20-21).

Aitken was an innovator in his devotion to propaganda as a tool of war -- at a time when propaganda lacked popular respect -- and a tool designed for the ideological battle on the home front. Further, he developed a philosophy that demanded propaganda produce such compelling material that people would pay for it. Aitken believed: "No propaganda reaches the hearts and minds of the people unless it is so convincing that the public is ready and anxious to pay a price to see or read it" (Evans, 1985, p. 20).

War films made by the Imperial War Office Committee, depicting Canadian troop activity in Europe, were coupled with inspirational films depicting Canadians' contributions on the home front (Morris, 1978, p. 60).

Two-minute film tags urged Canadians to save coal or to buy war bonds (Evans, 1985, p. 22). Evans writes:

> In the long view, home-front propaganda was successful in establishing domestic goals such as recruitment, food economy, and national savings, and in this context film gained enormous prestige as an instrument of national purpose, albeit as a late arrival (Evans, 1985, p. 24).

Evans adds: "The First World War had demonstrated how information as a whole played a valuable secondary role in what was now 'total' war" (Evans, 1985, p. 25).

iv) Theatre of War:

John Grierson, Canada's film commissioner during the Second World War, was the "democratic world's most famous propaganda expert" (Morris, 1986a, p. 45). He further refined Aitken's techniques. Information to Grierson was "as necessary a line of defence as the army, the navy, and the air force" (Grierson, 1996, p. 86). Grierson perceived a national cinema as an extension of the state (Dorland, 1986, p. 317) and subscribed to a unique brand of benevolent totalitarianism (Evans, 1985, pp. 13-14). Grierson wrote in 1940:

> In a society like ours, which is even now in the throes of a war of ideas and in a state of social revolution of the profoundest nature, art is not a mirror but a hammer. It is a

> weapon in our hands to see and to say what is right and good and beautiful and hammer it out as the mold and pattern of men's actions (Evans, 1985, p. xiii).

Four key themes were central to Grierson's belief system: the importance and power of the state; the irrelevance of party politics; the new power of government technocrats; and the primacy of the irrational over the rational (Morris, 1986, p. 31). The inherent tension in documentary cinema between information and propaganda was not an issue for Grierson; his "contextual theory of cinema", explains Bruce Elder, "demonstrated that the value of particular films depends upon their utility in the social context in which they are produced" (Elder, 1989, p. 92).

Grierson called his propaganda "education", a brand of education which called for, among other principles, "directive" community leadership from artists and teachers through a "dramatic process of enlightenment" which would introduce "a measure of imagination and inspiration" (Grierson, 1966, pp. 165-166). Evans argues that Grierson saw no distinction between propaganda and education, and "used film and print to promote a strange blend of mass suggestion and education" (Evans, 1985, p. 14). In Grierson's own words:

> Cinema is neither an art nor an entertainment: it is a form of publication, and may publish in

> a hundred different ways for a hundred different audiences. There is education to serve; there is the new civic education which is emerging from the world of publicity and propaganda; there is the new critical audience of the film circles, the film societies and the specialized theatres. All these fields are outside the commercial cinema.
>
> Of these, the most important field by far is propaganda (Grierson, 1966, p. 68).

Grierson's documentary genre rendered "a creative interpretation of actuality" (Evans, 1985, p. 16).

Grierson believed propaganda had a life beyond war, but the end of the war chilled the enthusiasm of his superiors in Ottawa. War is a time of crisis, a period in which nationalist ideology is elevated to a degree not always desirable in peace time. War becomes a national emergency, even though the interests served by war may not be shared by everyone in the national community. Grierson, for example, denied Canadian regionalism, the ubiquitous counter-balance to Canadian nationalism. Grierson believed his documentary idea took hold in Canada because of a "need to achieve unity in a country of many geographical and psychological distances" and a desire to assert Canada's "new sort of place in the world" (Grierson, 1966, p. 111).

In following the federal government line, Grierson's National Film Board ignored alternative visions of Canada; they negated regional difference, most notably French Canada's opposition to the war (Morris, 1986, p.

39). The 1942 NFB production *Inside Fighting Canada*, for example, did not mention the conscription crisis "which had split the nation badly in the spring of 1942" (Evans, 1985, pp. 133-134). Grierson's documentary excluded events that would have threatened national morale. The NFB "suspended the rule of truthful reporting" by not documenting the Dieppe disaster (Evans, 1985, p. 40). In the 1943 film *Letter From Overseas*, viewers were misled in the belief Canadian soldiers had fulfilled their "special task" at Dieppe in August, 1942. In fact, they had suffered "a casualty or captured rate of more than 57 per cent" (Evans, 1985, p. 186).

As the post-war role of the NFB was debated, and the desire for a feature-film industry resurfaced, Grierson fought on for his documentary ideal. In his 1944 essay "A Film Policy for Canada", Grierson opposed film quotas in Canadian movie houses, opposed the development of a feature-film industry in Canada and urged the Canadian government to stick to making "educational" documentaries through the NFB (Grierson, 1988, pp. 52-67). "It is an attractive notion, this notion of building up one's own local Hollywood, but how difficult it would be to execute" (Grierson, 1988, p. 58).

Describing Canada as "a dependency of the United States" (Grierson, 1988, p. 55), Grierson suggested two "other possibilites": Canadians interested in making

features could make them in New York or Hollywood; and, anticipating the Canadian Co-operation Project with the United States, Hollywood could be encouraged to use Canada "as a source of first-rate stories" (Grierson, 1988, pp. 59-61). "What can be asked of Hollywood -- and is increasingly being asked -- is that it should, as a matter of policy, spread its net wider in the search for its themes" (Grierson, 1988, p. 61). In sum, Grierson felt more could be gained through cooperation with Hollywood than through confrontation (Morris, 1986b, p. 26).

Grierson's opposition to a Canadian feature-film industry has been variously interpreted. For film historian Peter Morris, Grierson was an "innocent abroad" who became "a key architect of Canada's marginalization in the film world" (Morris, 1986b, pp. 29-31).

> Grierson's stirring gesture of faith in Hollywood's recognition of its international responsibilities and its essentially benign and supportive role in other countries is, of course, derived from his often simplistic views on internationalism generally. His faith also contrasts strikingly with the hardheaded realism of Hollywood and the U.S. generally in the postwar years (Morris, 1986b, p. 23).

Morris notes that Grierson's NFB had worked very closely with Hollywood during the Second World War. The NFB, for example, collaborated with Hollywood short-film producers, to the extent of subsidizing them by about

$1,000 per film. Grierson's NFB had offered to provide a liaison officer and to meet some incidental expenses for Hollywood producers contemplating film activity in Canada (Morris, 1986b, p. 25). His interest in cooperating with Hollywood was to ensure the distribution of NFB films in the United States (Morris, 1986b, p. 26).

Joyce Nelson (1988) attributes to Grierson far more sinister motives, portraying him as an agent of American economic and cultural imperialism. Nelson argues that, at least until the end of the Second World War, Grierson was "a champion of emergent multinational capitalism and ... he used the medium of film as a public-relations vehicle to convey the wisdom and necessity of accepting the new economic order that would come to typify the postwar world" (Nelson, 1988, p. 13). Grierson's internationalism "was closely aligned with multinational capital's goal to integrate world markets and eliminate the impediments to the new economic order." Among the impediments were trade unionism, resistance to technological progress and nationalism (Nelson, 1988, p. 14). At the same time Grierson was advising Ottawa not to intervene with Hollywood's monopoly in Canada, Nelson notes, he was engaged in building a national cinema in Britain and calling for the regulation of Hollywood film companies in the United Kingdom (Nelson, 1988, p. 92).

Nelson describes the parallel structure Grierson designed to distribute and exhibit NFB films to non-theatrical audiences as a "clear concession to Hollywood", leaving its vertically-integrated commercial structure intact (Nelson, 1988, p. 89). Nor were documentary films a challenge to Hollywood film fare.

> By having the wartime NFB focus on "the moods of resolution", while at the same time importing films from outside the country to meet the "moods of relaxation", Grierson helped to divide the country's expectations along an axis that actually served the U.S. entertainment industry structure (Nelson, 1988 pp. 150-151).

Nelson argues that this practice reinforced the attitude that Canadian content was associated with "documentary, propaganda, 'moods of resolution', central authority" and American content with "entertainment, comedy, 'moods of relaxation': relief from Canadian content itself" (Nelson, 1988, p. 151).

Gary Evans (1991), finally, perceives Grierson as a realist. Dismissing Morris's assessment as "a simplistic nationalist argument" (Evans, 1991, p. 339fn), and ignoring Nelson altogether, Evans argues:

> First, a national film policy was unlikely, since film exhibition was a provincial responsibility and, in Canada, to obtain unanimity was (and is) improbable. Secondly, it was not feasible to alter Hollywood's worldwide preponderance, given Canadian demographics and a scarcity of experienced

> talent. The Liberal government had spent the war years building up the branch-plant economy; to swim against this tide was to tilt at windmills (Evans, 1991, p. 6).

While it would seem a natural evolution, the National Film Board has never fully embraced feature film-making -- with some memorable exceptions: Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964), Gilles Carle's *La Vie heureuse de Léopold Z* (1965), Gilles Groulx's *Le chat dans le sac* (1964), Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971), Jean Beaudin's *J.A. Martin photographe* (1976). Under fire by private film-makers throughout the post-war period for claiming the lion's share of lucrative government-sponsored film contracts, features were perceived as clearly within the private sector's bailiwick (See: Evans, 1991).

The NFB maintains its emphasis on documentary film-making. The same year the NFB released the feature *The Company of Strangers* -- which in its first year grossed more than $2 million in theatrical, video and television revenues (Harris, 1991, p. A11) -- film board president Joan Pennefather announced the NFB would be spending less on fiction films, participating only in co-productions (Abramovitch, 1990, p. D6).

CHAPTER SIX

Acts of Omission, Acts of Commission: The Public Policy Context

Federal and provincial governments in Canada have been sponsoring film production since the turn of the century, and the federal government has operated a national film production organization continuously since 1918. Public-sector film production has filled a void that private enterprise has failed to address: Peter Morris writes:

> In this century at least, there is apparent a continuing concern in Canada that the forces of the free marketplace must be tempered in the public interest through government involvement. Most commonly this has found expression in state owned enterprises either taking over commercial companies or operating in competition with them.... Rarely argued philosophically -- and certainly never on socialist principles by governments in power -- it seems more of a pragmatic response to the peculiar needs of Canadian society than an articulated doctrine (Morris, 1978, pp. 127-128).

But that concern to temper free-market forces has always had strict limits. State intervention in the film industry has confined itself to promotional measures --

subsidies and tax breaks -- and has avoided protectionist measures demanding screen quotas, tariff barriers or withholding taxes (Thompson, John Herd, 1991, pp. 4-5). At the same time, Canadian governments have intervened in the production sector, but have refused to tamper with distribution or exhibition, reflecting a fundamental faith in both private property and market economics. Governments, that is, *invest in* production with the belief that "good" Canadian films will make their own way through the distribution networks to the theatre screens. Judy LaMarsh, Secretary of State in the Pearson government, reflected this attitude in 1966:

> Canadian productions will have to compete with foreign films for our own market. Canadian productions will have to win respect -- and audiences -- on their own merits. The government is counting on the support and cooperation of film distributors and cinema owners to meet this particular problem (Magder, 1985, p. 96).

Governments justify production subsidies by arguing that, without incentives, there are few sources of investment capital in Canada and the small domestic market increases the risk to investors entering what is already a risky and capital-intensive industry. Tampering with distribution and exhibition, however, requires a fundamental challenge to the machinations of the marketplace. Canadian public policy has waffled between,

on the one side, recognition of cultural expression as a necessary ingredient of mature nationhood and, on the other side, long-term subscription to liberal trade.

Similarly, up until 1967, Canadian governments were more inclined to sponsor documentary production than feature-film production. Documentary films can be accommodated within governments' education mandate, and can be distributed non-theatrically. They exist in a separate sphere which does not encroach upon the commercial sector that handles feature films as entertainment commodities.

i) Acts of Commission:

The first state-sponsored films in Canada were tools to promote immigration from Britain to settle the prairies. Following the Canadian Pacific Railroad's sponsorship of James Freer's tour of Britain in 1898-99, the Canadian government sponsored a second Freer tour of Britain in 1902 (Morris, 1978, pp. 30-33). In 1905, the federal government commissioned a Parisian film-maker to shoot scenes of Winnipeg "in order to stimulate emigration from France" (Morris, 1978, p. 129).

Motion pictures played a key role in Canada attracting three million immigrants between 1900 and 1914 (Morris, 1978, pp. 32-33). In the first few decades

after Confederation, nationalism in Canada meant remaining British and warding off American republican values. Most of the immigration films "were directed principally at British audiences" because U.S. immigrants in the first five years of the twentieth century outnumbered those from Britain and because Canada feared losing the west to the United States if British immigration did not increase (Morris, 1978, p. 33). Early film was also used to lure industry and investment capital (Morris, 1978, pp. 133-135).

The instrumental applications of film as a medium of propaganda during the First World War led governments to play an increasing role in film production (Morris, 1978, pp. 59-60). Canada became the first country in the world with government film production units, while at the same time rejecting calls to curtail American monopolization of the commercial film sector. A differentiation was made by state officials between the purposeful films of government production and the commercial films they defined as entertainment commodities (Magder, 1985, p. 86).

Having previously contracted out film projects, Ontario established the Ontario Government Motion Picture Bureau in 1917. The bureau purchased the abandoned Trenton studios in 1923 and ran them until 1934 (Morris, 1978, pp. 70-71). In 1918, the federal government

established the Exhibits and Publicity Bureau within the Department of Trade and Commerce for "the production, acquisition and distribution of motion pictures". The bureau's *Seeing Canada* series, launched in 1919 and aimed primarily at foreign audiences, was designed to attract industry and capital to Canada (Morris, 1978, pp. 131-135). The Exhibits and Publicity Bureau became the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau in 1923, and was absorbed by the National Film Board in 1941 (Morris, 1978, p. 161). British Columbia established its own Educational and Patriotic Film Service in 1919, becoming one of the first Canadian provinces to use film to promote immigration (Morris, 1978, p. 149). The establishment of the National Film Board in 1939 entrenched the state as a producer of films for nation-building purposes; John Grierson was invited by the Canadian government to rejuvenate state film production (Evans, 1985, p. 13).

Increasingly in the post-war period, the federal government has been asked to address the commercial film sector. The aftermath of the war demanded that government redefine the NFB's mandate and address the American domination of feature film, particularly in the face of a balance-of-payments crisis with the United States. The Emergency Foreign Exchange Conservation Act of 1947, which imposed import restrictions on a number of

U.S. goods, excluded motion pictures. That year, $17 million of the $20 million taken out of Canada by the motion-picture industry went to the United States. A lobby from the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) and Famous Players Canada Corporation convinced Minister of Trade and Commerce C.D. Howe that Hollywood could help resolve the problem it helped create. Pendakur writes: "[The MPEAA and Famous Players] sold Howe on the idea that a quota on American films might infuriate the faithful moviegoers in Canada and that the MPEAA would find a solution to correct the outflow of dollars" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 136). Rather than impose screen quotas, import restrictions or withholding taxes, Ottawa negotiated the Canadian Cooperation Project with Washington and the resourceful MPEAA. The deal required Hollywood to: produce a film on Canada's trade-dollar problem; provide more complete newsreel coverage; produce short films about Canada; release NFB films in the United States; include Canadian sequences in its feature films; make radio recordings by Hollywood stars extolling Canada; make more careful selections of films shown in Canada; and, work with a Canadian government officer in Hollywood to coordinate the project (Cox, 1980, p. 34).

Pendakur describes the Canadian Cooperation Project as "public relations gimmicks to stop the Canadian

government from legislating any quotas." He adds: "The smoke screen created by the MPEAA lobby through the CCP began to thin out in less than a year, and some government officials in high positions were beginning to get suspicious" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 137). The Canadian Cooperation Project expired in 1951 when Canada's currency reserves crisis eased (Pendakur, 1990, p. 141).

The first serious attempt by the Canadian government to stimulate indigenous feature-film production was the establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) in 1968. This represented a major shift in state attitudes toward film and culture. Ted Magder writes:

> Popular culture could no longer be defined as mere entertainment; it was crucial to the formation and vitality of national identity and sovereignty. This reappraisal of culture, per se, was linked to the more familiar arguments about the need to establish a greater degree of economic independence; sovereignty entailed both economic and cultural control (Magder, 1985, p. 86).

The CFDC was mandated to: invest in Canadian feature-film projects; loan money to producers; present awards for outstanding production; support the development of film craft through grants to film-makers and technicians; and, "advise and assist" producers in distributing their films (Pendakur, 1990, p. 148). In sum, the CFDC was

designed to ease the burden of funding feature-film production in Canada.

Private investment in film production had been encouraged by Ottawa since 1954 through a sixty-per-cent capital-cost allowance, a tax deduction available to investors in any film, no matter the source. The law was revised in 1974 to increase the write-off to 100 per cent, but only for investments in Canadian feature films. The capital-cost allowance was reduced to thirty per cent for non-Canadian productions in 1976, "to be claimed only against income from those films and taped productions" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 170).

The impact of the capital-cost allowance is debatable in terms of both the program's cultural and its economic objectives. Citing figures based on tax-shelter productions from 1974 to 1986, Pendakur acknowledges the capital-cost allowance boosted film production ($660 million in eligible investment for 432 feature films) and the size of average film budgets (from $527,000 prior to 1974 to $3.5 million in 1986). He writes: "Undoubtedly, many jobs were created by the CCA" (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 171-173).

While questions have been raised about the cultural value -- the "Canadian-ness" -- of the resulting films, the importation of Hollywood production practices, the use of Hollywood stars and creative personnel, and the

commitment to the industry of the new-found film investors (See: Pendakur, 1990, pp. 170-179), the more important issue is whether or not the capital-cost allowance had an impact on the distribution and exhibition of Canadian feature films, the key to building a Canadian film industry. In a CFDC study of forty-five tax-shelter films produced in 1979, the program's most productive year, Pendakur notes that only twenty-two of the films were released commercially (twenty-one of the forty-five still hadn't been released by April 1982), and of those, five were considered "commercially successful". Only two of the forty-five films "were classified as having achieved the cultural objective of the policy" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 178). Pendakur writes: "As the critics of the CCA correctly pointed out, the industrial objectives of the government failed to create a national cinema that gave expression to Canadian issues and problems" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 179).

The 1985 *Report of the Film Industry Task Force* concluded that the capital-cost allowance, in fact, "widened the gap between production and market". The introduction of the 100-per-cent capital-cost allowance coincided with the Canadian Film Development Corporation's decision to drop its demand for a distribution agreement as a funding prerequisite. The capital-cost allowance "significantly reduced the

importance of distributor participation in the front-end of the production of a property." Together these policies eliminated distributors from the critical development stage of the project.

As a result, "while the supply of Canadian theatrical properties increased considerably, many were totally unmarketable" (Canada, 1985, pp. 28-29). Investors proved more attracted to the tax shelter than they were committed to making commercially viable feature films. When economic recession hit in the early 1980s, private investment disappeared.

ii) Acts of Omission:

Canadian governments' reluctance to impose protectionist measures on the film industry can be seen most clearly in their consistently negative response to calls for screen quotas in Canadian movie theatres. Part of the problem, certainly, is the fact that movie theatres fall under provincial jurisdiction. A nation-wide screen quota would demand coordination among ten provincial governments. But even when provincial governments have imposed quotas, the measures have never implied the fundamental restructuring of the feature-film industry.

British Columbia was the first, passing legislation in 1920 insisting its theatres present at least one ten-minute B.C. educational film or travelogue with every film program. The decree expired after just eighteen months when the government decided to restrict the activities of the chief source of B.C. films, its own Educational and Patriotic Film Service (Morris, 1978, pp. 150-151). Ontario legislated a newsreel quota in 1930, demanding newsreels contain at least forty per cent British Empire content and twenty-five per cent Canadian content (Cox, 1980, pp. 30-31). The demand for quotas nation-wide intensified in the late 1920s with the entrenchment of Hollywood domination and the disappearance of Canadian film imagery.

Canada was not alone in being shut out of its own movie theatres. By 1926, British films accounted for just five per cent of films shown in British theatres. The British government responded with the Cinematograph Film Act of 1927, imposing a screen quota of five per cent in 1928, gradually rising to twenty per cent. The King government in Canada supported the British quota, with the proviso that the law apply to all films made within the British Empire. This was granted (Morris, 1978, pp. 177-180). Australia imposed its own quota of five per cent British Empire films in 1928, rising to ten

per cent in 1929 and fifteen per cent in 1930 (Morris, 1978, p. 312).

The King government, however, didn't support quotas at home. Citing public consternation over the predominance of American films in Canadian theatres at the time, Peter Morris writes: "What seems most puzzling about the official inaction is that it took place in an atmosphere conducive to action" (Morris, 1978, p. 179). Ray Peck, director of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, opposed quotas on principle, believing films receive the exhibition they merit. Peck encouraged American branch-plant film activity in Canada.

> We are attempting at all times, as Canadians, to induce American capital and manufacturing interests to come into Canada and establish branch factories. I look on the American film industry much as a branch factory idea in so far as it affects Canada. American motion picture producers should be encouraged to establish production branches in Canada and make films designed especially for British Empire consumption.... We invite Americans to come over to Canada to make automobiles and a thousand and one other things, and why not invite them to come over and make pictures, but make them the way the British markets demand? (Morris, 1978, p. 181).

Taking up Peck's invitation, a number of Hollywood producers registered film companies in Canada to take advantage of the British quota, producing what came to be known as "quota quickies". Between 1928 and 1938, twenty-two features were produced in Canada by American

companies "to circumvent the British quota". The law was changed in 1938 to exclude "dominion film productions" from the quota (Pendakur, 1990, p. 134). Morris writes: "Only Canada allowed itself to be exploited without protest by Hollywood for the production of quota quickies. And Canada reaped small benefit -- except the injection of a little money into the cities where production was based" (Morris, 1978, pp. 181-182).

As has already been discussed, a renewed call for screen quotas in the immediate post-war period was opposed by NFB founder John Grierson and Minister of Trade and Commerce C.D. Howe, resulting instead in the Canadian Cooperation Project. The call for quotas was issued again in the early 1970s, a period of heightened nationalism in which foreign ownership of the Canadian economy was a predominant theme. By 1974, Canada had become the No.1 foreign market for U.S. film distributors (Magder, 1985, p. 96).

Le Syndicat National du Cinéma, organized by French-Canadian film-makers to counter the profit orientation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, and the Council of Canadian Film-makers lobbied for quotas and a special tax on American film companies' earnings in Canada. Among the proposals voiced were: Canadian-content quotas in Canadian theatres; the purchase of one of the existing theatre chains; the establishment of a

competing exhibition system; reserving theatres for independent films for a set period each year; setting aside fifty per cent of screen time for short films; imposing box-office taxes to be directed toward indigenous film production (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 158-159). At a film symposium in Winnipeg in February, 1974, nineteen film-makers (including Denys Arcand, Kirwan Cox, Colin Low, Peter Pearson, Tom Shandel and Don Shebib) issued the Winnipeg Manifesto, which read in part:

> We, the undersigned film-makers and film-workers, wish to voice our belief that the present system of film production/distribution/exhibition works to the extreme disadvantage of the Canadian film-maker and the Canadian film audience. We wish to state unequivocally that film is an expression and affirmation of the cultural reality of this country first, and a business second (Crean, 1976, p. 109).

Calls for a quota were supported by Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner and, Pendakur writes, the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia indicated support "for the principle of screen quotas", but were reluctant to impose additional box-office taxes. Further, the 1975 final report of the Ontario Committee on Cultural and Economic Nationalism concluded that protectionist policies for Canadian cultural production served the public interest and would be less costly than subsisidies (Pendakur, 1990, p. 160).

Faulkner reached "an informal agreement" with the two major theatre chains, Famous Players and Odeon, "to make two weeks of screen time available for English Canadian films (original or dubbed) in the three largest markets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 161). If followed to the letter, this would guarantee Canadian films a 3.8-per-cent share of screen time in those cities.

The 1984 National Film and Video Policy tabled by Liberal communications minister Francis Fox "recognized the historic problem of foreign transnational corporations' control over Canadian theatrical and film markets" and spoke of the problem as "a cultural crisis of undetermined proportions". Nevertheless, Fox opposed quotas, claiming, ironically, that they would "limit the range of viewing choice available to Canadians". Fox preferred negotiations with the Motion Picture Export Association of America rather than regulation of the industry (Pendakur, 1990, p. 256).

A change of government later that year seemed to promise long-awaited action on film distribution, but no screen quotas. The 1985 *Report of the Film Industry Task Force* dodged the subject of quotas, targetting instead the structural issues of distribution and vertical integration (Canada, 1985).

iii) Courting the Majors:

Legal channels have proven as futile as political channels in cracking the Hollywood oligopoly. Canada has twice undertaken combines investigations of the film industry, but has failed to improve the competitive climate.

During the 1920s, the Canadian subsidiaries of the major American studios created an association, later called the Motion Picture Distributors and Exhibitors of Canada. This cartel, which included the vertically-integrated distributor Paramount Pictures and exhibitor Famous Players, awarded exclusive exhibition rights to its members' films to Famous Players, squeezing out the rival Allen theatre chain. By 1929, having bought out the Allen chain and nine others, 207 of the 299 theatres belonging to chains were controlled by Famous Players (Canada, 1985, pp. 42-43).

In 1930, federal Minister of Labour G.D. Robertson ordered an inquiry under the Combines Investigation Act. Commissioner Peter White concluded that a combine had existed since at least 1926, comprising Famous Players and the exhibitors Paramount, Universal, Fox, Columbia, R.K.O. and First National (Canada, 1985, pp. 42-43). The case was prosecuted in Ontario in 1932, where it was thought to have the best chance of success, but Supreme

Court Justice J. Garrow cleared the accused of all charges. Famous Players and the distributors, Pendakur writes, "were acquitted on the basis that the prosecution could not establish that the alleged combine was detrimental to the public interest" (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 90-91). The acquittal was also attributed to the limited scope of the Combines Investigation Act itself (Canada, 1985, p. 43; Morris, 1978, p. 311).

The second case, fifty years later, failed when the original complainant, Cineplex Corporation, became part of the combine it was fighting. When Cineplex was established as an independent theatre chain in 1977, the two existing chains, Famous Players and Odeon, enjoyed exclusive film-supply agreements with the major American distributors (Canada, 1985, p. 44). Cineplex opened its first multiplex theatre in Toronto in 1979, soon discovering its "obstacle to profitibility" was its lack of access to the major studios' new releases (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 223-229).

Cineplex was close to receivership in December, 1982, when its complaint was taken up by Lawson Hunter, director of combines investigation, who filed an application for inquiry with the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission against the seven major distributors in Canada: Astral Films, Columbia Pictures, Paramount Productions, Universal Films (Canada), United Artists

Corp., Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. and Warner Brothers Distributing (Pendakur, 1990, p. 232). Armed with recent changes to the combines law -- film had been exluded prior to 1976 -- and fearing the bankruptcy of a Canadian company with 1,000 employees (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 233-236), the commissioner negotiated an interim agreement with the distributors in 1983 to open up the bidding process for first-run films (Pendakur, 1990, p. 238).

A follow-up report determined that while improvement had been made regarding access to "subsequent-run" films, "little change" had occurred in the distribution pattern of first-run films. Famous Players and Odeon, that is, still controlled between seventy-two and 100 per cent of first-run films, and they continued to receive from distributors the right of first refusal to new releases (Pendakur, 1990, p. 240). Three months prior to the commissioner's final report in 1984, Cineplex bought the Odeon theatre circuit, "thereby making the continuation of the application process with the RTPC on behalf of Cineplex unnecessary" (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 240-242).

iv) Public Policy in Context:

Cultural policy is produced within a context. Ted Magder describes cultural policy in Canada as "a

manifestation of the specific historical and developmental characteristics of Canadian society" (Magder, 1985, p. 82). State policy, that is, is subject to social, political and economic constraints (Magder, 1987, p. v).

> The claim that communications and cultural production are key sectors because of their role in establishing a popular sense of national identity -- the experience of sovereignty -- is not mere rhetoric. But saying this in no way implies the existence of an autonomous, self-generating or coherent policy process. In other words, state policy is not to be idealized as the practice of a neutral, techno-rational institution, nor should the policy process be situated above the contradictory dynamics of capitalist democracy (Magder, 1985, p. 82).

The state, in other words, is not a monolith.

> On the contrary, the state is an institutional ensemble, and state activity and state "interests" derive from the balance of social forces extant within a given historical conjunction. State power is a mediation of the relational struggles for power within the social formation as a whole. It follows from this that the policy process itself, and the internal structure of the state, are characterized by disunity, flux and struggle (Magder, 1985, p. 85).

Feature film is representative of the cultural industries as the most highly capitalized sector and the clearest example of American dominance in any cultural field in Canada (Magder, 1985, p. 82). Film policy, Magder argues, must be understood within the context of

imperialism, but also within the context of domestic struggles and conflicts.

> Whereas dependency theorists might see Canada's film policy as being produced at the behest of the American state and the American film industry, we see film policy as being determined by forces within the Canadian social formation as they are structured by dependent capitalist development (Magder, 1985, p. 85).

While Canadian "nationalists" do not have a necessary class position, nor a common vision,

> Canada's feature film policy reflects the class nature of Canadian society in that the production and consumption of feature films has principally been oriented around the maintenance and promotion of feature films as commodities situated within the sphere of private accumulation (Magder, 1987, p. 11).

Magder characterizes the film-policy record in the period prior to the 1968 establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation as one of dependent development, in which "state policy facilitated the dominance of an American-based production, distribution and exhibition network that monopolized the commercial market for feature films in Canada." The weak enforcement of anti-trust laws, the intent of the quota quickies, the Canadian Cooperation Project and the limited scope accorded the National Film Board, he argues, "all complemented the overall strategy of dependent development which the state endorsed" (Magder,

1985, p. 102). Canada, for example, was "the only advanced Western state that did not, until 1968, take steps to encourage domestic commercial film production" (Magder, 1985, p. 86). The landmark 1951 Massey Report demonstrated a "tacit acceptance of the market-place as a natural phenomenon" (Magder, 1985, p. 92-93). By ignoring the possibility of Canada developing its own feature-film industry, Magder argues the Massey Report "codified" a dichotomy between the "pernicious" mass culture of Hollywood cinema and NFB documentary films as "a much more effective way to develop Canadian culture" (Magder, 1989, p. 289, 295fn).

Film policy from the creation of the CFDC to the present represents "a shift to an orientation of the economics of culture and the culture of economics" (Magder, 1985, p. 102). Responding to nationalist movements of the period, the CFDC was a compromise, encouraging Canadian feature-film production "without disturbing the monopolistic control of the film market-place" (Magder, 1985, p. 95; 1987, p. v). During the late 1960s, Canada's survival came to be associated with political and economic sovereignty as well as "a more highly developed sense of cultural identity" (Magder, 1987, pp. 182-184). But that sense of cultural identity would have to be developed by cultural products that warranted a place in the mediascape, as determined by the

market. The Canadian state, Magder argues, has left "the actual generation of cultural content to the private sector" (Magder, 1985, p. 103).

A good illustration of the contending forces of policy development can be found in the Mulroney government's record on film policy. To set the stage, the contrast with the preceding Liberal government (1980-84) is instructive. The 1982 Applebaum-Hébert Report, commissioned by Minister of Communications Francis Fox, opposed protectionism in general, and quotas in particular, in addressing foreign domination of the cultural industries (Canada, 1982, pp. 6, 89-90). Its specific recommendations for the film industry adopted the promotional strategy of pouring more money into the production sector by enlarging the budget of the Canadian Film Development Corporation and maintaining the capital-cost allowance (Canada, 1982, pp. 259-260).

The report's treatment of the pivotal distribution sector of the industry is a whitewash. With no hint of collusion among the vertically-integrated Hollywood companies, the report describes Canadian cinema's inability to gain adequate exhibition as a "mass-market dilemma". The report accepts vertical integration uncritically, describing it as "advantageous" to producers because it ensures distribution of their films. At the same time, the report readily accepts the

assertion that profit potential alone governs distributors' and exhibitors' film choices. "For these reasons Canadian film producers may make what many Canadian critics call 'American' films but which are, in fact, no more nor less than mass-market films" (Canada, 1982, pp. 250-252). The report recommended strengthening Canadian distributors economically through subsidies, loans and tax breaks (Canada, 1982, pp. 261-262).

A subsequent study commissioned by Fox to make recommendations for a new national cinema act sidestepped the issue of screen quotas by suggesting the act "contain language making screen quotas available to the Canadian government, if needed." The report recognized that the industry "was dominated by foreign oligopolies in collusion with major circuits", but declined protectionism in favour of market resolution (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 252-253). The Liberals' 1984 National Film and Video Policy rejected quotas as limiting Canadians' viewing choices, opting instead for negotiations with the Motion Picture Export Association of America (Pendakur, 1990, p. 256).

The Mulroney government's 1985 *Report of the Film Industry Task Force* adopted an altogether different tack. The report blamed Canadian cinema's invisibility on "three major structural problems" in the industry: foreign domination of film and video distribution;

chronic under-capitalization of production companies; and concentration of theatre ownership and vertical integration of distribution and exhibition (Canada, 1985, p. 7). Attributing the American distribution companies' primacy in the market to a "de facto-monopoly" [sic], the report made three key recommendations: restrict the distribution of all films and videos in Canada to Canadian companies; enact measures to prevent the vertical integration of distribution and exhibition; and insist upon the separate negotiation of distribution rights for the Canadian market. Too often, the report noted, distribution rights to Canada are included with the purchase of U.S. rights, excluding Canadian distributors from bidding for films for their own market (Canada, 1985, pp. 8-16).

Flora MacDonald replaced Marcel Masse as Minister of Communications in June, 1986, and immediately adopted one of the 1985 task force recommendations. She established a Feature Film Fund of $165 million over five years, to be administered by Telefilm Canada. The money was available to Canadian film-makers provided they had a distribution agreement in place (Department of Communications, 1987, p. 47). In February 1987, MacDonald issued her first major policy statement, promising to tackle the contentious issue of film distribution. She proposed legislation which would

ensure distribution of non-proprietary films by Canadian companies. Non-proprietary films are those produced independently of the major Hollywood studios -- *Platoon* and *Crocodile Dundee* are two examples from this period -- and comprise half of the films imported into Canada (Pendakur, 1990, p. 265).

In 1986, the major U.S. distributors controlled approximately ninety-seven per cent of total revenues from the Canadian market. The National Association of Canadian Film and Video Distributors estimated MacDonald's proposals would shift seven per cent of those revenues to Canadian companies and result in the creation of twenty more Canadian feature films per year (Pendakur, 1990, p. 266).

The Department of Communications published a subsequent report which reinforced the need to restructure the industry. *Vital Links: Canadian Cultural Industries* (Department of Communications, 1987) recognized that Canadian cinema's share of screen time -- between three and four per cent -- has remained constant "regardless of the number or quality of the films produced in the Canadian film industry."

> Unless structural anomalies in the market are also remedied, films by Canadian producers will have great difficulty in reaching their potential audience, and the cycle of dependence upon government will be perpetuated (Department of Communications, 1987, p. 43).

The report re-iterated MacDonald's commitment to an "import licence system" which would create a separate Canadian film market for distribution rights (Department of Communications, 1987, p. 48).

MacDonald's policy statement was met, predictably, with hostility in the United States, particularly when the two countries were at that time negotiating a free-trade agreement of unprecedented scope. When Ronald Reagan met Brian Mulroney in April, 1987, the American president is reported to have denunciated the MacDonald film policy and demanded to know Mulroney's position (Pendakur, 1990, p. 271; Austen, 1987, pp. 53-54). Later that month, Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, met privately with MacDonald (Austen, 1987, pp. 53-54). On April 29, 1987, a group of U.S. congress members sent a letter to Mulroney threatening to block Senate approval of free-trade legislation if the film policy became law (Austen, 1987, pp. 53-54; Pendakur, 1990, p. 271). At the Cannes International Film Festival in May, 1987, European film suppliers were reportedly reluctant to sell Canadian distribution rights separately, as MacDonald's bill demanded (Pendakur, 1990, p. 275; Austen, 1987, pp. 53-54).

Reaction to the proposals did not, however, break neatly along the forty-ninth parallel. Jonas Rosenfield, president of the American Film Marketing Association, a group comprised predominantly of independent film companies, wrote MacDonald a letter which was sympathetic to Canada's "justifiable national ambition" to control its own film market (Pendakur, 1990, p. 269). In Canada, Garth Drabinsky was a vocal opponent of the proposed legislation. As president of Cineplex Odeon theatres, his profits depended on a steady supply of Hollywood films. And, as Manjunath Pendakur notes, Drabinsky was at that time expanding aggressively into the United States. American retaliation to Canadian protectionism could have jeopardized his plans (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 273-274).

By the time MacDonald introduced film legislation in May 1988, the original package had been watered down considerably. The bill offered $200 million in subsidies over five years, established separate Canadian distribution rights for imported non-proprietary films, and prohibited the foreign takeover of indigenous distribution companies (Lacey, 1988, pp. A1, A4). Shelved were the task force recommendations to restrict distribution of all films and videos in Canada to Canadian companies and measures to prohibit vertical integration of the distribution and exhibition sectors.

Again, reaction was mixed. Southam News claimed the government had "backed away from its 14-month-old promise of stiff new cinema legislation aimed at curbing Hollywood's stranglehold" (Portman, 1988, p. A6). An editorial in *The Globe and Mail* described the bill as "docile" ("A docile film policy", 1988, p. A6), and national affairs columnist Jeffrey Simpson insisted MacDonald's "retreat" was "indissolubly linked" to free trade (Simpson, 1988, p. A6). Daniel Weinzweig of Canadian distributor Norstar Releasing told *The Globe and Mail* that the bill was the best deal possible under the circumstances of free-trade negotiation with the United States (Fraser, 1988, May 10, p. A13). The legislation died on the order paper when the Mulroney Conservatives called an election for November 1988. Their re-election as a majority government allowed free trade to proceed.

Whether or not MacDonald's film bill was good for the Canadian film industry, and whether or not the Conservative government sacrificed film policy for free trade, the episode underscores the context of struggle in which public policy is drafted. The conflicting interests in the domestic and international communities are mirrored within government itself. The Ministry of Communications, Pendakur argues, is always vulnerable to pressures from the Ministry of Finance (Pendakur, 1990, pp. 253-254).

> It is ... important to consider the significant differences between the mandates, powers, weaknesses, and the overall agendas of the state agencies involved in the motion picture industry. While the minister of communications is bound by the larger obligation of ensuring that Canadian cultural industries flourish and that they promote national cultural identity, Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada has a different and conflicting function. Its main guide is the combines act, the goals of which include, "protection of consumers and businessmen against exploitation through restrictive agreements or exercise of monopoly power, the wider objective is the protection of the market system itself [sic]." The underlying assumptions are that competition ensures efficient allocation of resources and enhances productivity, the benefits of which can be passed on to the publics involved. As we have seen so far, this approach to the problems of the Canadian film industry simply preserves the power of the American transnationals and their allied circuits, while keeping the unintegrated sections of the industry weaker. The market system that the combines law is meant to preserve is a distorted one, dominated by foreign transnationals with certain structural and other ties to large capital in Canada (Pendakur, 1990, p. 253).

It is worth noting one final point with regard to the context within which Canadian film-making takes place. While surveys may indicate that Canadians support Canadian content in their movie houses, and while Canadian showings at film festivals are usually well-attended, there is no great public outcry over the marginalization of Canadian cinema. Lobbies for legislative protection of an indigenous film industry

come from some bureaucrats, some working members of the industry, some journalists and some academics. The hammer that Hollywood wields with the Canadian public is the popularity of its films. The ultimate weapon to sway public opinion in any struggle between Canadian legislators and Hollywood is a Hollywood boycott of Canadian movie theatres.[1]

Notes

[1]Whether or not Hollywood would actually pull its films out of Canadian theatres for a time, the *threat* to do so remains a potent weapon with which to sway public opinion, and has been used before (See: Pendakur, 1990, pp. 260-261).

Conclusion

The context in which Canadian film-makers work systemically marginalizes independent film, and particularly film which does not subscribe to Hollywood entertainment conventions. The political-economic context is oligopoly capitalism, an exclusive industrial structure which defines cinema strictly as an entertainment commodity. It is a context in which American cinema enjoys primacy, in Canada and around the world.

The historical context is characterized by deeply-ingrained cultural dependency, resulting in the lack of a strong cinema tradition in Canada. Feature films, for Canadians, come from somewhere else, usually Hollywood. Canadian film-making has been ghettoized among the non-theatrical genres -- experimental film, animation, and especially documentary -- which do not intrude upon the commercial sector. Canada's most prolific periods of film production have been associated either with national emergencies -- i.e., world war -- or other periods of nationalism.

Finally, the public-policy context is characterized by governments' fundamental faith in the marketplace as meritocracy. That is, if Canadians make films that are

good enough, film exhibitors and distributors will not be able to resist them. Canadian governments are keen to sponsor film production, but refuse to restructure the key distribution and exhibition sectors of this industry. This pattern is sustained despite considerable evidence that the quantitative and qualitative impact of subsidized production has had no impact on Canadian films' distribution and exhibition.

PART III

Texts in Context

Introduction

There is a strong correlation between the contextual themes addressed in the preceding section and the thematic preoccupations of English-Canadian film-makers. English-Canadian auteur cinema invokes the context of its production by repeatedly raising issues of representation, mediation, identity, community, colonization, marginalization, the place of the artist in society, the desire for self-exile, and Canada-U.S. relations. These themes merge in a discernible metatext punctuated by the self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness of the film-makers.

The films of Atom Egoyan, for example, dwell on the increasing mediation of modern communication and explore the ambiguous frontier between image and identity. On the one hand, he suggests that media come *between* people, deterring rather than enhancing their ability to communicate. At the same time, Egoyan confronts the contradictory nature of the mediascape by exposing the

simultaneous power and vacuity of media imagery (See: Burnett, 1991).

Egoyan's attribution of obstructive and intrusive characteristics to media results partly from his own formal engagement with film and video, evident in the avant-garde dimension to his practice. Visually, his films range from the deliberately austere *Next of Kin* (1984) and *Family Viewing* (1987) to the rich sensuousness of *The Adjuster* (1990). In *Family Viewing*, for example, Egoyan toys with various "generations" of video imagery to represent the generations of the family in the film (See: Arroyo, 1987).

His obsession with media imagery speaks analagously to the condition of independent film-making in Canada. Cinema , structured as it is along a cultural industry model, is an exclusive medium which has historically impeded communication between Canadian film-makers and Canadian audiences. For the most part, Egoyan comments on the particular Canadian experience in an implicit way, yet he occasionally signals that he's speaking *directly* to Canadians. The most obvious example is a scene in *Speaking Parts* (1989) in which Egoyan has conspicuously placed a number of Canadian titles -- *Le déclin de l'empire américain, Un zoo la nuit, The Grey Fox* -- near the cash register of a video store (See: Burnett, p. 135).

Egoyan films, like many of those discussed in this section, are self-conscious and self-reflexive. His particular self-consciousness speaks to both film practice as representation and signification and to the place of Canadian film practice in the construction of identity. The question of identity is closely connected to the question of community, another exploration of ambiguous borders. The inherent ambiguity in the delineation of community is further complicated in a period of global political and economic integration which challenges traditional notions of community, society and nation.

The theme is particularly relevant to Canadians, who struggle to forge communion out of difference -- the central characters in Egoyan's films are immigrants, a community (in this case, the Armenian Diaspora) within a community --, and to Canadian film-makers, who have elected to practise independently of the hegemonic Hollywood industry. Canadian film-makers are part of both a universal quest for the redefinition of community in the late twentieth century and the particular Canadian quest to define community as it is lived by Canadians.

As artists, film-makers require a sense of the community for which they speak -- William MacGillivray's Maritime communities or Anne Wheeler's community of women -- and the community, or audience, they wish to address.

Canadian film-makers working outside Hollywood must define their own cultural community. Hollywood's dominance of feature film, that is, casts Canadian cinema as "other", even within Canada (See: Yacowar, 1986). Canadian film-makers, too, are haunted by the responsibility, historically attributed to the cultural industries by succeeding Canadian governments, of creating a national community (See: Rousseau, 1991, pp. 113-115).

Further evidence of English-Canadian film-makers' self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness is their frequent use of the artist as protagonist, a device that can't be dismissed simply as narcissism. It is the artist's role to give voice to his or her community, by defining that community and exploring its particularity. It's the artist who personifies the need for self-affirmation through achieving voice. William MacGillivray's *Life Classes* (1987), for example, employs art as a means of the protagonist's personal self-discovery. Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard The Mermaids Singing* (1987) addresses the exclusivity of art as a social practice through the video diary of Polly, an outsider who gains access to the Toronto art world, not as the photographer that she is, but as the secretary that she isn't.

Finally, the theme of escaping "here" is a central preoccupation of English-Canadian film-makers. The escape is occasionally real, more often imaginary, recounted as the personal story of a central character, but related metaphorically to Canadians' collective imagination. At the same time, the theme of escaping "here" speaks meta-cinematically by invoking the experiences of Canadian film-makers with their marginalized practice.

The theme of escaping "here" evokes the Canadian colonial condition, in which the colony is perceived by its constituents as a cultural void, an appendage of some more significant imperial centre. The centre has a perceived reality that the colony can never attain. This centre need not be specified, but most often in Canadian cinema it is represented by the United States. Just as importantly, the centre is anywhere but "here".

The theme is expressed in two ways: as an adolescent fantasy in such films as Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) and Bruce MacDonald's *Highway 61* (1991); and as an ill-defined cultural claustrophobia in such films as William MacGillivray's *The Vacant Lot* (1989), Joseph Viszmeg's *City of Champions* (1990) and Gail Singer's *True Confections* (1991).

The depth to which the above themes are explored, the explicit nature of their discussion, and the extent

to which they are shared among film-makers from coast to coast, suggest a powerful contextual influence. All of these themes address quotidian Canadian experience, but they also engage meta-cinematically film-makers' own professional practice. The pervasive self-consciousness of the film-makers speaks to their marginality as Canadian film-makers.

In spite of the dominance of Hollywood cinema in their own upbringing, English-Canadian auteur film-makers have largely avoided the Hollywood model of theatrical features.[1] Hollywood has appropriated Canada as a market for its films and a site upon which to shoot American movies. Hollywood, in this way, erases the political boundary which separates Canada and the United States and reaffirms its own dominant cultural particularity. The film-makers discussed here have rejected a concordant self-abnegation, choosing instead to validate their particular Canadian experience by insisting upon the specificities of time and place.

Canadian cinema, as a result, reorients our cultural horizons by treating Canadian stories in identifiable Canadian settings and by its explicit assertion of difference. In response to Hollywood hegemony and their own marginalization, English-Canadian auteur film-makers have produced a cinema whose strategy is appropriation of

the medium rather than accommodation to Hollywood industrial and film practice.[2]

Notes

[1]Talking about Canadian experimental film, Gene Youngblood notes that Canadian film-makers do not make the same kind of movies they were raised on. The same can be said of English-Canadian auteur cinema. Youngblood writes: "The majority of college students may stand in line to see *Easy Rider* and *Alice's Restaurant*, because they have little choice. But it's significant that when they make their own movies, the output is qualitatively different from the input: they just don't make the kind of movies they're raised on" (Youngblood, 1977, p. 325.).

[2]Ron Burnett calls this as a "processus de réappropriation de l'image nationale" (Burnett, 1991, p. 135). Graeme Turner describes Australian film and television's strategy as "one of appropriation not of accommodation" in which American genres are given an Australian inflection, "as if the American genres were being colonized to Australian ends -- naturalizing, rather than raucously foregrounding, Australian subjects, locations, and stories" (Turner, 1992, p. 647).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Family Viewing

Atom Egoyan engages the nature of the mediascape itself in a complex inquiry which at the same time challenges and reproduces signifying practice. Egoyan's films are characterized by intrusive media, conflicts between image and identity, dysfunctional families and suppressed inter-personal communication.

Egoyan's 1987 film *Family Viewing* presents a dystopian vision of the breakdown of human relationships, indulging an obsession with the evolution of humankind to a state of media being. Told from the point of view of the teenaged Van, the film is about a contemporary Toronto family: Van, the only child; his father Stan; his father's live-in lover Sandra; Van's maternal grandmother Armen; and, conspicous by her absence for most of the film, Van's estranged mother. The struggle between Van and his father centres on Van's desire to reunite the family by liberating Armen from the corporate sterility of her nursing home.

The viewer is constantly reminded that his/her perception of this family is mediated. The opening

credits are presented as channel changes by someone with a remote control flipping through the dial. In the opening scene, the camera is turned on by Van like a television set. At the film's end, he reaches up to turn it off again. Like the credits at the beginning, cuts between scenes are often signified by fuzzy video static, as if the director is merely switching channels. As voyeurs, we look out of the television set into the family living room, or into Armen's hospital room. Armen's hospital bed is pointed toward a television set, at which she stares -- blank, dazed, bored -- even during Van's visits. She doesn't utter a word throughout the film.

A television set is the focus of the family's living room -- as in most Canadian households -- and the family has a small television perched on the kitchen counter. Stan and Sandra also have a TV set in one corner of their bedroom, connected to a videocassette recorder. A video camera mounted on a tripod is pointed at the bed. Van inadvertently discovers that Stan, who works for a video distribution company, is taping over old family videos with scenes of his and Sandra's passionless lovemaking.

Van: "He's taping over everything."

Sandra: "It's a thing he has. He likes to record."

Van: "And erase. He prefers to erase."

Staring at the video screen as they talk, they watch the video cut from a backyard family scene, featuring Armen, Van's mother and the infant Van, to newly-recorded images of Stan and Sandra in bed. Stan, lying on top of Sandra, is looking over his shoulder at the video screen to check that it's working. He then turns to Sandra, buries his face in her shoulder, and returns to their mechanical sex.

Conversation between characters is also mediated. Family members converse while watching television, their dialogue inhibited as they stare, zombified, at the glowing tube. Only Aline, a young woman Van meets at the nursing home, seems capable of emotion; she is horrified that Van hastily arranged the funeral -- and videotaped the internment -- of her mother, who died while Aline was out of town for a weekend. Her tombstone, her final medium, is blank.

> Van: "It was a good funeral Aline -- believe me. You wouldn't have done it any differently."
>
> Aline: "I would have been there."
>
> Van: "But you weren't. You were out of town. And now you're watching it."
>
> Aline: "On television."
>
> Van: "Sure. [pause] You're just not in the right mood. But when you are you can play it. [Tape ends. He hands her the videocassette.] Anytime you want."

Aline throws the tape away in disgust.

Television is not the sole medium in *Family Viewing*. Equally prominent is the telephone. Aline works for a company offering sexually-explicit telephone conversation, and one of her clients, it turns out, is Van's father. In one scene, Aline readies herself to make a telephone call from her apartment, from which the film cuts to Stan and Sandra's bedroom. Stan sits on the edge of the bed, nearest the phone, in a dressing gown. Sandra, kneeling in the middle of the bed wearing a black negligee, brushes her hair. They pay no attention to one another.

The sombre scene is reflected on the video screen in the corner of the room; it is all being recorded. The telephone rings. Stan puts Aline on the speaker phone. As Stan and Aline talk, Stan signals Sandra to perform the sex acts Aline describes. Sandra, silently and with obvious reluctance, goes along. Later in the film the scene is repeated, except this time Aline doesn't call. When Sandra asks if they can't simply "do it without her", Stan responds with an uncomprehending glare.

The relationships between family members seem abnormal. Dialogue between Van and Stan is forced, and usually takes place as a secondary activity; the primary activity is watching television. Stan and Sandra cannot

make love without audio or visual aid. Conversation between Van and Sandra is inhibited by an unexplained sexual tension between them. The strongest family bond is that between Van and Armen, who reinforce that bond by watching home movies together, without talking.

Family history is stored on the collection of videotapes over which Stan is recording. In the original tapes, Stan is always the absent member of the family, because he is behind the camera. The camera, in this sense, comes between Stan and his family; recording the family scene is more important than participating in it. In the new scenes Stan videotapes -- erasing family history -- the act of recording sex with Sandra is the apparent source of his arousal, rather than Sandra herself.

Human emotion is lacking throughout the film, creating a symmetry between form and content; shot under harsh lighting, the film has a cold look which complements the lifeless interaction between characters. While striking a dire warning about the dehumanization of mediated communication -- a medium is something that comes between -- Egoyan at the same time underlines through exaggeration the extensiveness of the mediation of Canadians' communication.

This parallels, on one level, the broader human condition; increasingly since the late nineteenth

century, and at a dizzying rate today, humankind's attempts at communication are mediated by print, telephone, radio, television, computer network, pager, telephone answering machine and fax. While ostensibly facilitating communication, Egoyan perceives these technologies as hindrances. Media come between people, they intrude. As a film-maker, Egoyan has to be sensitive to the way the film mediates his own attempts to communicate and the manner in which the film industry mediates the Canadian film-maker's relationship with the Canadian audience.

Egoyan's thematic treatment of representation permeates his 1989 film *Speaking Parts*. The film explores the relationship between image and identity on a personal level, through three central characters: Lisa, a hotel housekeeper; Lance, a hotel housekeeper, gigolo, and actor; and Clara, a screenwriter.

Lisa's world revolves around her imagined love affair with Lance. The "affair" consists principally of Lisa, sitting on the floor in her dark, empty apartment, watching by candlelight videos of films in which Lance has appeared as an extra. Some she's watched as many as twenty times. Lisa fabricates her identity as Lance's "lover" by means of television and video; Lance won't even speak to her (See: Burnett, 1991, pp. 134-142).

We first meet Clara inside what appears to be a crypt, but is in fact a video cemetery. Clara goes there to watch a video clip of her brother, who died during an operation to donate one of his lungs to Clara. Clara has written a film script based on this story, and she has auditioned Lance to play the role of her brother.

In the same way that the video cemetery is "une archive vivante", Clara's film script is an attempt to restore her brother's life and to affirm her own identity. It is an attempt, in other words, to objectify her memories through the creation of a narrative film. It's an attempt to re-establish contact with someone who is dead and to preserve this connection in the form of an image.[1] The Producer [sic], however, writes Clara's part out of the script; instead of the brother donating a lung to his sister, the story now involves two brothers. Clara wants Lance to convince The Producer to maintain the original story line; in effect, she's asking Lance to replace her brother, to save her life -- as her real brother once did --, to save the film image of her life. Lance's failure to do so prompts Clara to threaten suicide. If the story has *become* Clara's life, and she has been cut from that story, then her life is over. As a writer, of course, Clara's being is entwined with the stories she tells.

In contrast to Clara's need to communicate, Lance's reticence inhibits his ability to express his feelings; it is as if he has no personality. He is often alone, and when he is with other characters, he seems like he's alone. Even his sexual clients complain he's "not vocal enough". We never learn what he thinks about anything, including himself. He finds his identity in the roles he plays; as an actor -- on screen or in bed -- he simply adopts the roles that are asked of him. He has no need to communicate, to really *be* Lance.

Rationalizing Lance's film roles as an extra without any lines, Lisa declares: "There is nothing special about words." Yet Lance's refusal to speak to Lisa is a source of heart-breaking frustration for her, and the viewer comes to the opposite conclusion: there *is* something special about words.

Mediation is central to the story. Lance and Clara are brought together by Clara's script and they become lovers during Clara's brief stay at the hotel. In an exchange which foreshadows a scene central to Egoyan's thematic intentions, Lance says goodbye to Clara as she leaves the hotel.

Lance: "Do we stay in touch?"

Clara: "We can still see each other."

Lance: "How?"

We get the answer to that question in their subsequent meeting. Lance sits alone in the hotel conference room and speaks to Clara via an interractive video screen. The film cuts away for a few moments, and when we return, Lance and Clara are masturbating. The lovers are mutually aroused by the fact of being each other's sexual image. They can't touch each other, so instead they see each other and touch themselves. Masturbation becomes a metaphor for the power and, simultaneously, the ultimate vacuity of images (See: Burnett, 1991, p. 140).

If the affair between Lance and Clara evolves from being based in reality to being based in imagery -- and, ultimately, entangled with Clara's autobiographical script -- Lisa's audiovisual relationship with Lance is consummated corporally in the film's closing scene. Seated facing one another on the floor in her apartment, Lisa reaches out slowly to touch Lance's face, as if to make sure he is real. She is momentarily shocked when she feels his skin, expecting, perhaps, a video screen.

Egoyan's film underlines the ambiguity of the image in exploring the relationship between image and identity. This ambiguity is punctuated by the fact that real characters (within the film) occupy the video screen: The Producer, in his meetings with Clara; Clara in her discreet meetings with Lance; and Lance, in the videos Lisa rents. Lisa, however, can't tell the difference

between the video image and the corporal reality.[2] The camera, or film or video, becomes more than a mediator between the real and the image; it becomes an autonomous actor itself (Burnett, 1991, p. 139). Burnett concludes:

> Le film d'Egoyan convie à un message capital: l'identité, qu'elle soit nationale ou personnelle, ne peut être dissociée des images, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'il s'agisse de la seule voie à suivre. En cette période fragile et précaire de notre histoire, il est peut-être nécessaire de découvrir une nouvelle manière d'utiliser les images plutôt que de créer de nouvelles situations où elles nous abusent (Burnett, 1991, p. 142).

Egoyan's 1991 film *The Adjuster* again explores this relationship between image -- media image, social image -- and identity. The film challenges the association between the value of people's material possessions and the value of their lives, rejecting the supposition built into the medium of advertising that people can purchase a lifestyle. Yet at the same time, Egoyan insists that the destruction of the image carries destructive personal consequences.

The central character is an insurance adjuster, Noah Render, whose job is to itemize clients' material losses, assign economic value to their belongings, and arrange for reimbursement. As he explains to fire victim Arianne, his job is to rebuild peoples' lives after they have been destroyed. Arianne recognizes the futility underlying Noah's premise; that a life can be

reconstructed like a razed house. The only thing she is interested in retrieving from the fire is her wedding ring. Arianne, the viewer learns, saw the fire begin with a small spark from a short-circuited light switch, but did nothing to extinguish it. "Something had to change." She doesn't want to rebuild her old life, even if it were possible.

If Noah's mission is misguided, his image as solid family man and dedicated professional is simply fraudulent. Taking advantage of his clients' "state of shock", he is a sexual predator. Unlike his Biblical namesake, people are driven to Noah Render's ark by fire. Under the pretense of offering them salvation, Noah instead exploits them. At the end of the film, even his own house burns down. During his frequent visits to the motel where his clients temporarily reside, he has sex with Arianne (while discussing her claim), Lorraine and Matthew. Like the housekeeper Louise, who works the motel after-hours as a prostitute, Noah offers his clients an artificial form of comfort: sex in the guise of compassion.

Noah adopted his own family -- his partner Hera, her son Simon, and her sister Seta -- when they were burned out of *their* house. By all appearances it is a family of convenience. Noah is rarely home and there is no apparent intimacy between Noah and Hera; he's never seen

in bed with her, only seated at the edge of the bed. The only evidence of warmth between Noah and his family is between Noah and Simon. This model family lives in a model home (with fake bookshelves), one of only two or three houses in deserted Sherwood Estates, a new Toronto subdivision whose developer went bankrupt. The house is surrounded by acres of bulldozed, grass-devoid earth with billboards propped up where houses were to be built.

Hera is a film censor, who secretly videotapes for her sister Seta the pornographic films she classifies. Hera's job is to document infractions to the film classification code, determing, that is, what in the porno films has social value and what doesn't. Outside the screening room, dozens of men and women sit at desks clipping pictures out of magazines and tossing them in huge discard bins.

Egoyan uses Noah's obtuseness to emphasize the fragility of the affiliation between image and identity. Noah is too literal, incapable of operating on the level of metaphor. He can't, for example, comprehend Arianne's disinterest in rebuilding her material life, and he rejects the analogy between his job and Hera's -- sorting out what has value, and what doesn't. "You're a censor," Noah remarks. "You've got nothing to do with my job."

Hera: "Do I make you feel stupid?"

Noah: "What do you mean?"

Hera: "When I say something which deserves consideration, and you respond without thinking, how do you feel?

Noah: "I feel fine."

Hera: "I thought you might feel stupid."

Noah's family leaves him at the end of the film when Hera discovers the nature of Noah's relationship to his clients.

Noah's dispossessed "families" are contrasted by Bubba, a rich ex-professional football player, and his partner Mimi. They have all the material possessions they desire -- a luxurious mansion, a chauffeured limousine -- but their lives are otherwise empty. Throughout the film, they busy themselves by staging elaborate sexual fantasies. Bubba, for instance, poses as a drunken derelict riding the subway during morning rush hour. Mimi, masquerading as a smartly-dressed businesswoman, takes a seat beside him, slides his hand up her dress and cackles in delight, shocking the other commuters. Later, at an empty football stadium, Mimi poses as a high school cheerleader before a row of boys dressed in football uniforms. Dancing to rock music blaring over the public address system, she stops and points to one of the boys, who runs over, pulls off his helmet, drops to his knees and performs oral sex. Bubba

stands at the sideline, his back to the field, listening to Mimi's moans.

In their final fantasy, Bubba impersonates a film director who rents Noah's house as a location. Explaining the autobiographical story line to Noah and Hera, Bubba says the characters in the film are going through a "very strange time in their lives."

> "They have everything they want. Or, they have *means* to have everything they want. But they don't know what they *need*. So they try different things, and this house is one of them."

Bubba brings his make-believe film to life by pouring gasoline throughout the house and setting it aflame, ending his and Mimi's aimless existence and destroying Noah's model home. His home destroyed and his family lost to him, Noah is now in the same boat as his clients.

While exposing the artifice of the image, Egoyan nevertheless acknowledges its power. Bert, the chief censor, admits the pornography is "exciting material" and Seta is obviously intrigued by the video clips Hera brings home for her. Noah worries that Seta may be addicted to the imagery. The power of the video imagery is underscored when a stranger appears at the window behind Seta and masturbates while watching the video screen. The provocative video imagery comes to life, and Seta's fright at discovering the pervert at the window

has a lot to do with this sudden, unexpected corporal manifestation of the pornographic imagery. The distance between image and reality is nullified.

The roots of these complex themes can be traced to Egoyan's 1984 feature *Next of Kin*, which deals with two dysfunctional families and the son who belongs to both of them. The central character, Peter, is a twenty-three-year-old who doesn't work, sleeps a lot, and dreams he's someone else. The only child of the Fosters, his lack of ambition is a source of friction within the family. Following a family counselling session, Peter chooses to resolve the crisis by leaving his family and adopting another one. He poses as Bedros, the son who was given up for adoption as a child by Armenian immigrants George and Sonya Deryan. Being born into a family, Peter explains, creates an obligation of love, denying one's freedom of choice.

The film comprises three stories: the two invented by Peter -- one for the Fosters, one for the Deryans -- and the one to which the viewer is privileged, the story of Peter's misrepresentations. Peter tells the Fosters he is going away for a while, and through the audio diary he keeps, tells them about a family he has met and his decision to stay away. He says nothing about how he met this family, what the nature of his relation to them is, or that his intention is to reunite the Deryans by

replacing their missing son and mediating the fractious quarrel between George and his daughter Azah. The third story concerns Peter's attempts to recreate his identity.

All of Egoyan's films involve a degree of deception, relating to the constitution of family, the constitution of identity, and how family and identity are forged through communication. This quality of deception reveals the degree of social construction in representation, communication and community. Social construction contains the potential for misrepresentation.

For Egoyan, the family is the smallest denomination of community,[3] and its relationships are based on communication. But instead of bonding family members, communication comes between them. On one level, it is a curious message coming from a communicator, a film-maker who employs mediated communication. But it speaks to the dysfunctional state of Canadian cinema, the dysfunctional relationship between artists and audience in the Canadian community, and, one could argue, the dysfunctional state of the Canadian community itself.

Cynthia Scott's 1990 film *The Company of Strangers* exists at an opposite pole. If Egoyan's oeuvre concerns the dehumanization of mediation, Scott addresses the humanness of dialogue. It is, as *Globe and Mail* film critic Jay Scott describes it, "a film about talking" (Scott, 1990, p. A9).

The film presents an allegorical portrait of the Canadian people told through the experiences of eight women -- seven of them seniors -- roughing it in the bush for three days when their bus breaks down on a lonely, back-country lane. A representative cross-section of Canada's female constituency, the women -- Constance, a Quebecoise; Alice, a Mohawk from Kahnawake; Michelle, the black bus driver; Mary, a lesbian; Catherine, a nun; English women Beth (a Jew), Winny and Cissy (Meigs, 1991) -- operate as a tightly-knit collective in their search for shelter, food and water. Scott situates her characters in an environment deprived of media (except for Catherine's Walkman, to which she listens while trying to repair the bus). The eight "strangers" must engage in dialogue to survive and to come to know one another, to unite as a company.

They trek to an abandoned farmhouse where they set about making beds of discarded mattresses, blankets and straw, drawing water from the pond, pooling their box lunches and, as their food runs out after the first day, collecting mushrooms and berries, trapping frogs and catching fish with a net made from Alice's pantyhose. Each of these scenes is interspersed with spoken glimpses of the women's life stories: Constance, for whose childhood summer cottage the women had been bound, studied at l'écôle des beaux arts, but was too busy

"mating and breeding" to become an artist; Alice came to hate her husband as much as she'd once loved him; Mary explains the social and psychological implications of her homosexuality while birdwatching with the charmingly open-minded Cissy. The film pauses over still photographs from each of the women's family albums.

The film creates a community of this eclectic group in two ways. The production itself brought the women, non-professional actors previously unknown to one another, together during the summer of 1988 (Meigs, 1991). Secondly, the film's narrative structure compels the actors, who play themselves, to forge community in order to survive, by the daily toil that their survival entails, and by the tender recounting of their personal histories. The story is characterized by a conspicuous absense of power relations, whether based on gender -- there are no male characters[4] -- race, class or age. The characters are removed from the normal relations of patriarchal urban society by their geographical isolation, their close proximity to one another and their sudden need for each other in the absence of their own families.

If Egoyan and Scott represent the struggle for community in antipodal extremes -- dysfunctional family/harmonious sorority -- this theme is more often played out in less well-defined communities, in which

people seek and must forge kinship. We encounter two kinds of "community" in Canadian cinema. One is based on "here", a group of people sharing a place as a community. The other is based on shared social circumstance, in which place is not necessarily a primary element. *The Company of Strangers* comprises both kinds of communities; their sharing of place enables the characters to discover their sorority as women and as elderly women. In Egoyan's films, the characters struggle to forge community out of family.

In Charles Wilkinson's *My Kind of Town* (1984) and Gordon Pinsent's *John and the Missus* (1986), small towns confront external threats to their future existence as community. They are communities whose raison d'être is resource extraction; when that employment vanishes, community members must seek other bonds. In *My Kind of Town*, the closing of Chemainus's principal employer, the saw mill, forces its residents to create their own employment. In *John and the Missus*, a community's constituents face relocation with the closing of Cup Cove's copper mine.

Wilkinson's film is based on the true story -- and Wilkinson's NFB documentary ("Vancouver filmmakers make first feature," 1985, p. 43) -- of Chemainus's conversion from Vancouver Island mill town to tourist town in the early 1980s. When MacMillan Bloedel closed the local saw

mill in 1983, depriving the town of its livelihood, Chemainus developed a program to adorn its buildings with murals depicting local history. The project revitalized the community, attracting 250,000 to 300,000 tourists each year (Mullens, 1992, p. B6).

Wilkinson quickly establishes what the mill's closure implies for the one-industry town. The introductory theme song tells of a working man's town where there's no work anymore. The voice-over narration of the central character, Pete, asks: "Question: What do you get when you take a mill town and shut down the mill? Answer: Chemainus."

Pete is a bright but aimless post-adolescent. In the film's opening scene, he is arrested for spray-painting graffiti -- "Take a Bath!" -- on the side of a building. Instead of fining him -- Pete has no money and his father is unemployed -- Sam, the blue-jeaned mayor, has Pete perform community service work. At first this means odd jobs, such as whitewashing the wall he defaced. But as Sam discovers Pete's intelligence and creativity, Pete is recruited to help the town's tourism promotion, the Chemainus Festival of Murals.

The point of the film is Pete's discovery of community and the constituents' role in constructing community. The economic crisis of Chemainus has an external source: a transnational corporation's decision

to close a regional saw mill. In a rather simplistic morality tale, the solution to this threat to the town's existence must be internal. Pete's choices reflect the town's choices; he can simply leave to find a job and a life elsewhere -- he has an interview in Vancouver with the telephone company -- or he can stay to help create new opportunities.

The character who helps Pete realize that he has options is Astrid, a young German artist who's writing a travelogue about Chemainus for a European magazine. Astrid symbolizes the outside interest in the town as a potential tourist destination.

Pete lands the phone company job, but on the way to Vancouver he stops for a chat with his Uncle Roy, who runs his own small saw mill. Pete decides to stay and work with his uncle. The film ends with a long stream of tourists arriving in Chemainus the morning of the festival.

While equally romantic, Pinsent's film offers a more complex treatment of the theme. Set in 1962, the Newfoundland copper mining village of Cup Cove confronts the economic realities of a company town. The mine is nearing exhaustion and the provincial government wants to close it and relocate the villagers. At a meeting to announce the latest round of lay-offs, the mine manager

Tom states: "The mine is the town and the town is the mine. No one could argue with that."

But miner John Munn argues vociferously; a community leader and member of one of the first families of Cup Cove, he can't accept the idea that a community with deep historical roots can simply be resettled. For John, "community" is life itself, and cannot be dismissed by the economic imperatives of external forces. At a meeting in which Denny, a provincial government representative from St. John's, confirms that the mine will close permanently, John is uncomprehending.

> "I mean, Jesus, if we're not here, where are we? How the hell do you *re*-settle? That's like jumpin' up and down all your lives, in't it? That might be all right for you fellas [Tom and Denny], who can't make up your minds where you want to be, but we made ours up a long time ago around here. This was here, see? Right where she was flung, copper and all, and so were a good many of us. We're already settled, see?"

When Denny tells John the town is dead, John retorts: "Then so are we!" Haunted by ghostly images of his father, John can't separate the people of Cup Cove from their place. Worse, he can't accept such a decision being imposed on the community, a decision which has been taken completely out of the hands of the community.

John's resistance finds little support. While his speech at the community hall meeting moves his fellow miners, they accept the death of the mine as inevitable

and see no alternative. As they file out, they pick up government application forms for relocation compensation. Even John's son Matt takes one with him. Some villagers greet the resettlement. Fred, the post office clerk who's physically rooted to Cup Cove even though in his imagination he has visited the cultural capitals of the modern world, sees it as his chance at last to live in cosmopolitan Montreal -- he pronounces it *Mon-royale*.[5]

John's decision to stay in Cup Cove creates family conflict. It tests the loyalty of John's wife, Anne, and causes a rift between John and Matt, newly-married to Faith and now responsible for his own decisions. One of the values challenged by the resettlement is patriarchy. Anne and Mavis recall drawing palm trees on their school scribblers as young girls, dreaming of visiting exotic places. But both women sacrificed their dreams to their husbands' jobs in Cup Cove. When John finds a copy of *National Geographic* in the house, he accuses Anne of wanting "to whisk us away, too".

Matt perceives futility in resistance -- Cup Cove has a glorious past but no future -- and accepts the government's offer to relocate. He has to think of building a new life as the old life crumbles like the copper mine.

In fact, the only people who *don't* leave are Alf, John's closest friend, who dies as a result of a mine

accident, and Fred, who hangs himself the night before he's to leave for Montreal. John and Anne leave, but only temporarily. They hire a barge to tow their house to Boot Cove, and as they approach the new settlement, they try to convince themselves that it "looks like home". When they can't, they order the barge to turn around and take them back.

Pinsent's film depicts a clash between traditional values of community and modern political-economic imperatives. For John, community is rooted to place and defined by widely-shared historical memory. Community, for John, is betrayed only by those who refuse to defend it. In the case of Cup Cove, community solidarity is broken by opportunists. John accuses Tom of having deceived the miners, his fellow villagers. He accuses Burgess, who fled Cup Cove to open his own bakery in Hamilton, of scavenging, when Burgess shows up to buy some "conversation pieces" for his shop from the doomed Cup Cove general store.

John's conception of community clashes with the mobility a modern capitalist economy demands. The mobility of capital exacts an expectation of mobility on labour, rendering "here" increasingly irrelevant. If the mine at Cup Cove is no longer profitable, then it is closed and capital pursues more lucrative projects. As Tom says at the opening, the mine is the town. No mine,

no town. The only "community" capitalism accommodates is economic community.

If the organic community is no longer a viable concept, how do we constitute community in the late twentieth century? This question is central to Bruno Lazaro Pacheco's *The Traveller* (1989) and Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986). Both films are set in western Canada and concern the search for community across cultures.

In *The Traveller*, for example, the protagonist Robert Braun is a former anthropologist who has become a dealer in native Indian masks. A non-native, Braun was raised in a Haida community in British Columbia and married a Haida woman named Helen. As the film begins, Robert arrives in Vancouver to buy some masks from native carver Tony Peterson. Peterson, however, can't be found and the carver who occupies Peterson's studio doesn't sell the masks he carves.

Robert's partner Frank represents the entrepreneurial side of their business. Robert opposes Frank's scheme to buy cheaper imitation masks made by penitentiary inmates because he believes in the cultural integrity of the native people. Robert decides to sell his shares in the company he originally founded.

This decision represents Robert's realization that his efforts to bridge the native and non-native cultures has been a dismal failure. He'd quit teaching because he

felt it was exploitive and he was fed up "selling ideas to students".

> "So I got into the business of selling them *real* things, *real* masks. It seemed more honest at the time. Don't really know which one's better or worse. But that's all over now. I'm not selling anyone anything anymore."

Now, natives accuse him of exploiting them commercially by stealing their masks.

His separation from Helen, too, has had greater implications than a split between two individuals. Robert and Helen had been presented with ceremonial masks when they were married. Robert kept the masks when they separated and a friend of Helen's accuses him of having sold them. Their failed marriage suggests the failed marriage of two cultures with incompatible world views.

The film concludes with Robert's futile attempt to make amends. Returning to the island where Helen lives, Helen tells him: "You can rest here. But you're not welcome." Leaving a dance at the community hall, Robert meets the native man who was his best friend as a boy. The next morning, we see them as if they were boys once again, footracing along the beach. Then they decide to have a canoe race. Robert paddles furiously, but when he turns to look for his friend, the Haida man is still standing by his canoe at the beach. Robert pauses

momentarily, then continues to paddle and the last image we have is his canoe pointed toward open water.

Loyalties treats the subject of community by class, by race, by gender and by birth, exposing both bonds and splits within these various kinds of communities. The film concerns the arrival in Lac La Biche, Alberta, of a doctor and his family from England. David Sutton, a general practitioner, has arrived ahead of his family to establish his clinic. The film opens with the arrival of David's wife Lily and the three youngest of their four children. There is tension in the question of why the Sutton family has come to northern Alberta.

Difference and similarity are recurring themes throughout the film. Difference is clearly and quickly established between the Sutton family and the locals, based on language, dress, custom and disposition. Both the pilot of the small plane which brings Lily and her children to Lac La Biche, and Audrey Sawchuk, who meets them at the airport -- "Welcome to the bush, honey" -- remark on their accents. Audrey says: "Oh, I love the way you folks talk." Lily refers to the movers as "removal men" and to the Sawchuks' barbecue as "a garden party".

The Sutton family's aristocratic pretensions contrast sharply with the unpretentious beer-parlour patrons at the local hotel where they go for dinner.

David must excuse himself from dinner to stitch the lip of Rosanne Ladouceur, a waitress who takes a punch in the mouth from her boyfriend Eddy. At the Sawchuks' barbecue, David and Lily are again set apart. David's shirt, tie, sports jacket and dress slacks contrast with the other men's shorts, t-shirts and baseball caps. Lily's white summer dress contrasts the other women's blue jeans. David has concluded that the residents of Lac La Biche are "dreadful people". David and Lily feel they are "on the lip of civilization" and "so far away from everything".

Yet there is a mysterious distance between David and Lily -- he's "too busy" at the clinic to help her settle into their new home or to meet her in town for lunch, and he's unable to make love to her --, so that the family serves poorly as a garrison. There is an unexplained tension, too, between David and Robert, the eldest son who joins the family later when his school term is finished.

Lily seeks friendship bonds elsewhere. Initially, she tries to befriend Audrey, but the first time she calls to visit she discovers Audrey passed out drunk on the couch. Instead she befriends Rosanne Ladouceur, a Metis neighbour that she and David have hired to help with housekeeping and child care.

There are other divisions based on race and gender. The white residents occupy the positions of authority over native residents -- doctor, police officer, hotel proprietor (even the friendship between Lily and Rosanne is based on Lily's employment of Rosanne) -- and men occupy positions of authority over women -- Rosanne was fired by the hotel after Eddy punched her.

The family secret is exposed in the film's climactic scene. David and Mike Sawchuk are away fishing and Rosanne and Lily are celebrating Lily's birthday in a local bar, having left Rosanne's teenaged daughter, Leona, to babysit. Leona is watching television when David appears, having come home early. With his wife out, David gets Leona drunk, sexually assaults her, then chases her outside into the rain where he rapes her.

Lily and Rosanne arrive home and, seeing David's car outside, Lily becomes anxious. By the time she enters the house and sees the empty champagne bottle and glasses, she is frantic. She and Rosanne run outside, where they discover David and Leona. Rosanne screams and runs to Leona to help her up and to help her dress, while Lily stands dumbfounded as David staggers back into the house.

The scene crystalizes a number of thematic strands. We suddenly know why David has dragged his family halfway around the world, and we suddenly comprehend the tension

within the Sutton family. Lily is speechless, but Robert screams at David: "Bastard! Bastard! You did it again! I hate you! I hate you!" Robert runs away into the house, away from both his parents.

The scene also forces Lily to decide where her loyalty lies: with her husband or with her friend. As Rosanne walks Leona past Lily, she shouts at Lily: "What kind of woman are you? Bitch!" It is a second blow for Lily. A few minutes later, Rosanne barges into the house with a rifle, ready to shoot David. Lily clobbers Rosanne with a bottle, knocking her down, picks up the rifle and orders Rosanne out. Robert is watching all this from the top of the stairs.

The film cuts to the next morning at Rosanne's place. Rosanne is seated on the couch, Leona's head resting in her lap. Outside, we see an RCMP car arriving. Lily, the officer informs Rosanne, has filed a complaint against David, but because she can't lay charges against her husband, Lily has suggested Rosanne might.

The film then cuts to Lily arriving at Rosanne's, with the four children in the station wagon. At first only Lily gets out of the car, hesitantly, but Rosanne appears and welcomes Lily and the kids. At the end of the film, the three women -- Rosanne, her mother

Beatrice, and Lily -- are left together with the children.

The circulation of people, images and capital, patriarchal privilege and political economy undermine traditional notions of community. These forces are felt particularly powerfully in Canada, which has never been homologous and which has attempted to construct a national community through transportation and communications networks. The east-west axis of this transportation and communications infrastructure is in contest with continental economic forces and American cultural hegemony which creates media communities and redefines how Canadians imagine community.

The explorations of community undertaken by these film-makers is informed by their own struggle to define community, to define a "national" cinema. Their choice to make Canadian films -- in the face of a dominant Hollywood film industry -- is some indication of how they define their community and their commitment to the project, but the films themselves testify to the complexity of the task.

Notes

[1]Ron Burnett writes: "Il est clair que son désir de retrouver son frère confère à l'image fabriquée une

crédibilite qu'elle ne mérite pas. La représentation qu'elle à en tête est une construction et, comme telle, doit être produite par l'industrie même qu'elle à rejetée" (Burnett, 1991, p. 141).

[2]The image, Burnett comments, makes reference to that which it illustrates and something more internal: the self.
"Or le paradoxe, à notre époque post-moderne, c'est que l'identité ne peut être détachée de l'image, de telle sorte que le solopsisme est peut-être la condition et le moyen nécessaires pour construire son identité. En fait, dans *Speaking Parts*, personne ne peut se dégager de sa relation aux images, de sa dépendance au langage iconique, de son désir de s'abandonner aux transformations induites par les images" (Burnett, 1991, p. 134).

[3]Egoyan says that "any film which deals with the family is dealing with the smallest social unit in our society" (Burnett, 1989, p. 42).

[4]It is not clear whether the pilot who comes to retrieve the women at the end of the film is a man. Mary Meigs, one of the actors in the film, comments on this: "We are rescued by a pilot-person whose helmeted head is just barely visible at the window of the little plane" (Meigs, 1991, p. 107).

[5]It's not certain whether Fred has actually been to all the places he claims to have visited -- New Orleans, New York, Montreal, etc. -- or whether he just *imagines* he has.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Artist as Protagonist

Achieving voice is an act of self-realization and self-assertion. Film-makers are the chief protagonists in the struggle to create a distinctly Canadian voice in film, and in Canadian cinema the artist or creator is regularly featured as a protagonist. One response, in other words, to the film-making context in Canada is a preoccupation with the place of the artist in society, and the place of cultural expression in Canadian society. Repeatedly in Canadian cinema, art serves as a vehicle for the protagonist's self-discovery, analagous to the need for national cultural expression in achieving Canadian identity.

Benedict Anderson argues that the imagination is a crucial component of nationhood, defining a nation as "an imagined political community". "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1989, p. 15). Ernst Fischer insists that the purpose of art is to connect the

individual to the community; art reinforces the human collective (Fischer, 1963, pp. 35-36). The artist's subjectivity is based, not on a fundamental difference of experience, but on a particular consciousness of that shared experience.[1]

The use of the artist -- writer, singer, photographer, painter, musician, film-maker -- as protagonist in Canadian cinema is very much an exploration of the individual's connection to his or her society. This includes uncomplicated coming-of-age stories in which art serves as a vehicle for self-discovery, and more complex investigations of art's pragmatic dimension as an instrument of action rather than a form of disinterested contemplation.[2]

A striking example of the latter is Patricia Rozema's *White Room* (1990), a modern-day fairy tale which speaks to issues of the imagination, relations of power between author and subject, and the nature of story-telling. In this case, an aspiring writer undergoes a disturbing yet cogent apprenticeship in which he discovers that the writer's act of observation is not simply a vicarious form of pleasure, but an act of intrusion. The story-teller, that is, holds power over his or her subject: the power to tell the story, or not; the power of *who* to tell the story to; and the power of *how* to tell the story.

The film's protagonist is Norman Gentle, a young man in his early twenties trapped within his own imagination. Having had no experience in the world -- he lives alone with his parents in a Toronto suburb, riding his bicycle to choir practice -- he's a writer with nothing to say. He is metaphorically impaired, incapable, that is, of articulating his random observations in anything but clichés. The female narrator tells us:

> "Once upon a time, there was a young man who lived a very exciting life. The problem was, it was all in his head."
>
> [long pause]
>
> "And when he tried to put words on it, it always slipped away. So he began prowling in the darkness of other people's lives."

Norman's prowling begins as adolescent voyeurism. One evening, attracted by music he hears while riding his bicycle, he discovers the secluded home of a young woman who sings loudly to pre-recorded music. Enchanted by her silhouetted figure, the reflected lights of her swimming pool dancing magically across the windows of her house, Norman returns night after night to watch and listen to her sing. He jots his impressions in a notebook, but he is unable to capture his enchantment in words. Later, at his typewriter, Rozema creates the image of the blank white page swallowing him like a milk bath. The virginal

purity of the page mirrors Norman's own disabling inexperience.

One night, when there is no music, Norman spots a second silhouette, that of a man who enters the house, methodically stalks the woman, rapes and kills her. Paralyzed by indecision, Norman watches the murder in horror as the woman's terrified screams reverberate. Running away to call police, the panicked Norman confesses, "I didn't *do* anything", which, of course, is his part in the crime.

The experience propels Norman into the world; the next morning, he leaves his parents' home, the narrator tells us, on "a journey for honour, action, and of course, he hoped, love." He quickly finds employment when the city-wise Zelda subcontracts her Toronto newsstand job to the bumpkin from the suburbs on a sixty-forty basis. It's at the newsstand Norman discovers that the woman he saw murdered is Madelaine X, a pop music star.

Norman attends her funeral -- the eulogy is delivered on a video screen -- and there encounters a mysterious woman dressed all in black and wearing dark glasses. Seeing her crying, he lends her his clean white handkerchief. Norman is mesmerized by the woman, and the rest of the film concerns his awkward pursuit of her as both sexual fantasy and a character for a story.

The woman, we learn, is Jane, a recluse who is the voice behind Madelaine X. Uneasy in the world of media celebrity, she writes and records music in her home studio. Madelaine X had served as Jane's public persona, lip-synching her way through videos and concert appearances and bluffing her way through interviews. Madelaine X's murder has stunned the diffident Jane. She and Madelaine X were longtime friends and their clandestine partnership suited both women's abilities: Jane's musical gifts and X's "socially sexy" personal skills. When the press learns that Madelaine X didn't sing her own songs, there is significant pressure on Jane to come out of hiding to maintain her career and to continue making money for her record company.

As Norman gets closer to Jane -- caught prowling on her property, he limply claims he was there to ask for landscaping work -- he is increasingly compromised between his sexual and literary motives. Jane isn't fooled by Norman's pose as a gardener, but she's only half correct in reading Norman's interest in her as sexually inspired; she doesn't know that he is a writer. Ironically, it's only after they make love the first time that Norman is *able* to write, finally gaining a measure of first-hand experience in passion and love.

If Madelaine X and Jane are two components of the same media persona, then Zelda is Norman's alter ego.

Like Madelaine X, Zelda is attracted to the commercial side of art. She poses as an artist, wearing gaudy clothing, dying her hair blue and claiming, at different times, to be a writer, a musician, a performance artist. But the only art she practises is opportunism. Zelda learns that Jane is X's voice when she reads a draft of a story Norman is writing. Her jealousy of Norman's relationship with Jane tempered by her own cynicism, Zelda attempts to blackmail Norman by threatening to expose Jane's secret. Following Norman to Jane's hideaway one night, Zelda confronts Jane with the fact that Norman has written Jane's story.

To this point in the film, it's unclear what Norman's intentions for his story are. Given his naivete, it's likely he hasn't even thought about the conflict in pursuing Jane as both lover and literary character. Given the import Jane attaches to her secret and her reclusivity, Norman cannot have both. Is the lover or the writer in Norman to prevail? We aren't given the chance to find out because Zelda, for whom no such moral conflict exists, becomes the agent of Norman's betrayal. As Norman's earlier indecision made him party to X's murder, his subsequent inaction leads to Jane's destruction.

Norman's feeble attempts to explain himself to Jane only fuel Jane's determination to humiliate him by giving

him both herself *and* her story. She fills the holes in Norman's story -- "She thought it was love, it was only ambition" -- by showing him the white room of the film's title, the secret chamber where she writes and records her music, and where she sleeps. Then, forcing Norman's moral conflict, she seduces him while at the same time insisting he ask the questions he needs for his story.

> Jane: "C'mon Norm, every story needs a tender love scene."
>
> Norman: "It isn't a story."
>
> Jane: "Yes it is."
>
> [She lifts up her dress and climbs astride his hips.]
>
> Jane: "Ask me a question!"

As they have sex, Jane persists in posing as his interview subject. "In fact, my whole life is just one big media anecdote." The power relation has been reversed. When Norman, twice, tells Jane he loves her, she silences him by telling him to "shut up".

Jane's most devastating barb pierces even Norman's incomprehension. Recounting "one of the most exciting moments of my life", Jane tells of the unexpected visitor who showed up at her house one night. Instead of recounting her meeting with Norman, however, she describes Madelaine X's rape and murder, as if it were

her own. The analogy is clear; the unexpected visitor to Jane's house -- Norman -- has left her violated.

Norman doesn't give up hope of redemption, however. When Zelda organizes an impromptu press conference on Jane's doorstep the next morning, Norman hatches a scheme to lure the reporters away, return to rescue Jane and fly off to Paris together. He manages to get rid of the reporters and Zelda, but when he returns, Jane has slit her throat.

The film does not end here, though, because Norman's fairy-tale imagination cannot cope with such an unsatisfactory denouement. Invoking authorial privilege, the narrator informs us, Norman "wrote himself a much kinder ending to the story." In this ending, Jane lies sleeping in a flowing, white gown and is awakened by Norman's gentle kiss. They waltz like prince and princess through the white room as the camera slowly pans back and the film ends.

Besides the obvious feminist subtext -- to Jane, Norman's ambition prevailing over love is a patriarchal cliché -- this revisionist fairy tale also calls into question the power of the writer over his or her subject and the power of the voyeur over the object of the gaze, challenging the vicariousness of the writer as voyeur and witness. Norman's voyeurism, and his inability to turn his passivity into activism, exacts a high price. It

seems, on Rozema's part, to be a self-conscious reflection on the power of writing, on the idea of creation's capacity for destruction.

Norman holds Jane's life in his hands -- as author, as lover, as the protagonist in the movie. He had the power to be a faithful lover. He had the power to be faithful to his writing. He had the power to rewrite the ending to the film to suit him. It's *Norman's* film; Jane can't kill herself unless he says so.

Rozema's film recalls some of the authorial self-consciousness of the Atom Egoyan films already discussed, asking difficult questions about the act of story-telling and the story-teller's relationship to both the subject of the story and the larger community. More often in Canadian cinema, art serves as a vehicle for self-discovery, in which a personal story can be seen as analogous to the larger national community's search for itself. Artistic expression, that is, offers the protagonist a sense of self, a sense of independence, a sense of purpose, set against a larger context of dependence, self-doubt and self-abnegation. This theme invokes Canada's own quest for self-definition, in which its cultural industries are assigned a fundamental role.

Rozema's first feature, for example, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987), is the video diary of Polly, a thirty-one-year-old photographer who lives alone with her

cat and finds fantasy in the darkroom of her apartment. Polly's narration establishes the scenes; the film begins with Polly speaking directly to the camera and ends when she reaches up to shut the camera off. This direct address emphasizes to the viewer that both the film, and Polly's diary, are representations.

Even though she's "organizationally impaired" and can't type, Polly's goofy charm wins her a job as part-time secretary to Gabrielle, curator of the Church Gallery. A Swiss whose European sophistication contrasts Polly's social awkwardness, Gabrielle becomes a mentor; a smart dresser who presents herself with assured professionalism, she's at ease with such requisites of urban chic as sushi and art criticism.

Gabrielle's fear of aging is matched by a romantic desire for artistic immortality. She asks rhetorically: "To make something beautiful is to be beautiful forever, isn't it?"

> Polly: "What do you wanna make that's so beautiful?"
>
> Gabrielle: "One painting. This big. [Indicating with her hands.] That's good. Undeniably. Unequivocally. Universally. Good."

Despite her surface strength, Gabrielle has well-founded insecurities. Samples of her painting are rejected by an adult art class as "simple-minded". When Polly asks to

see her work, Gabrielle deceptively shows Polly paintings by her lover, Mary Joseph, instead. The canvasses emit a fluorescent glow. The woman whose career is based on judging others' work has subscribed so completely to the myth of the universal good that she cannot find value in her own work.

Polly, who idolizes Gabrielle, nevertheless pities the curator's sudden lack of self-assurance. She steals one of the glowing canvasses and mounts it in the gallery, unaware of Gabrielle's plagiarism. At the same time she is inspired to overcome her own timidity; employing the "pseudoname" Penelope, Polly submits to Gabrielle some of her photographs. Leafing through Penelope's portfolio in a matter of seconds, Gabrielle dismisses the photographs as "simple-minded" -- the identical dismissal given Gabrielle's paintings -- and asks Polly to send Penelope a rejection letter. Polly is shattered by Gabrielle's callousness and by her own failure to live up to the artistic standard of the "undeniably, unequivocally, universally good". She ritually burns the photographs and pushes her camera off her apartment balcony.

But Polly's real sense of self-discovery comes in two phases at the film's conclusion. Accidentally, she learns that Gabrielle is a fraud and that Mary Joseph -- who scolded Polly for mimicking Gabrielle's judgemental

dismissal of Penelope's photographs: "What's good?" -- is the true creator of the glowing canvasses.

More significantly, Polly learns that Gabrielle's artistic pretension is misplaced. Rozema's use of Biblical referents -- the characters' names, Mary Joseph's immaculate conceptions, the gallery occupying an old church -- emphasizes Polly's reverence of art as a great cathedral, to which blessed practitioners of this most sacred religion are called, and in which mere mortals like herself can only worship. When Gabrielle's deceit is exposed, Polly's faith is severely tested, but, one can only presume, her sense of art is redefined. Seeking reconciliation, the film concludes with Polly leading Gabrielle and Mary Joseph into her darkroom, which has been transformed into an Edenesque forest.

Throughout the film, the darkroom is Polly's place of fantasy, her domain of competence, the site of her spiritual liberation. The film shows us two Pollys: the incompetent secretary and the competent photographer. Yet it is as a secretary -- Polly's domain of least ability -- that Gabrielle takes her seriously by hiring her.

Rozema challenges persistent conceptions of a universal, objective standard of quality all artists confront. Who would be more sensitive to this than a Canadian film-maker, whose work is always measured

against Hollywood's "universal" standard? If it's good, the argument goes, "undeniably, unequivocally, universally good", then it will find its audience. But as Mary Joseph asks, What's good? And who decides? Yves Rousseau writes:

> L'art contemporain y est perçu comme un establishment géré par une minorité qui s'arroge le monopole des choix esthétiques. Serait-ce une métaphore des canaux officiels de production cinématographique? (Rousseau, 1991, p. 130).

Gabrielle is a victim of her own belief system. "The Curator", as Polly refers to her, is the judge of what is art and what will be exhibited as art in her private gallery. More importantly, she is the arbiter of what is *not* art. Of course, Gabrielle's paintings are rejected by the same criteria, by the anonymous curator of the adult painting class.

The theme of exclusivity speaks to the exclusion of Canadian film from Canadian cinema screens. John Tomlinson argues that the appeal to the universal in art subsumes cultural difference.

> First, it implies that hermeneutic difficulties are overstated, that there is 'common understanding' between cultures at some 'deep' level, thus, that we all laugh at the same thing. Second, it denies the possibility of cultural imperialism because it denies fundamental cultural differences: the ubiquity of a cultural form is thus separated from any question of domination since it can always be

> explained in terms of universal appeal (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 53).

Appeals to universality become "a suppression of history by the use of a discourse of 'nature'" (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 54).

William MacGillivray, too, challenges the myth of art as sacred and exclusive calling in *Life Classes* (1987). MacGillivray's film recounts the private journey of Mary Cameron, who, pregnant with the child of the local bootlegger Earl, leaves Cape Breton for Halifax. Modelling at a local art school to pay her rent, Mary matures as an artist in this new environment, progressing from paint-by-number seascapes to original sketches of her daughter Marie and, later, Earl.

This simple coming-of-age story is set against a background theme of the globalization of culture. Mary must find her own place in the collision of the pretentious avant-garde and the commercial trash. Earl, insisting he's an "ex-bootlegger", introduces a satellite dish to Ingonish, and establishes his own (illegal) cable television network. The television serves as a sitter for Mary's grandmother Nanny -- "Is it time for the stories?" -- and company for her widowed father, seen watching the hockey fights. Earl and his friends indulge their new access to global culture by consuming pirated pornographic films.

Mary, on the other hand, is primarily a cultural producer. She is introduced to Halifax's artistic community through Gloria, a student. Mary attends a lecture by a prominent German sculptor whose artspeak is refined to the extent that it's incomprehensible in both German and English. Mary is shocked to learn that the artist doesn't actually make any of her own sculptures; she merely conceives the ideas.[3]

Later in the film, Mary and Gloria participate in an art performance, in which four singers stand naked inside plastic tubes, singing songs of their own choosing with accompanying musicians. The performance is videotaped and fed back to New York for a satellite simulcast. Unbeknownst to Mary, Earl's satellite dish picks up the program. Before Earl realizes that Mary is naked and singing a traditional Gaelic song Nanny taught her, he has phoned all over town to sound the alert. At one level Mary is degraded by the fiasco, but on another level she is liberated, both as a performer and a creator (See: Véronneau, 1991, p. 74).

Mary's quest for independence culminates in a gallery showing of her sketches; "A One-Man Show" features her abstracted drawings of a nude -- and in some sketches, pregnant -- Earl. It is the realization of Mary's personal transformation from object -- in the literal sense, as life classes model -- to subject.

Through her sketches, for example, Mary forces Earl to share some of the experience she endured: pregnancy and posing nude. At the film's conclusion, Mary moves into the house in Cape Breton she's inherited from Nanny and snubs Earl in his awkward attempt to propose marriage.

MacGillivray's film also addresses the regeneration of family and community through representational images. The personal history of Mary's landlady, Mrs. Miller, for example, is represented by a family photo album and a television documentary on Africville. Earl's first glimpse of Marie is her picture on the front of a t-shirt Mary gives him. All Mary has left of her mother is one faded photograph; her father burned everything else when she left him. The film's theme song, which Mary sings during the satellite simulcast, is called "My Child":

> My child is my mother returning,
> Her mother, my daughter, the same.
> She carries us all in her yearning,
> Our sorrow, our peace, and our pain.

In all of these cases, the characters' memories are captured by representational images: photographs, songs, a television documentary.

The film opens and closes with a television interview with Jacinta Cormier, the actress who plays Mary in the film. This device reminds the viewer that

the film is also a representation. In the first interview, Cormier states:

> Mary comes from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, a small town. And for some reason, was set apart from the society she grew up in. She's a product of a culture -- and a victim as well, I guess -- of the changes that it's going through. I grew up in a small town as well, and, like her, was ... forced, I guess, to leave home. And in both cases we moved to a city.
>
> I came to know her. Not that it was easy. She's a very complex character. I'm still not sure I fully understand her, or her motives.

As the story ends, we return to the Cormier interview:

> Mary and I are basically the same person. It's a cliché ... it's just that I was beginning to find many similarities between us. For instance, the way she strove for independence. It's too bad, you know, it's just a film. I'd like to know what happened to Mary.

Clearly, MacGillivray intends *Life Classes* to be not "just a film", but to resonate with implications for life beyond the movie theatre. If Jacinta and Mary are the same person, then Mary represents a larger social struggle to secure a place, an identity, in the global culture.

In a similar vein, Anne Wheeler's *Bye Bye Blues* (1989) traces the personal transformation of Daisy Cooper, a blues singer and pianist who achieves independence by joining a swing band in the absence of

her husband, stationed overseas during the Second World War. Told from a woman's point of view, the film plays on a central paradox of war: the worst of times for some is the best of times for others. This is accentuated in the beautiful images of the Alberta foothills, which reinforce the distance between war and the home front.

In the first scenes of the film, Daisy is portrayed as a pretty and bumbling appendage of her husband Teddy, a major serving with the British army. Stationed in India,[4] Daisy has to ask Teddy's permission to buy a carpet in a street market -- he says no -- and she is chased screaming from the bathroom by a snake, into Teddy's reassuring arms.

When Teddy is posted to Singapore, Daisy returns with her new-born daughter Emma and five-year-old son Richard to her parents' home in northern Alberta. With no work available and no word or money from Teddy -- believed captured by the Japanese -- Daisy stubbornly persists in winning a place in a local dance band, replacing her brother Will, who has enlisted.

A societal double standard is quickly established. Slim, the band leader, discourages Daisy at every turn, partly because her piano-playing is rusty, but also because she's a woman. The first time she's paid -- three dollars; the men get five -- Daisy proudly states that it's the first money she's ever earned. As Daisy's

singing and piano-playing improve, and the band's fortunes rise proportionally, Slim can't be sure he can count on the "grass widow" to be there when the band needs her.

There are familial deterrents as well. Daisy's parents object to a married woman working the war-time dance halls and Daisy feels guilty about leaving her children, more and more frequently, especially in the hands of her unreliable sister-in-law Frances. Richard, particularly, resents Daisy's frequent absences. Will, who returns from the war with a leg missing, accuses Daisy of living it up "while Teddy starves to death in some hell-hole." No one, of course, objects to men like Teddy and Will leaving their families for war.

Daisy gains independence as the film progresses -- she really becomes the heart of the band -- but her independence is tempered by the responsibility she feels to her children and to her husband, even though after four years Daisy doesn't know whether Teddy is dead or alive. She tells Frances: "I can't imagine him any more. I used to be able to close my eyes and see him."

None of the men in the band shares Daisy's conflicts. Max, the American trombone player who becomes the band's leader, for example, is divorced with a sixteen-year-old son he hasn't seen for years. Max's principal reason for staying with the band, it seems, is

his attraction to Daisy. As his infatuation becomes love, he pressures Daisy to become his lover, eventually proposing marriage to her.

Only at the piano and the microphone does Daisy feel truly liberated; she becomes a confident player and an exuberant singer, fronting the band's performances. Yet it's a short-lived liberation; the end of the war and her husband's imminent return signal Daisy's return to a life of domesticity. Her sense of loss is apparent in the film's final scene, the morning after Teddy's return home, when the bus carrying the band, and a disconsolate Max, leave on tour without her.

I've Heard the Mermaids Singing, *Life Classes* and *Bye Bye Blues* employ female protagonists as symbolic representations of the colonized subject. Polly, Mary and Daisy progress in their own ways from passivity to activity as they come to terms with some knowledge of the self, as women and as artists. This process is empowering, even though this empowerment is confined to the marginal practice of Canadian cultural expression.

Bye Bye Blues, too, introduces the sense in Canadian cinema of artistic expression as a symbol of escape. The escape can imply the flight from a particular place, as in William MacGillivray's *The Vacant Lot* (1989). Or it can be an escape from socio-economic hardship, as in Ken Pittman's *No Apologies* (1990).

Set in modern-day Halifax, *The Vacant Lot* juxtaposes two musicians at contrasting junctures in their careers. Trudi is the neophyte rhythm guitarist in an all-woman band called The Vacant Lot. She holds a romanticized notion about leaving Halifax like her father did -- abandoning Trudi and her mother -- to follow her music wherever it takes her, possibly to a reconciliation with her father. Her guitar-playing is her connection to her absent father.

David, who is Trudi's father's age, has already had a taste of touring with a popular band called Flat Out Boogie (they've since become a "technopop" band called Guns Go Bang, based in Los Angeles). He was kicked out of the band -- the impression is he wasn't good enough -- and he can't get any work. He's bitter at being shut out of the business even though he knows "thousands" of chords and hundreds of songs, he has twenty years' experience and has "played with the best". At one point early in the film his sound equipment is repossessed and sold to some young kids who have a gig the next night.

Trudi's father, singer-guitarist Johnny Sadler, exists as her mentor *in absentia*. She doesn't know him or anything about his career. All she has to go on is her childhood memories of him singing to her, some publicity posters from clubs he's played, and one phone call from Los Angeles, during which he tells her he has

an album coming out. When she proposes flying out to see him. he hangs up. David, at first only an acquaintance, becomes a different kind of mentor for Trudi, a gifted singer-songwriter and guitarist who can bring to life for her his experiences in the music business.

Trudi, at the same time, rekindles David's enthusiasm for music; it is through Trudi that David finds work. Patti, the hard-edged leader of The Vacant Lot, recruits David to play lead guitar for their upcoming three-week club tour. David mocks the radical feminist lyrics of Patti's songs, her inability to sing or play guitar, and the band's "dated" image.[5] But he agrees to join the band because "there's not much else happening". Patti resents David's "pyrotechnics" on guitar, but nevertheless respects his ability to play and his experience. The tour, however, is a disaster. The band's van breaks down on the way to their first gig, and while it's being repaired, all their equipment is stolen.

Trudi returns home to find her father waiting for her in the kitchen. "I brought the album. I want you to have a copy of the album." He looks seventy years old, with weathered skin, scraggly hair and grey-flecked beard. He staggers when he walks, either from too much drink or drugs, or from too much living. He gives Trudi the tape and hobbles out of the house. David returns home set on selling everything but his guitar and flying

to Los Angeles. The aborted tour is his final humiliation. Trudi decides to go with him.

On the drive to the airport in David's Volkswagen, Trudi listens to her father's cassette. The songs are awful, and Trudi eventually throws the tape out the car window. The snow forces them to stop driving and the film's last image is the snow-covered Volkswagen at dawn, parked outside the airport gates. A jet rises over the gates and the camera leaves the car to follow the jet as it climbs.

Throughout the film, the airport symbolizes the potential for escape; David and Trudi often drive out there to talk and to watch the planes come and go. It's a reminder that they are not stuck in Halifax, not if they don't want to be. Even though the two men Trudi knows who have boarded those jets have returned failures, the departing jets nonetheless represent the opportunity Trudi's music presents. The alternative is working in the library and living with her mother in the trailer park; the family's mobile home is itself a telling oxymoron.

Ken Pittman's *No Apologies* dramatizes Newfoundlanders' choice between fight and flight in their struggle with chronic disparity, and art becomes the weapon of choice in that struggle.[6] A family is reunited by the impending death of its patriarch Peter, a retired

miner. Peter's failing health mirrors Newfoundland's socio-economic decline and serves as a stimulus for Peter's sons, Mark and Matthew, to act.

The film begins with the homeward journey of Mark, a political film-maker who's been working in Central America. The bleakness of rural Newfoundland that the film presents reinforces the gloom of the intermittent television news reports of economic hardship. We see, as if through Mark's eyes, the desolate landscape of winter, the interminable grey of the sky, trees without leaves and stubble poking through the snow, fields pock-marked with rusted cars turned upside down, buildings in need of paint, a closed coal mine, kids selling rabbits by the side of the road.

Conspicuously absent from the reunion is Peter's brother Jack, who, as a young man, left Newfoundland for New England. Citing illness as his excuse for not visiting his dying brother, Jack sends instead his eldest son Tim, and Tim's wife Genny, from Boston. Tim later confesses to Mark that Jack isn't sick, "He just couldn't stand coming back here."

It quickly becomes apparent to Tim why his father left; the Newfoundland the film portrays is depressing. But Jack's departure remains a sensitive issue, particularly for Mark and Matthew, a fiction writer who has remained at home. When Tim asks Peter why he didn't

go south with his brother, Mark proposes bitterly that perhaps "the whole island" could be moved to the U.S. After a few days of disheartening newscasts and Mark's and Matthew's cynicism, Tim concludes that apathy is Newfoundland's real problem. He tells Genny: "No wonder Dad got out of here. Why can't they just wake up and *do* something?"

As a character, Tim is portrayed as some combination of unwelcome mainlander and American imperialist, a convenient target for Mark's and Matthew's frustration. Yet Mark shares Tim's sentiments, if not his sense of devotion to the family's native community. This is revealed during a discussion of Mark's work in Central America -- he's making a film called *Profile in Disparity* -- with Matthew. Matthew rejects the analogy between the disparity of Central America and the disparity of Newfoundland, insisting: "Those people are *really* oppressed. They die! *That's* disparity." Mark insists Central Americans die "because they fight back", a recipe Newfoundlanders should emulate. "You. Me. *Somebody. Do* something for Christ's sake!"

Gradually, the film reveals that Peter was "doing something", and his approaching death validates the Central American analogy. There is a strong implication, later confirmed, that Peter's demise is only the latest in a long list of miners' deaths believed to be work-

related. Mark asks Dr. Murray: "How many have died? You're the company doctor. Isn't anything being done?" Dr. Murray arrives later at the house to inform Matthew that Peter, the leader of some kind of union agitation, has taken a company file, and the company wants it returned.

Mark learns from his father that Matthew has the file, which contains confidential company records on its deceased employees. Without telling Matthew that he knows about the file, Mark challenges his brother to put his writing -- Matthew is a central figure in contemporary Newfoundland literature -- to political purpose.

> Mark: "Does it bother you they read your stuff and then forget it, and then go on the same as always?"
>
> Matthew: "I write fiction and poetry, Mark. I don't write social commentary or politics."
>
> Mark: "I don't care *what* you write about, Matthew. It should make some *difference* to them."
>
> Matthew: "It *does*. Inside."
>
> Mark: "How come nothing's changed? *Nothin'*. Outside or inside."

Matthew, it happens, is wrestling with precisely the same question. His current bout of writer's block results from his struggle to reconcile his commitment to

literature with the socio-economic blight that surrounds him, and with his commitment to his father. Matthew can't even bring himself to show Mark the file, let alone publish its contents.

Seemingly incapable of putting up the kind of long and determined fight that seems necessary for the community's recovery, Matthew decides instead on radical action: the assassination of William Porter, a politician implicated in the miners' deaths. Matthew, however, is intercepted by his brother and, stung by Mark's earlier criticism that his writing doesn't make a difference, he shows Mark the file. The film leaves us to conclude that the brothers are about to join the home fight in their father's honour.

Pittman's film addresses the political dimension of cultural production in this ideological struggle between two brothers: Mark, an engaged film-maker whose political activism has thus far been devoted to a far-off region of disparity; and Matthew, a writer who has avoided social commentary, except that his writing *is* political in the sense that he writes about Newfoundland, validating his native community in a way Jack or Tim wouldn't understand.

In this way, *No Apologies* speaks to Canadian cinema's political dimension. Its engagement in its own community is an act of validating Canadian experience,

something that only an indigenous cinema can do. The film stands in sharp contrast to those Canadian films in which the geographical setting is disguised a generic un-place.

MacGillivray tackles this same struggle in a much more didactic manner in *Understanding Bliss* (1990). Set in modern-day St. John's, the film resumes an itinerant affair between two academics: Elizabeth Sutton, a professor of English literature from Toronto who is separated from her husband; and Peter Breen, a professor of cultural studies in St. John's whose wife is visiting her mother in Corner Brook.

Ostensibly, Elizabeth has come to St. John's to give a public reading of the Katherine Mansfield short story "Bliss". But she is also there to visit Peter. Peter is preoccupied with rehearsing a Mummers' play with his students and demonstrates a greater commitment to the play than to Elizabeth. The first night she's in town, Peter says he can't see her because he has to visit his father, and he can't attend her reading because of a conflicting rehearsal.

It took Elizabeth "all day" to fly from Toronto to St. John's, which she refers to as "the far east". The day-long trip creates a spatial gulf between these two Canadian communities: the big city in central Canada and the seaside hamlet. St. John's has an intimacy that

creates discomfort for both characters. MacGillivray uses long, uninterrupted shots of Peter and Elizabeth walking through the town to establish it as a close-knit community. This creates a claustrophobia in Elizabeth and a fear in Peter that his liaison with Elizabeth will be discovered by his neighbours.

Peter's cultural politics set him on a collision course with Elizabeth's formalist sensibilities. The central message Peter offers his students is to tell their own stories. During one class, the students analyze video clips of indigenous films, one of which is *The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood*, an iconic Newfoundland film Peter describes as "probably the most important film produced in our island yet, certainly one of the most important films to come out of Canada, even though Canadians, let alone Newfoundlanders, are not aware of it."[7] Peter tells his students: "You don't need a Ph.D. to know a good story. You don't need Canada or America coming down here and tellin' you what's worth holding onto, what's worth saving. Remember who *you* are."

Elizabeth's views on the subject of culture are never articulated, but are instead represented by her choice of reading material. Mansfield, an early twentieth-century writer who was born in New Zealand but is considered a British author, is renowned for her homelessness and rootlessness, her "permanent sense of

isolation". Suffering from tuberculosis, she travelled relentlessly, seeking a climate more accommodating to her illness (Daly, 1965, pp. 17-24). Elizabeth's scholarly devotion to Mansfield distances her from Peter's commitment to local culture.

On another level, Elizabeth's choice of the Mansfield short story "Bliss" -- in Elizabeth's words, "a story of superficiality, deceit and realization" -- echoes her own relationship with Peter. "Bliss", Saralyn R. Daly writes, was one of a chain of stories in "Miss Mansfield's developing consideration of the failure of love between men and women." The story's bliss, that is, is described but it is not real. The ironic assertion of all of Mansfield's descriptions of lovers, Daly writes, is: "...at the moment when they most hope they are approaching deep feelings of union, they are, instead, saying good-by [sic], discovering their immutable separateness" (Daly, 1965, pp. 87-88).

Elizabeth is devastated by the poor turnout at her reading; nine people show up, compared to the three hundred and twenty people who came to hear her in Toronto. Peter's sister May, who videotapes the talk so her brother can watch it later, explains to Elizabeth:

> May: "You know, it's not that we're not interested. It's just that we don't want to be *told* to be interested. Got a lot to deal with here, you know. Our whole world

> is collapsing around our ears. You people, you people continue to freeze us out, shut us down.
>
> "I mean, who cares about someone from the wealthy merchant class of New Zealand when yet another fish plant's gone down? Katherine fucking Beauchamp Mansfield!"

Elizabeth: "Katherine fucking Mansfield Beauchamp."

May: "Whatever. You *do* see what I mean. It's simply that, at this time, in this place, it's not relevant. If you want to see what's relevant, go to Peter's class, look at his tapes, listen to him talk."

Joining Peter's rehearsal later -- where there are the same number of performers as Elizabeth had in her audience -- Elizabeth is humiliated when she's recruited into the play. The experience reinforces the resentment she feels because Peter assigns more significance to the play than to Elizabeth. Returning to Elizabeth's hotel to watch the video -- Peter is critical that her talk consisted simply of her reading the story aloud -- they discover their "immutable separateness". Elizabeth is upset that her wants and Peter's are so different; she doesn't want marriage and children, she wants them only to be lovers. For his part, Peter rejects angrily Elizabeth's dismissal of the culture that is clearly so important to him and the superficial manner in which she perceives their relationship. Peter is risking his

marriage to be with Elizabeth; Elizabeth treats the relationship merely as a fling.

In their final scene together, what appears at first to be passionate foreplay, becomes, in fact, an act of rage. Peter lies on top of Elizabeth, pinning her wrists to the hotel bed. Her draws her camisole over her face, then suddenly spits his anger at her. He calls her a "fucking barbarian" who is "just passing through", "raping and plundering". He demands: "You wouldn't want to actually *love* anyone, would you?"

Elizabeth has become in Peter's eyes everything his value system compels him to reject: a smug central Canadian who has deemed Newfoundland's culture a quaint relic; a cultural elitist who, operating from the socio-economic comfort of professional life in Toronto, determines that the selfish affair between two individuals exists on a higher plane of significance than Peter's attachment to his community.

Understanding Bliss poses questions about art's place in society -- why is the Mummers' play so important? -- and the artist's responsibility to community. In the ideological conflict between Elizabeth and Peter, MacGillivray sides clearly with Peter, the engaged scholar who insists upon the importance of a people telling its own stories. The Mummers' play manifests all of Peter's beliefs, as local culture and as

demanding broad participation. Elizabeth takes her culture for granted and the film judges her harshly for it; her own viewpoint is never really expressed.

The preoccupation with the artist as protagonist reveals a self-consciousness and a self-reflexiveness in Canadian cinema. The films reflect on the role of cultural production, and the association between the artist as individual and the artist as a member of a community. By practising in a marginalized film industry, these film-makers make a statement about which community they feel they belong to because Canadian film production is never a practice taken for granted.

Notes

[1]Fischer writes: "An artist can only experience something which his time and his social conditions have to offer. Hence an artist's subjectivity does not consist in his experience being fundamentally different from that of others of his time or class, but in its being stronger, more conscious, and more concentrated. It must uncover new social relationships in such a way that others will become conscious of them too.... Even the most subjective artist works on behalf of society. By the sheer fact of describing feelings, relationships, and conditions that have not been described before, he channels them from his apparently isolated 'I' into a 'we', and this 'we' can be recognized even in the brimming subjectivity of an artist's personality. Yet this process is never a return to the primitive collective of the past. On the contrary, it is a reaching out into a new collective full of differences and tensions, where the individual voice is not lost in a vast unison. In every true work of art, the division of human reality into the individual and the collective, the

specific and the universal, is suspended; but it remains as a suspended factor in a re-created unity" (Fischer, 1963, p. 46).

[2]Australian social critic Donald Horne writes: "This is not the place to discourse on all the wisdoms of philosophical pragmatism, but part of the idea is that knowledge and intellectual inquiry are instruments of action, rather than forms of disinterested contemplation..." (Horne, 1989, p. 44).

[3]Pierre Véronneau writes: "Le hiatus culturel entre ces artistes <<universels>> et les gens qui ne sont pas de leur monde ne peut être plus évident; la pseudo-naïveté de Mary ne fait que souligner son intelligence par contraste avec l'arrogance de l'artiste reconnue" (Véronneau, 1991, p. 73).

[4]Although the setting is not identified as such in the story, the Indian scenes were shot in Poona, near Bombay.

[5]The film itself trivializes the feminist theme. Patti is a stereotype: her politics are expressed as inarticulate rage with a personal source the film never explains; as David suggests, she can't sing and her songs are banal; and the all-woman band needs David to secure club dates. Nor does the film really develop the theme of Trudi's father's abandonment of his family.

[6]William MacGillivray is one the producers of *No Apologies*. He is also the editor and music editor of the film.

[7]Bryan Hennessey, the actor who plays Peter Breen in *Understanding Bliss*, also played Henry Penny in *The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood*. The students in Peter's class recognize Peter as the actor in the earlier film. Another of the clips shown is from MacGillivray's first feature, *Stations* (1983).

CHAPTER NINE

Bye Bye Blues

The theme of escaping "here" is a central preoccupation of contemporary English-Canadian auteur cinema. The escape is occasionally real, more often imaginary, recounted as the personal story of a central character, but related metaphorically to Canadians' collective imagination. At the same time, the theme of escaping "here" speaks meta-cinematically by invoking the experiences of Canadian film-makers with their marginalized practice.

The theme of escaping "here" evokes the Canadian colonial condition, in which Canada is perceived by its constituents as a cultural void, an appendage of some more significant centre which has an imagined reality the colony can never attain. This centre need not be specified, although most often in Canadian cinema it is represented by the United States. More importantly, however, the centre is anywhere but "here". The earlier discussion of the context of feature-film production in Canada connects such thematic preoccupations to the film-

makers' own struggle to validate "here" through their film practice.

Most of the films discussed in this section address this subject through simple, personal stories that juxtapose their characters' undefined desperation for escape with a vague, yet romantic, sense of destination. In this way, the films demand that the viewer reflect on a pervasive cultural claustrophobia. "Here", that is, is more a *state* of being than a place of being.

i) Escaping "Here":

As suggested by its title, Joseph Viszmeg's *City of Champions* (1990), is an ironic treatment of the theme, a half-comic, half-pathetic tale of four losers floundering in their own self-deception. The film opens with a shot of the central character, West, walking away from Edmonton and long-time girlfriend Moochie, with no one to stop him, "not even myself". The film then skips back one year and recounts, from West's perspective, his latest near-miss with love and money.

Chance encounter links West with two women: Gabrielle, a wife and mother of two young boys who has just robbed a bank (with an electric razor); and Dixie, the spoiled only child of an affluent suburban family.

All three characters seek relief from their quotidian monotony, building dreams based on delusion.

Gabrielle and Dixie construct masks to conceal their true selves, deceiving themselves far more than one another, or the audience. Gabrielle, for instance, describes herself as a modern-day Robin Hood and a gambler "on a mad tear" since deserting her family. This is true, as far as it goes; she *is* on a mad tear and she shares generously with Dixie and West the money she has stolen. She doesn't mention that she just left her family that morning. In fact, Gabrielle is little more than a frustrated housewife.

Dixie, whose real name is Yolanda, poses as a socially aware survivor of life on the streets devoted to liberating the oppressed. Between bouts of tough talk inflected with Marxist rhetoric, she telephones home to ask her mother to pick up her car at the repair shop and her clothes from the dry cleaner. Dixie later admits to West that she has a Holt Renfrew credit card, a BMW, a home in tony Riverbend and a boyfriend who aspires to investment banking.

The only person West tries to deceive is himself. West lives with Moochie in a camper parked in a field beside a highway on Edmonton's outskirts. The camper sits beneath a sign that says Wimpy, with an unrestricted view of a nearby oil refinery. The extent of Moochie's

ambitions are a job, a family and an apartment, and she reports faithfully to work at Value Village each morning. Predictable to a fault, Moochie offers no hint of an unknown dimension. Her mundane dreams are West's nightmare. To Moochie, West is equally transparent; he's a helpless dreamer. When he tells Moochie he's leaving "to go east", she merely rolls her eyes; she's heard this before. The fact that West is heading east accentuates his confusion.

With Gabrielle and Dixie, West embarks on a day-long joyride: shopping, drinking, robbing a second bank, dancing in a nightclub, and spending the night together in the Roman Room of the Fantasyland Hotel. The spree unravels the next morning. Dixie becomes Yolanda again and returns home to go shopping with her mother. West and Gabrielle scheme to take off for Las Vegas, but when West returns to the camper to collect some belongings, he gets into a heated argument with Moochie -- she alternately threatens to kill West and herself -- and Gabrielle leaves him behind.

At the end of the film we return to the scene of West walking along the highway, a suitcase in his hand and the Edmonton cityscape behind him. The progress West has made in a year is assuming responsibility for his own far-fetched dreams. He muses about travelling to Rio de Janiero and the islands of Greece. "Now I can leave or I

can stay; it doesn't make any damn difference. I'm on my own. I guess this is freedom."

Viszmeg's film is ultimately critical of the characters' desire for escape, trivializing their plight. We can't take any of these characters seriously because they are presented to us only as caricatures. Dixie/Yolanda has only a vicarious sense of oppression; it's something she's read about in her political science classes. She is oppressed only by her own boredom and the sterility of her life of privilege. Gabrielle's impromptu rebellion seems to be an irrational response to her tedium. We're given no information about her home life to suggest that she's acting on the level of politicization. She tears her husband's picture out of one corner of a family photograph, but the basis for her anger remains unexplained. West's flight is motivated by simple self-indulgence.

In the same vein, yet on a more multi-dimensional scale, Peter Shatalow's *Blue City Slammers* (1987) paints Queenstown, Ontario, in purgatorial fashion. A border town on the Niagara Peninsula -- the film was shot in Blyth, Ontario -- its sole industry is a nuclear power plant; workers there are called "glow boys". While the film portrays the town in bleak terms -- its livelihood tied to the potentially lethal nuclear power plant -- it

suggests at the same time that escape is not the only path to self-fulfillment.

The central characters belong to a women's softball team -- the Blue City Slammers -- which has qualified for the championship game of the Tri-Cities Labour Day tournament. With the church, the quarry and the hotel, the softball team serves as one of Queenstown's central social institutions. It's the end of summer, the end of the softball season and the beginning of a new phase in the characters' lives.

The central figure seeking escape through change is Kim, the team's catcher and a waitress at the Blue City Hotel. Waiting tables since she was fourteen, Kim is an intelligent and soft-spoken young woman who has decided to enter the restaurant and hotel management program at George Brown College in Toronto. She hasn't figured out yet how to tell her boyfriend Butter; her hesitation, it seems, has more to do with leaving *him* than leaving town. The catalyst for Kim's final resolution to quit Queenstown and leave Butter is Jim Shaffer, the "all-night guy" at a radio station on the American side of the border. Jim's flirtation with Kim instills in her the added self-confidence she needs to realize her plans.

Butter is a beer-swilling local yokel who hasn't yet come to terms with the end of adolescence. Unemployed and unambitious -- waking from a restless sleep, he tells

Kim: "Dreams are a bugger" --, Butter's social capital has to this point in his life derived from an unrivalled ability to party. But impending adulthood has quickly rendered his social skills obsolete. As Butter realizes he's losing Kim, he spends two unemployment insurance cheques on an engagement ring and spray-paints his proposal on the rocks of the quarry. Kim's subsequent refusal humiliates Butter in front of their friends, not because it's a rejection of his love for her, but because it's a rejection of the juvenile lifestyle he represents. Kim is humiliated, too, by being forced to declare her passage from this stage in her life in such public terms.

Chicken, another member of the softball team, is the daughter of a wealthy pig farmer who wants her to go to college in the city. But Chicken is, well, chicken. Like Butter, her identity has been constructed upon increasingly devalued social skills, and she's afraid of having to reconstruct her identity on more challenging terms. As the relationship between Kim and Butter disintegrates, Chicken and Butter cling to one another as they cling to their nostalgia. Chicken vows: "*I'll* party with you, Butter."

Kim's desire for escape has more to do with the social constitution of community than with the community of Queenstown itself. Kim and Lori Walker, the team's pitcher, are portrayed equally sympathetically, even

though Kim's maturation is implied in her impending departure and Lori's maturation is associated with her remaining in Queenstown. Lori is a single mother with a fourteen-year-old son Joe. Joe's father, Gary Turner, left town inexplicably before Joe was born, and hasn't been heard from since.

Gary's unexpected return during the Labour Day weekend provides one of the film's central dramatic conflicts. When Lori sees him for the first time, she greets him with a hard slap across the face. "You prick! Your son's had fourteen birthdays. You missed every one of them. Where were you, you prick?" Gary reveals to Lori that her father, Bill Walker, ran him out of town at the point of a gun. "Didn't have much choice, a man sticks a gun in your face." Gary knows this really doesn't wash; he could have taken Lori with him, or, at the very least, have explained himself to her. Instead he simply ran away. Gary's return signifies that he's stopped running. His escape from his own irresponsibility -- and his cowardice -- is his return to Queenstown, his return to Lori, and his climactic confrontation with the gun-toting Bill Walker.

Allan King's *Termini Station* (1989) is the most intensely dramatic of the films discussed in this section, depicting the devastating consequences of unrealized dream as unrealized passion. The film's

tension derives from the relationship between Micheline Dushane, a young prostitute in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, and her mother, and their shared desire for escape.

Mrs. Dushane was abandoned by her lover, Mr. Stein, almost ten years ago. Her bitterness stems partly from Stein's unfulfilled promise to take her to visit Rome to see all the famous Italian operas, and partly from lacking the mettle to take herself there. Micheline was abandoned by her father, who, we learn through a series of increasingly revealing flashbacks, threatened to kill her, but wound up killing himself. Micheline's bitterness is traced to her incomprehension of her father's actions.

The Termini Station of the film's title is the name of the train station linking Leonardo Da Vinci airport and the city of Rome, the terminus where Mrs. Duschane's dreams become reality. But the only station we see in the film is the Kirkland Lake bus terminal, where Micheline often hangs out. "It makes me feel like I'm goin' somewhere."

Micheline's hard edge protects her from the passion that has crippled her mother. While fellow hustlers Val and Nellie dream -- Val confuses her clients' lust for love; Nellie aspires only to go someplace warm -- Micheline remains cynical; what she's selling is sex, not passion. As she bluntly informs a prospective john, a

smooth-talking American moose hunter: "Cut the romance, Bullwinkle. It's seventy-five bucks a shot, no sick stuff!"

Since Mr. Stein left her, Mrs. Duschane has retreated into alcoholism and melancholy. A depressed drunk who watches soap operas on television and listens to Puccini, she occupies an upstairs room in her son Harvey's house. While Harvey and his wife Liz do all they can to discourage Mrs. Dushane from wallowing in the misery of her broken dreams, Micheline inadvertently rekindles her mother's passion.

Micheline sends her mother reeling with the news that Stein has died in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Micheline intends to buy his old black Desoto, for sale at the local used car lot. To this point, Mrs. Dushane has clung to the belief that Stein would return. As long as he was alive, her dreams were alive. That evening, fuelled by gin and self-pity, Mrs. Duschane resolves to take herself to Rome. With Puccini blaring, she dresses, packs a bag and descends the stairs, declaring, "I want my passion back." Harvey intercepts his mother on the stairs and, after a brief argument, coaxes her back to her room. The scene convinces Harvey to have his mother hospitalized.

Micheline has lived her desire for escape through her mother. Mrs. Dushane's experience has made Micheline

afraid of failure, and she uses her mother to rationalize her own inertia. As Micheline tells her boyfriend Del, she can't leave town because she can't leave her mother. Mrs. Dushane's hospitalization appears to doom both their dreams; Mrs. Dushane now knows Stein is never coming back, and she knows she's not going to leave on her own. Her mother's hospitalization at the same time puts the onus on Micheline to act.

Retrieving Mr. Stein's letters for her mother one day, Micheline learns from reading one of them that Stein is her father. She had never been told this. While it clears up the mystery surrounding her father's attempt to kill her, and his suicide, Micheline suddenly feels a profound sense of having been abandoned -- and thoroughly deceived -- by her mother. Further, Micheline learns that it was Harvey who told his father about Stein's affair with their mother. Harvey caught Stein and his mother in bed, and overheard their plans to run off together. They planned to take Micheline with them, and leave Harvey behind.

Micheline decides to kidnap her mother and take her to Montreal in Stein's Desoto. Their flight is a chase scene full of black comedy as Harvey tries to stop them. First, the Desoto breaks down as they try to pass a truck. They resolve to hitch-hike, but the first car that arrives is Harvey's. As he is collecting their

luggage from the trunk of the Desoto to take them back, Micheline and Mrs. Dushane swipe Harvey's car. They race to overtake the Montreal-bound bus that has passed them on the highway. They flag down the bus at the same time Harvey -- in Del's car -- and the police arrive.

But, finally, it's Harvey who has given up. Too many men -- his father, Mr. Stein -- have already denied his mother her liberty. Harvey wanted only to take care of his mother, but at last he acknowledges the depth of her passion and concedes that the best he can do for her is to let her go. Micheline and Mrs. Dushane board the bus, and as it pulls away, Puccini is heard again.

Mrs. Dushane's "escape" from Kirkland Lake represents her own self-fulfillment. The bitterness she feels at having been abandoned by Stein derives in great measure from her own dependence on Stein; she deprived herself of her dreams because she invested in his ability to help her realize them. While determined not to make the same mistake as her mother, Micheline is equally afraid to risk failure by leaving Kirkland Lake on her own terms. Harvey's solution is to dream modestly; his ambition is a promotion at the tire shop where he works.

As in *Blue City Slammers*, the characters in Gail Singer's *True Confections* (1991) are engaged in the painful process of confronting adulthood, the stage when adolescent dreams are either realized -- or, at least,

acted upon -- or they're not. The central character, Verna Miller, is an eighteen-year-old anxious to escape 1950s Winnipeg. According to Verna, the best things that ever happened to Winnipeg were a flood and a polio epidemic, "because they forced everyone to leave". The film becomes an escape story, as Verna seeks an ally with whom to hit the road, destination unspecified. At issue is whether or not she'll make it.

At the same time, the film is very much about the process of forging identity. The film revolves around the city's Jewish community in the post-war period, with two recent historical events informing the atmosphere: the holocaust and the founding of Israel. The characters come to terms with their Jewishness in revealing ways. Verna's grandmother, for example, opposes anti-semitism through political activism: she confronts a restaurant owner who won't serve Jews; she challenges the dean of a medical school that has a quota on Jewish admissions; and she speaks about anti-semitism on a Christian radio program.

Verna, on the other hand, takes her Jewishness for granted, in an apolitical way that clashes with her friends' desire for conformity. When Verna voices her objection to singing Scottish folk songs in singing class -- "There isn't one Scot in the whole room" -- by singing

in Yiddish, her friends scold her for bringing attention to themselves as Jews.

Verna's first ticket out is Lawrence Albert Simon, a visiting New York beat poet "stuck" in Winnipeg. Verna and schoolfriend Kenny are among only a handful who attend Simon's poetry reading. When Simon asks them to show him the night life, Verna responds: "Night life? Seriously, it's dark and we're breathing, that's the best we can offer you."

Simon, however, knows Winnipeg better than they do, in the sense that he knows psychological boundaries are more difficult to overcome than city limits. By introducing Verna and Kenny to a "blind pig" he knows on North Main -- "I like it here," says Verna, "it doesn't feel like Winnipeg" -- Simon undermines their self-abnegation. He challenges their expressions of cultural suffocation. "You want out? Get out."

Simon makes a vague promise to whisk Verna and Kenny off to New York, but, not surprisingly, reneges. He asks them to meet him on the eastbound train the same day Verna and Kenny are supposed to go to music camp near Minneapolis. When he doesn't show up, Verna, who has taken to wearing black clothes and dark sunglasses, proposes they go anyway.

> Kenny: "What's the point of going without him?"

Verna: "Kenny, getting out of here is the point."

By default they go to music camp, where Verna meets Martin Manheim, a Rhodes scholar and Europhile desperate to purge his Jewish heritage. In his dress and in his affected manner, Martin distances himself from his Jewish Winnipeg upbringing. He confesses to Verna that he even eats ham at high tea. Martin is an intellectual snob who likes Verna because "she's a good listener".

As Verna was entranced by Lawrence Albert Simon's cosmopolitan airs, she falls for Martin's contrived sophistication. "You must tell me about Oxford. I'm very interested in Oxford. I'm very interested in anywhere." Martin is attracted by Verna's malleability; he sees in her eagerness for cultural redemption the opportunity to mold her after his own image of mature womanhood. They become engaged.

The wedding plans further accentuate the difference between Martin's and Verna's families. Verna's mother organizes a kosher menu. Martin's mother wants a French menu. When Martin arrogantly announces he has guests coming from England, Verna's grandmother unabashedly retorts that she has invited friends from Moose Jaw.

The wedding falls apart on a more substantial issue, however. Martin refuses to allow Verna to use the

wedding money to help her best friend Norma arrange an abortion. In the end, Verna and Norma hop the train and leave town together, not at all in the manner they had envisioned.

The film offers Verna two models of escape: that of Lawrence Albert Simon, that of embracing a fuller life; and that of Martin Manheim, that of adopting another culture in order to mask personal feelings of inadequacy. Unlike Martin, however, Verna has no sense of shame either in her Jewishness or her Canadian-ness; she simply desires a life that extends beyond Winnipeg's apparent confines. That she ultimately chooses Lawrence Albert Simon's path is evidenced by his presence on the train -- a few seats behind Verna and Norma -- at the end of the movie, and Verna's invitation to Norma to visit her in Greenwich Village.

ii) Dreaming the American Dream

If the theme of escaping "here" is employed primarily as an escape *from*, a number of films introduce the United States as the place Canadians seek to escape *to*. These films expose Canadians' American dream as fantasy, and because it is fantasy, its appeal is based on illusion and, these films suggest, delusion.

The romantic lure of "America", for example, is contrasted with the drudgery of "here" in the Norma Bailey film *Bordertown Cafe* (1991). The film centres around the cafe, which is situated on the Canadian side of the Canada-U.S. border somewhere in Manitoba,[1] but which straddles the two cultures.

The central character is Marlene, a single mother with a seventeen-year-old son Jimmy. Jimmy's father, Don, a truck driver, left Marlene when she was eight months pregnant, when she herself was seventeen. After all that time, she still longs for Don's infrequent visits, hoping he'll return to stay. A homemade doll house Marlene keeps, dusty as it is with neglect, symbolizes her dream of social stability. In the meantime, Marlene is dating Bob, the local Canada Customs officer who waits patiently for some commitment. In contrast to the itinerant Don, Bob is stable, faithful, ready at his post.

The lure of "America" serves as the film's thematic backdrop. The cafe walls are filled with American pop culture icons and Marlene's mother Maxine is a brash, outspoken American who constantly threatens to return to Minnesota and what she imagines to be a future as rosy as the past she recollects. She claims to be a direct descendant of Daniel Boone, John F. Kennedy and Cher, and spits out her lines like a Neil Simon character. The

plot revolves around Don's bid to lure Jimmy to the U.S. to live with him and his fiancee Linda.

There are few scenes in the film that are not set at the cafe, emphasizing the transitory quality of this space.[2] The cafe is a stage upon which Marlene's family lives publicly -- before their extended family of regular customers -- and it's a medium for the two cultures. The border upon which the cafe sits becomes an undefined cultural space, a space "between". But the border is as well a psychological space between people: between Don and Marlene, and between Maxine and her husband Jim. Jimmy is caught in a void in the middle.

Ultimately, Jimmy must make the decision his mother and his grandmother haven't been able to make for themselves. His resolve is represented by his rejection of Don's invitation and his decision to repair his mother's dusty and neglected doll house at the end of the film, to reconstruct, that is, stability in an unstable environment.

Adolescent fantasy is also a central theme in Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), which addresses Canadians' ambivalence toward American popular culture. Set in 1959 at John and Kitty's Paradise Ranch in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, the film is temporally situated in the period in which Canada is caught between the imperial reigns of Britain, its mother country, and

the United States, its giant neighbour. Wilson symbolizes this transitional stage with background shots of the Canadian flag hanging between the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes on city flagstaffs, as well as by the cultural claustrophobia of Sandy, the pubescent protagonist -- "I'll be thirteen in three months, practically a teenager". Sandy rejects the conservative British roots of her family and the sudden arrival of her American cousin Butch, a seventeen-year-old James Dean lookalike, serves as a catalyst.

The film opens with Sandy, in bed, scribbling: "Dear Diary; Nothing Ever Happens." Moments later, Butch arrives unexpectedly at Paradise Ranch, driving up in a cherry red Cadillac Eldorado convertible with whitewall tires. Clearly something is about to happen.

For the remainder of the film, Wilson playfully juxtaposes scenes of colonial suffocation -- Canada's past -- with those of American cultural seduction -- Canada's future, in 1959, and its present for contemporary viewers of the film. Sandy's parents, John and Kitty, for example, demonstrate an arrogant aversion to the American flamboyance of Butch's (actually, his mother's) car and his ever-present transistor radio. In one scene, John takes a photograph of Sandy and Butch in front of the Cadillac.

Kitty: "My, quite an extravagant car for one so young. So ... *American*."

John: "Now, Kitty. He comes from a good family. Americans of course, but still a very decent family."

The colonial past is personified by Granny, a feisty remnant of British imperialism who has John and Sandy over for tea. Granny calls Sandy "Sawndruh" in an affected manner. When Sandy asks for water instead of tea, Granny insists she pronounce it "wahtuh". "Now, let me please hear you say 'wahtuh', as it is meant to be spoken." The scene underlines Sandy's rejection of English culture and Granny's resistance to indigenous North American culture and language.

Butch, of course, personifies "America". With blond hair slicked back, sideburns, and a cigarette pack tucked up under one sleeve of his white t-shirt, he is the mobile, individualist rebel figure. For Butch, Paradise Ranch is a cultural backwater. His transistor radio can't tune in the American radio stations -- "In the States we got rock 'n' roll all day long" -- and the hit movie *Rebel Without A Cause* hasn't yet made it to the local theatre. His flashy modern car must endure cattle gates and gravel roads.

Butch: "Back in the States we don't got roads like this. Everything's paved!"

Sandy: "Ya? Like livin' in the States?"

Butch: "Are you kiddin'? Of course I like it. Anything you want, we got it in the U.S.A."

Sandy: "So what are you doin' up here? In Canada?"

At the end of the film, when Butch gives Sandy his radio as a parting gift, it plays only the decidedly unhip "There's a Bluebird on Your Windowsill" by Will Carter. Canada, indeed, imposes limits on imported American popular culture.

Wilson portrays the post-war transition period of Canadian nationhood through a series of caustic stereotypes: Granny as Victorian matriarch; John and Kitty as guardians of conservative moral values; Sandy as independence-seeking adolescent, breaking free from the grasp of one empire only to fall into the clutches of another; Butch as false rebel, who has stolen his mother's car to flee his responsibilities to a girlfriend believed pregnant. Al and Dolly, Butch's parents from California, are stereotypified as ugly American boors: Al is loud and overweight and talks about developing Paradise Ranch; Dolly is loud, brash and judgemental, buried beneath thick layers of make-up.

The film leaves us with the same ambivalence Canadians feel today toward the United States; the

undeniable appeal of American popular culture is tempered by the smug sense of moral superiority Canadians harbour.

In Wilson's 1989 sequel, *American Boyfriends*, Sandy's wish to visit California is fulfilled. It's now 1965 and Sandy is in her first semester of political science at newly-constructed Simon Fraser University. Bemoaning the fact that her friends have all either moved away or married, an invitation to her cousin Butch's wedding in Portland allows Sandy, Thelma and Lizzie the opportunity for one last adventure together. Julie La Belle, a fellow student and Sandy's roommate, tags along.

The film depicts a bitter-sweet adventure, as Sandy and her friends come to realize that the "America" their imaginations have constructed is not simply a Disney theme park. At the beginning of the movie, for instance, "America" is perceived by Sandy and Julie as the place where things of significance happen: the 1960s radicalism of civil-rights movements, anti-war protests, Martin Luther King, Bob Dylan and California surfers. The fact that their political science professor is from Berkeley -- he's come to teach Canadians what *real* politics is all about -- punctuates this point. Of course, Sandy and Julie haven't given any thought to the fact that you can't have an anti-war protest without a war and you can't have a civil-rights movement without racism.

The film is characterized by self-parody. Wilson, in this way, turns the tables on the viewers of her first movie. This time the jokes deriving from cultural stereotype are played on the Canadians: those in the film and those in the audience. Wilson plays to Canadians' image of Americans as flag-waving zealots lacking traditional moral values. At the Portland hair salon where Sandy, Thelma and Lizzie get their hair done for Butch's wedding, a small American flag is stationed in front of each chair. The hairdressers spout love of country and hatred of communism. At the wedding reception, Sandy learns that Butch's father Al is remarried to Maxine and Butch's mother Dolly is remarried to Sid.

Gradually, however, Wilson probes beneath the theme-park facade. As the girls venture further into America, they lose both their sexual and political innocence. Initially attracted by the young men in uniform at the wedding, for example, they soon learn what those uniforms imply. Lizzie loses her virginity to Butch's best man Daryl, who is due to leave for Vietnam in six days.

Sandy and Julie decide to prolong their trip by heading to California when Butch gives Sandy the red Cadillac convertible of the original film. Thelma heads home and Lizzie stays on with Daryl in Portland. Sandy

wants to meet surfers and Julie wants to meet "radicals". They are introduced to both.

Arriving in Santa Cruz, they find the boardwalk closed and the beach deserted -- it's October, after all. The only people to join them on the beach are two young guys from Edmonton carrying air mattresses. When Sandy and Julie finally discover some surfers, they're macho rednecks. They strike up a friendship instead with the two men the surfers have just bounced out of a bar: Spider, a black, fourth-year political science student from UCLA; and Marty, a draft-dodger from the Bronx. Sandy asks them if they're surfers.

For Sandy and Julie, radicalism is a fashion statement rather than a political position. Spider and Marty, therefore, are dreams come true. They're American, they have radical views and they have political experience. In Sandy's and Julie's eyes, they've *lived*.

Sandy's infatuation is undermined, however, by the flipside of their radicalism. Marty gets into a heated argument with a surfer who lost his brother in Vietnam and Spider exudes constant fear, presumably because he is black, even though there are no incidents of racism in the film.

Reality hits Sandy when she learns that Butch has been killed in a car accident. Lizzie rejoins Sandy and Julie at the funeral and decides to go home. She can't

handle the grief that has prompted Daryl to drink heavily -- he's leaving for Vietnam that night -- and has spoiled their "love". For Sandy, Butch's death is her first confrontation with human mortality and it strengthens her resolve to assist in Marty's flight to Canada, even though Lizzie reminds her of the seriousness of the crime.

Throughout the film, Julie validates Sandy's dreams. We're told little of Julie's background, but she is clearly the most experienced of the young women, having already lost some of her innocence; she tells Sandy she lost her virginity to a friend of her father's at a cocktail party. Julie isn't shocked by anything they see or hear, and she becomes a "radical" herself when she decides to drop out of university and live with Marty in the Gulf Islands.

Bruce McDonald's *Highway 61* (1991) takes Wilson's film a step further; it's a self-reflexive lampoon of Canadians' American dream. The protagonist, Pokey Jones, is a barber in sleepy Pickerel Falls, Ontario, and an aspiring jazz trumpet player. He realizes his long-held ambition of driving south to New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, along a highway which traces the history of popular music.

Interspersed with the photographs of model haircuts, the walls of Pokey's barber shop are covered with

postcards and black-and-white photographs of jazz legends. His radio is tuned to a jazz radio station. For years he has kept a suitcase packed in his car, ready to take off south along Highway 61, but the car hasn't left the garage. The endlessly revolving red, white and blue of the barber's pole outside his shop is a haunting invocation of "America"; the pole remains lit even when the barber shop is dark and it appears frequently at the edge of the frame.

Pokey's adventure begins when he discovers a corpse in the yard behind the barber shop and two strangers arrive to collect the body from Jerome's Funeral Parlour and Taxidermy: Jackie Bangs, a jaded drop-out from a touring heavy metal band, and Mr. Skin. Jackie claims the deceased is her brother Jeffrey and she has arranged his funeral in New Orleans. In reality, Jackie intends to use the body as a suitcase for a drug run to New Orleans and she convinces the gullible Pokey to drive her there. Mr. Skin is a fundamentalist Satanist from Louisiana who claims he purchased the soul of the deceased and now he's come to collect. He chases Jackie and Pokey south along Highway 61.

McDonald conveys the border between Canada and the United States as a cultural gulf, treating the viewer to an anthropological satire which derives great mileage from stereotypical images of both countries. Scenes of

Pickerel Falls, for example, are conspicuously devoid of people, reflecting the town's languor. Pokey and his friend Claude walk to work down the middle of the main street with no cars and no other people in sight. The lighting that bathes the town in a golden glow and the faint call of a loon emphasize its idyll. The film comes under the lights' full glare only when Pokey and Jackie cross the border, and the soundtrack intensifies, shifting from gentle folk to jarring rock 'n' roll.

Following a comical grilling by two U.S. customs agents, Pokey and Jackie enter a vastly different landscape, greeted by a gigantic American flag. Where their approach to the border had been a lonely drive through trees and muskeg, they cross into a "peopled" environment of slum housing, factories, church bingos, tacky tourist stops and guns. Even their diet changes, to shoplifted junk food.

The trip for Pokey "is a dream come true", and the awe he feels at what he sees is the manufacture of pop media imagery. He tells Jackie: "I lived on the northern tip of the highway and I studied and I read. I never left home, but I know every inch of this highway. I know it inside out." Through Jackie's cynicism -- "You've never been to America, have you?" -- the audience acknowledges the clash between Pokey's imagined trip and reality. Pokey, in other words, has bought the media-

manufactured American dream as he has bought Jackie's story.

Pokey, for example, insists on stopping at Bob Dylan's childhood home, a plain, suburban house with a cat sleeping in the window. He describes enthusiastically his vision of the infant genius learning to ride a bicycle on this same driveway. Pokey is similarly invigorated by driving through St. Louis, the birthplace of Chuck Berry and Miles Davis, even though all we see are freeway overpasses and the cityscape drifting past the car window. Pokey's trip is a pilgrimage which brooks no contradiction.

Near Memphis, however, Pokey loses his car -- Satan burns it --, separates from Jackie and finds himself stranded without any money. Suddenly he understands why the Mississippi delta is the home of the blues. Completely disillusioned by the time he reaches New Orleans, Pokey recognizes himself as just another tourist wandering Bourbon Street. He doesn't find the spiritual connection to the music and the musicians along Highway 61 that he'd anticipated. The fact is, he can't even play his trumpet. Jackie's cruel remarks return to him. "You're no fucking musician. You're a *barber.* A small-town barber. A *Canadian*!"

The escape depicted in these films is, in essence, a search for identity. The trip undertaken is a coming-of-

age ritual in which the characters seek to construct a mature identity. In most of the cases cited here, they seek a mentor or companion to accompany them on their rite of passage.

West, Dixie and Gabrielle in Joseph Viszmeg's *City of Champions*, Kim, Butter and Chicken in *Blue City Slammers*, Micheline in *Termini Station*, and Verna, Norma and Kenny in *True Confections*, share a desire for escape, which is as much an escape from the remants of (a sometimes prolonged) adolescence as an escape, or at least temporary relief, from an impending adulthood. It is a desire for escape from an adolescent identity appended to family, and a search for the construction of a new identity on independent, yet more challenging, terms.

Canadians' "American dream" is the vehicle for escape in *Bordertown Cafe*, *My American Cousin*, *American Boyfriends* and *Highway 61*. This escape, however, is dressed in terms of indecision and irresponsibility, adolescent fantasy, naïveté, and ultimate disillusionment.

Notes

[1]The setting is not identified as such, but the film was shot in Warren, Manitoba.

[2]The film is based on Kelly Rebar's play of the same name.

Conclusion

In order to establish a correlation between contextual themes of film-making in Canada and the thematic preoccupations of English-Canadian film-makers, this section presented a variety of films from a number of directors. Some of the films could be described as "entertaining" in conventional terms -- e.g., *Bye Bye Blues*, *Highway 61*, *My American Cousin* --, and others we would commonly categorize as "art films" -- those of Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema and William MacGillivray.

What is interesting, however, is the ground that all these films share: the thematic ground discussed in the preceding three chapters; and the contextual ground of marginalized, independent film production in Canada.

There is nothing inherently marginal about the films *Bye Bye Blues* and *My American Cousin*. In Sandy Wilson's case, she has even been accused of making an American-style film. These films instead have been marginalized by an exclusive feature-film industry. The "art films" discussed would seem to have more marginal appeal, but they've been able to find an audience in international film festivals and art-house theatres in North America and in Europe.

Their marginality has resulted in the shared thematic preoccupations already outlined, and in a larger strategy of appropriation. These films share in an attempt to tell Canadian stories, address Canadian subjects and set their films in identifiable Canadian locations. They assert a Canadian particularity which rejects an accommodation with the hegemonic Hollywood film industry.

PART IV

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the first motion pictures were silent films, cinema was originally heralded as a universal language. Dana Polan writes:

> From its beginnings, film was caught up in an ideology of the cross-cultural, or, to put it in the reverse way, of the not culturally specific. There was, in other words, the sense that film was somehow above the beliefs of a specific culture, an art that spoke naturally and directly across boundaries, an art truly of the public sphere (Polan, 1988, p. 89).

In a climate of ascendent neoclassical economic values, this belief in film speaking a universal language persists in an updated form, corresponding to contemporary global economic and cultural trends. Proponents of this view define theatrical feature film, as they define all commodities, by market imperatives, discriminating solely on the basis of universally accepted conceptions of artistic merit. Hollywood cinema

dons the cloak of universality by its sheer material dominance of the world's movie screens. Its claim to universality is reinforced in Canada by Canadian cinema's marginal place in the mediascape.

This thesis, however, rejects an exclusively commercial definition of cinema, the strict confinement of feature film to economic commodity. It insists instead upon "interrogating the relation" between society's symbolic and material domains, upon treating cinema as a social practice (Nelson *et al*, 1992, p.4).

Cinema's social function extends "beyond that of being, simply, an exhibited aesthetic object." Graeme Turner writes: "Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself" (Turner, 1990, pp. xiv-xv).

The film text is a "battleground for competing and often contradictory positions" (Turner, 1990, p. 147). Cinema does not simply reflect or record reality, but

> like any other medium of representation it constructs and 're-presents' its pictures of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of the specific signifying practices of the medium. Just as film works on the meaning systems of culture -- to renew, reproduce, or review them -- it is also produced by those meaning systems (Turner, 1990, p. 129).

The myths, beliefs and practices preferred by a people find their way into that community's narratives "where they can be reinforced, criticized, or simply reproduced" (Turner, 1990, p. 78-79). Film production involves as much "screening in" certain kinds of narrative constructions as "screening out" other kinds (Turner, 1990, p. 143).

Turner argues that the control of the definition of a national cinema is hegemonic, "in that the imperative is always to restrict and limit the proliferations of representations of the nation" (p. 134).

> Like other ideological constructions, representations of the nation are not 'fixed'; their political and cultural importance is such that they are sites of considerable competition. To gain control of the representational agenda for the nation is to gain considerable power over individuals' view of themselves and each other. This is one of the reasons why there is so much concern within so many countries over the domination of film and television production and distribution by the United States of America. If we understand our world (and our nation) through its representations, foreign control of the major media of representation does threaten the coherence of the individual's understanding of that world (or nation). The American domination of the mass media has, to some extent, normalized American images of society (p. 135).

Neoclassical economic values challenge the notion of a national cinema as they challenge the idea of nation.

Hollywood has been for most of this century the world's dominant cinema. It has achieved this status by its technological, formal and textual innovations, but also by its relentless demand for access to international movie markets, and by its vertically- and horizontally-integrated industrial structure. For Canadian movie-goers, Hollywood defines cinema. Hollywood's global primacy exerts pressure on all cinema to subscribe to the commercial imperative.

i) Summary:

This thesis has combined political economy, cultural studies and film studies methods in order to investigate the relationship between the material domain of feature-film production in Canada and the symbolic domain of the films themselves. Its extension of the political-economic context of analysis and its introduction of film texts opposes neoclassical economic theory as it is applied to the Canadian film industry. This thesis is an attempt to "explain" English-Canadian auteur cinema by asserting the pertinence of extra-cinematic elements.

The thesis contextualizes film production theoretically in a survey of Raymond Williams's work. Its theoretical orientation insists upon the indissolubility of communication, culture, politics and

economics. It designates film-makers as social actors with a social as well as individual point of view and asserts that films are expressions of film-makers' lived social relations and expressions of the social relations of their practice. The thesis historicizes the commercial organization of cultural production and defines film-making as a practice which produces society, rather than merely reflecting or reproducing society.

The thesis establishes Canadian cinema as a marginal practice within an exclusive industrial context. The predominance of vertically-integrated transnational corporations creates a climate of vested interest rather than competition for screen time in movie theatres. It describes the long-term marginality of indigenous cinema, consistent with an historical context of Canadian cultural dependency. It characterizes the production of cultural policy as compromised by trade, industrial and economic policy imperatives. Film policy, that is, conforms to the taken-for-granted commercial, continentalist organization of feature film.

Finally, a thematic analysis of twenty-four films by sixteen Canadian film-makers reveals a strong correlation between contextual themes and the film-makers' recurrent thematic preoccupations: mediation and representation; the struggle to define community; art as a vehicle for

self-discovery; the desire to escape "here"; and Canadians' American dream.

ii) Conclusions:

Based on its analysis of texts in context, the thesis concludes that cinema is culturally specific and it is variably defined, undermining the liberalist ideology of culture and the notion of cinema as a universal language. It asserts, therefore, the inadequacy of neoclassical economic theory to the analysis of Canadian cinema. Neoclassical analysis reduces all cultural production to commodity production, taking for granted its commercial organization. This is both an ahistorical approach, which ignores the role of public enterprise in the Canadian economy, and a decontextualization of film practice in Canada, which has traditionally served a semiotic function. The neoclassical economic theory of Steven Globerman proposes an individual solution -- make better films to secure more screen time -- to what the thesis describes as a complex systemic problem.

The thesis concludes that there is a correlation between Canadian cinema's material marginality and its rejection of the Hollywood model of film practice. Canadian cinema is not merely an alternative to Hollywood

film practice, but stands in opposition to it, contesting definitions of culture, community, cinema and capitalism by the particularities of its practice. Hollywood cinema is defined by commercial imperatives, shaped as it has been by U.S. industrial capitalism. Canadian cinema is defined as a vehicle for cultural expression, shaped as it has been outside, or at the margins of, U.S. industrial capitalism. Hollywood cinema operates as private enterprise, backed by a transnational, corporate industrial structure. Canadian cinema combines both public and private enterprise to produce independent, personal and regionally-based films in which auteurs -- film-makers who often write, direct and produce their own films -- hold a central place. English-Canadian feature film challenges Hollywood's definition of cinema as an entertainment commodity.

As an oppositional cinema, English-Canadian feature film is a practice of appropriation rather than accommodation. Canadian film-makers who have been raised on Hollywood cinema have opted to produce a very different film practice, based on Canadian stories and subjects, Canadian characters and Canadian locations.

iii) Future Directions:

The study of Canadian cinema is still in its infancy. Its canon comprises a handful of books and some of these must be updated, revised and extended by other authors. The most glaring example of a work in need of revision is Peter Morris's *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939*, which stands as the most important historical text. The first seven pages of the original edition (1978) describe what is incorrectly identified as the first exhibition of motion pictures in Canada. When the book was reprinted in 1992, publisher McGill-Queen's refused to allow the author to make any corrections that would change the book's pagination. The original error was reprinted.

Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control* (1990) is the only comprehensive survey of the political economy of the Canadian film industry and, to my knowledge, only one book to date, Pierre Véronneau's *A La Recherche d'une Identité* (1991), addresses the 1980s renaissance of English-Canadian feature film. There is a need for biographical and critical studies of this new generation of directors, in particular Atom Egoyan, William MacGillivray, Patricia Rozema and Anne Wheeler.[1]

Three scholarship areas which take up where this thesis left off are worth considering briefly: the

possibilities of oppositional film practice in Canada; the historical construction of a definition of Canadian feature film; and, the implication of contextual elements in Canadian feature-film production for future thematic pursuits.

This thesis has described English-Canadian auteur cinema as an oppositional film practice. Future work may examine the viability of parallel distribution and exhibition structures, such as those provided in some measure by international film festivals, independent theatres and publicly-owned cinematheques. This could include the study of specific film-makers' practice: how they fund production; how their films are distributed; and where their films are exhibited.

The construction of definitions of Canadian cinema is a broad field of study, which may include investigating definitions constructed by public policy and by film criticism. Film policy influences Canadian cinema because governments are principal sources of funding and because film policy is itself produced within a larger social context. Film criticism is important because cinema audiences are doubly constituted. The cinema audience, that is, belongs also to the larger mass media audience for newspapers, magazines, books, radio and television, which review films, report on the film industry, and carry film advertising.

Finally, this thesis has described a self-conscious and self-reflexive cinema. The positive side of that is its validation of local, regional and national cultures. The potential problem is the exclusion of audiences if English-Canadian cinema's provincialism becomes a parochialism. As English-Canadian film-makers become more confident in their assertion of voice, it will be interesting to see whether, and how, thematic preoccupations shift.

Notes

[1]That gap has been partially filled by Egoyan's own *Speaking Parts* (1993), which contains Egoyan's screenplay and production notes for the film of the same name, an essay by Egoyan, an interview by Marc Glassman and a critical essay by Ron Burnett.

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