CANON BUSTING?

APPROACHING CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN CINEMA

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores contemporary Canadian cinema by investigating the convergence of films, policy and criticism as they are implicated in the idea of canon. Both fluid and multiple in its frame(s) of reference, the term canon extends beyond a list or core of privileged texts to include the processes of evaluation. Posited as a performative construct, the national cinema canon can be seen as offering a strategically deployed expression of national cultural identity, with appraisals of each film's value arising from the intersection of critical and governmental discourses; however, narrow admission criteria along with the displaced goal of developing a distinctive national art cinema reinforce perceptions of absence–of Canadian culture and/or identity–by delimiting canonical boundaries to exclude more than they include. Focussing on feature film production since 1984, and adopting a predominantly English Canadian perspective, this thesis aims to examine the underlying assumptions that direct canon formation; rather than attempting to reject or replace the existing canon, this process of rereading entails working within the prevailing discourses in order to generate an awareness of the politics of selection.

Emerging from a tradition of liberal humanist nationalism, canon formation in the Canadian context invokes conflicting conceptions of high cultural enlightenment and mass commodity success which have become entrenched as a continuing tension between cultural and industrial goals. These tensions are further complicated by a "double conscious" perspective that simultaneously values and rejects American cinema culture. Chapter One explores the factors shaping the admission criteria of origin and value, while Chapter Two addresses the relationship between national culture and canon formation. Chapter Three considers the ways in which Canadian cinema is defined through policy, including a case study of the 1999 Feature

Film Advisory Committee Report, which encapsulates the directional challenges facing cultural

policy development. Approaches to devising a descriptive canon are addressed in Chapter Four,

in which hybrid categories are suggested that could be used to supplant the nationalist

perspective with an acknowledgement of the fluidity of the metaphysical frontier of culture, and

hence the transnational, or perhaps post-nationalist, aspects of Canadian cultural experience.

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INTRODUCTION:

CANON BUSTING?

> Rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text
> from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same
> story everywhere).
>
> Roland Barthes[1]

This thesis explores contemporary Canadian cinema by investigating the convergence of films, policy and criticism as they are implicated in the idea of canon. By examining the structuring influence of canonical precepts, my aim is to demonstrate potential strategies for approaching the study of contemporary Canadian cinema. My use of the term "canon" emerges from a broad interpretation of "The Politics of Film Canons" in which Janet Staiger describes canon formation in terms of the politics of admission, selection, and the academy. Two aspects of her argument are of particular interest in this case. As part of a section discussing the role of the academic community in entrenching and enforcing the existence of canons, Staiger notes the presence of not only "the canon of films on a filmography list, but [also] a canon of articles and books" (18). Thus, in a given context, there are various dominant theories, paradigms and methodologies for approaching the study of films. Staiger further describes "a politics of inclusion and exclusion" that comes with selecting which texts will merit critical attention (8). In other words, the idea of canon extends beyond a list or core of privileged texts to the process of evaluation; as a result, both text and context are implicated.

Access to canonical status is frequently a matter of degree. In other words, while it may be possible to arrive at a consensus as to certain core texts of the canon, its margins comprise contested terrain. Furthermore, regardless of "consensus" regarding the core of the dominant canon, multiple alternative canons will emerge to represent divergent critical perspectives.

Therefore, whenever the term canon is used in this thesis, it is with the understanding of the multiplicity and fluidity of the constructs that it designates. It is also important to note that, unless otherwise stated, I am referring to the English Canadian film canon. This specificity of reference tends to be elided in discussions of Canadian national cinema. In particular, policy-related documents, such as *The Road to Success: Report of the Feature Film Advisory Committee* (1999), focus on measures that would address increasing the two percent of screen time devoted to showing Canadian films in English Canadian theatres, a total that differs from the screen time figure for Quebec. Although the Advisory Committee Report mentions both percentages, the distinction is made between "*Canadian* films" and "Quebec films" (Dept. of Canadian Heritage: 1999 3) [my emphasis].

In the "Introduction" to the *Canadian Film Reader*, published in 1977, Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson note that their book "is guilty of encouraging the study of films in the context of national cinemas" (vii). At the time, their uneasiness arose from the concept of arbitrarily delimiting analysis to the films produced within particular geographic boundaries. Nonetheless, Feldman and Nelson cite historiographic, social and cultural reasons for selecting this type of framework. The creation of an historical overview, culled from the archives, would allow them to "dig out common motifs" that could in turn be used to locate and interpret more general trends, both within Canadian society and in relation to international film studies; in other words, "exploring the unique characteristics of Canadian cinema" would provide insight into national identity (Feldman & Nelson ix). As such, Michael Dorland observes that the pursuit of a Canadian canon would endow these scholars with "a more intellectually ennobling mantle than that of mere scholarship" (1998 6).

Regardless of the post-structuralist challenges that can be levelled against the concept of

a (shared) national identity, Feldman and Nelson's *Canadian Film Reader* marks an important contribution to the early attempts to define a Canadian film canon. In the context of Dorland's recent study of the emergence of Canadian feature film policy, the 1977 *Reader* can also be seen in terms of a need to validate the federal government's decision to become involved in the development of the feature film industry. Dorland's book explores the series of interdepartmental committees, studies and reports that took place over the course of the decade preceding the formation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1967. Thus, in addition to participating in the "economy of talk" (Dorland: 1998 14) focussed on national cinema, Feldman and Nelson's *Reader* could begin to assess the achievements of the young feature film industry. However, more than thirty years later, it would seem that the discussion has not progressed beyond attempts to formulate a groundwork.

Instead, the foundations of the canon remain elusive, and its existence appears insecure. In 1993, as part of its tenth anniversary celebrations, the Perspective Canada programme at the Toronto Festival of Festivals held a symposium entitled "Whose Canon?". Although the purpose of the panel was to address issues surrounding access to, and participation in, canon formation, the advertisement for the symposium also includes a question that asks whether "given its shadow status within its own borders...the notion of a canon of Canadian cinema [is] even appropriate" (1993 283). "Shadow status" refers to the marginal presence of feature films in theatrical release. Depending on the year in question, Canadian films account for somewhere between two and five percent of the total screen time in Canadian theatres[2] (Wise: 1998 49; Acland: 1997 282). Even though it includes only a portion of the films made, it is this three percent that serves as the focus of the debate about the fate of the Canadian film industry.

Beyond the narrow perspective that emerges from the emphasis on the theatrical run of

features, "shadow status" also serves to evoke the idea of the impossibility of a Canadian canon. It seems particularly odd to have been asking this sort of question at the tenth anniversary of an annual showcase for canonical candidates; and yet, at the same time, it is a completely characteristic move within the field of Canadian film criticism. The symposium question recalls Feldman and Nelson's speculation that attempts to define a national cinema may ultimately result in the discovery of "no central motifs, no possible theory of Canadian film" (ix). However, the absence of a cohesive core of shared themes does not negate the potential for developing a theory of Canadian film. Instead, the challenge of deriving generalizable principles from a varying range of thematic and aesthetic preoccupations makes it difficult to define Canadian cinema; the inability of critics to locate an idealized national cinema, along with concurrent difficulties in pinpointing the essential aspects of national identity, tend to be (mis)interpreted in terms of the lack, or absence, of necessary qualities.

Absence plays a key role in the history of Canadian cinema. According to Charles Acland, "the recipe for this 'felt' national cultural absence has consisted of one part lost cultural potential, one part manifestos for corrective measures, and two parts self-loathing" (1997 281). In response to Bruce Elder's manifesto, Geoff Pevere's essay, "The Cinema We Got: The Critics We Need," attacks the "prescriptive mode" of Canadian film criticism and points to the underlying assumption of an idealized Canadian Cinema[3] (1988 324). Yet, Pevere succumbs to his own accusations, thereby further distancing the discussion from the actual cinema. The essay simply shifts the focus from prescribing to filmmakers to prescribing to critics. Despite the inclusion of certain postcolonial themes, Mike Gasher's exploration of Canadian cultural experience maintains both the traditional negative outlook and prescriptive focus: Gasher notes the absence of "a viable and recognizable Canadian voice" and "demands the affirmation of

Canadian cultural values" (1993b 104).

Thus, the Canadian film canon continues a tautological repetition of basic assumptions. National identity begins as a lack whose presence is demanded, but whose absence is ultimately reaffirmed. At the same time, the canon projects an extra-discursive reality, characterized as an idealized alternative vision, that serves as a future goal which manages to constantly elude the workings of cultural policy. The "cinema we need"[4] remains always already out of our grasp as a result of a canon which undermines itself. Furthermore, as a measure of cultural identity, the canon influences national policy directives. The emphasis placed on the "97 percent absence," accompanied by an often unstated distinction used to identify "culturally Canadian" films, fuels the perception that the Canadian film industry continually teeters on the brink of extinction. Upon closer examination, however, the "rapid growth occurring in the independent production industry" (Juneau 206-7) suggests that the fate of filmmaking in Canada is not as precarious as it seems. The resulting confusion undermines the formation of an effective Canadian film policy.

In the Third Edition of *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, Jeremy Hawthorn defines a "canon buster" as "a person or a proposal dedicated to overturning the accepted canon" (35). Overturning the canon would involve providing an alternative to the existing paradigm or rejecting the idea of canon altogether; the second position is ultimately untenable, however, because in order to discuss, program or fund films a selection must be made, which would necessitate invoking criteria of value, thereby reinstating some form of canon. Therefore, "canon busting" seems unlikely to offer an effective method to alleviate the tautological mire from which the Canadian film canon repeatedly struggles to emerge. With the movement from one canon, or text, to another "we can see...only what we have already learned to see before" (Johnson 3). An alternative lies with rereading which, according to Roland Barthes, "saves the

text from repetition" (Johnson 3).

Barbara Johnson explains Barthes' comments about rereading in terms of locating critical difference within the text. Through the process of rereading a "text's signifying energy becomes unbound" thereby "infinitely deferring" its meaning (Johnson 4). Lamenting the "immensely undervalued achievement" of the Canadian feature film industry, Harcourt recommended, in 1977, that "we...stop constantly comparing our own product with the British or American models" (1977 370, 374). The current focus on the 97 percent absence which underlies canon formation and informs cultural policy demonstrates that Canadian film continues to be measured in comparison to American standards. Instead, it would be more productive, not to mention more pragmatic, to perceive the canon as 3 percent full as opposed to 97 percent empty. A rereading of the film canon would reinterpret absence in terms of a necessarily fragmented national cultural identity. By instituting fluid boundaries and deferring reductive closure, the canon could begin effectively to encompass the breadth of filmmaking practice in Canada.

This thesis will focus on Canadian feature films that have had theatrical release since 1984. These films constitute the "three percent" that is both the "cinema we got" and, somehow, not quite the "cinema we need." Since this figure is distinct from the somewhat less disconcerting five percent of screen time spent showing French Canadian films in Quebec cinemas, it is important to note that this study offers an English Canadian perspective. The films discussed will include fiction and documentary feature length films as well as "crossover films" from Québécois directors such as Denys Arcand and Robert Lepage. It would be neither possible, nor desirable, to completely subsume the Quebec canon within a larger Canadian canon. However, it is useful to consider a complex interrelationship between the two canons rather than seeing them as separate entities emerging from differing traditions. The period under

examination is characterized by the emergence of a critically acclaimed and internationally successful national art cinema, featuring directors such as Atom Egoyan, Guy Maddin and Deepa Mehta. In addition, 1984 marks the year when Telefilm replaced the CFDC, the start of the Perspective Canada series at the Toronto Film Festival and the beginning of the Ontario New Wave.

In Chapter One, "Defining Canon," the conceptual challenges and contradictions underlying Canadian film criticism emerge through a discussion of the criteria for canonical admission. Following an examination of the ways in which assessments of textual origin and value are determined, I consider the ways in which elements of literary criticism and cultural policy discourse coalesced to shape the prescriptive approach to canon formation. Chapter Two, "The Only Cinema We're Going to Get," addresses the relationship between national culture and canon formation; while both cultural identity and the canon constitute performative constructs, the question arises as to whether or not they should be limited by the geographic boundaries of national cinema. In particular, interpretations of Canada's position in North American culture generate a doubled, or perhaps split, consciousness that is expressed in the unrealistic, and often contradictory goals outlined in both criticism and policy.

The points of convergence of canon and policy form the basis of Chapter Three, "Policy and the Absent Audience." This includes an exploration of how Canadian cinema is defined through policy along with a case study of the final report from the Feature Film Advisory Committee, the aforementioned *The Road to Success*. The chapter concludes with a consideration of several ways in which the complexity of cinema going behaviour has been elided by a focus on the construct of screen time as a measure of access to the Canadian audience. Chapter Four, "Constructing (Con)textual Categories," provides an analysis of the

challenges of devising a descriptive canon. The thematic categories used by Mike Gasher, in his study of English Canadian auteur cinema, exemplify a traditional nationalist strategy to canon formation, that ultimately excludes more than it includes within its boundaries. Rather than searching for a cohesive thematic or aesthetic core, this chapter demonstrates a post-nationalist approach to canon formation that stresses difference, thereby allowing for continual re-positioning, or de-centring, in the performance of a contemporary Canadian film canon.

Instead of rejecting or replacing the canon, this type of canon busting involves re-examining, or rereading, the process of canon formation. An analysis of the principles which influence the assessment of texts generates an awareness of the inner workings of the politics of selection. As a result, subsequent repetitions can reinterpret the foundation, thereby leaving the canon open to continual repositioning. Unfortunately, a rereading of the Canadian film canon also risks becoming what it sets out to critique. A prevailing prescriptive tone emerges as the assumptions underlying both canon and policy are deemed to be ineffectual for achieving key goals. On the other hand, perhaps it is precisely rereading that will allow for the "real liberation" (Lowe 38) that is always as yet unrealized. Maintenance of the performative nature of the canon enables its continued strategic use as a tool for understanding the diversity of contemporary Canadian cinema.

NOTES:

1. Johnson 3

2. The range in this percentage arises from the difference in the amount of screen time spent showing Canadian films in English Canadian and Quebec theatres. The figures for screen time vary annually and are currently declining due to an increase in the number of screens. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, I will be using 3% to refer to English Canada and 5% to refer to Quebec. The first number is based on the 1995 survey of Canadian Films in the Greater Toronto Area (Wise 1998) which lists the figure at 2.8%, while the second is based on the statistics cited in the Houle Report (17), which list that total at 5.8%. I have rounded the Quebec figure down because other sources list this amount at closer to 4%. The debate surrounding screen time and its use as an ideological construct will be covered in detail in Chapter Three.

3. Elder's essay originally appeared in *The Canadian Forum* (Feb. 1985) while Pevere's response was also first published in 1985. Both articles are re-printed in Fetherling.

4. My use of Elder's phrase is not intended to invoke the specifics of the aesthetic debate that arose around his 1985 manifesto. Instead, I am referring to the debate's more general implications regarding critical dissatisfaction with Canadian film history. As such, "the cinema we need" serves as a catch phrase for prescriptive idealism.

CHAPTER ONE:

DEFINING CANON

> The canon, although "known" to "everyone," is notoriously difficult
> to define precisely.
>
> <div align="right">Sarah Corse (64)</div>

The term canon "refers both to *origin* and *value*" (Hawthorn 32). Based on these criteria, the process of canon formation involves the selection of works which are privileged within a particular discourse. From its original ecclesiastical usage to denote a list of sacred texts, canon became a contested terrain in literary criticism. In particular, feminist critics challenged the authority of an official canon while competing schools debated whose list should be preeminent. As a result, the idea of a "claim to universality" (Hawthorn 33) has since given way to the recognition of the existence of multiple canons. Further, the notion of the emergence of a number of "transcendentally 'great'" (Corse 15) texts has been replaced by a discussion of the "politics of inclusion and exclusion" (Staiger 8).

Given that selection often has more to do with discourses of power than textual quality, Robert von Hallberg notes that critics approach canon formation "now only with irony" and with the objective that canons be "opened up, demystified, or eliminated altogether" (1). Nonetheless, Staiger argues that "escape from canon formation [would] be difficult to achieve" (4): Aside from the necessity of engaging in a process of selection in order to study or discuss film, the academy itself reinforces the existence of a canon, not only of films, but also of articles and books, that one must master in order to secure professional standing (Staiger 18). Thus, while the elimination of canon(s) appears to be an implausible pursuit, the examination of the mechanisms by which certain films are favoured to gain access to dominant canons offers an

important area of study. Similarly, whereas completely opening up canons would lead to entropic relativism, it is worthwhile to examine multiple alternative canons while also considering how their boundaries are negotiated. The first step in understanding how a particular canon is formed involves examining how the criteria of origin and value are determined.

CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION

Citing the use of canon in literary criticism, Hawthorn explains the application of the criterion of "origin" in order to identify "works which could indisputably be ascribed to a particular author" (32). Although this can result in a focus on author-driven textual analysis, a shift in emphasis away from a conventional conception of canon allows for a more complex consideration of both textual and contextual factors. For the purposes of the Canadian film canon, origin refers to measuring the contribution of Canadian creative talent in the production process. A point system, which utilizes a ten-point scale, determines which films qualify for government funding assistance, either directly through federal or provincial agencies or indirectly through tax credits.

A minimum of six points is required to satisfy the CRTC's Canadian content quota for television as well as to qualify for the Film and Video Production Tax Credit (Juneau 199; Dept. of Canadian Heritage: 1998 18). Examples of six point films include *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995), *Magic in the Water* (Stevenson, 1995) and *Air Bud* (Smith, 1997). Not recognizably Canadian in terms of content, six point films tend to disguise themselves as American despite their use of Canadian talent. Wyndham Wise describes these films as "industrial Canadian features" (1998 49). As the term "industrial" implies, these films constitute a significant source

of employment and revenue for the national film industry; at the same time, however, because these popular texts are influenced by the demands of the mass market economy, they do not coincide with the (high) cultural aims of nation-building. Canadian film criticism focuses almost exclusively on the achievements of the eight to ten point films which satisfy the canonical criteria of value.

Prior to addressing issues of value, a further distinction must be made with regard to origin. Critical disdain for industrial films does not necessarily arise from the failure of these films to evoke a distinctively Canadian sense of place; in other words, origin tends not to be reduced to questions of geography. Instead, the aforementioned "placelessness" of many of the Ontario New Wave films involves a particularly imprecise use of the city in that Toronto is used to represent generalized (urban) alienation (Pevere: 1995 15).[1] The rise of co-productions further adds to the number of "Canadian" features, such as *Red Violin* (Girard, 1998) and *Such a Long Journey* (Gunnarsson, 1998), that were neither set nor filmed on Canadian soil. Judgements concerning quality aside, access to discourses of art cinema seems to elevate particular films to canonical status. In other words, the politics of selection involve a combination of value and authorship, where the latter is understood to refer to the number of Canadians in key positions in the cast and crew.

Geoff Pevere uses a variation on this idea of authorial origin to offer a trans-national perspective on Canadian culture. In an article entitled "Ghostbusting: 100 Years of Canadian Cinema, or Why My Canada Includes *The Terminator*," Pevere outlines the "creeping Canadianization of popular culture" (1999 8). Ranging from the parodic sketch comedy of expatriates like John Candy and Jim Carrey to the enormous box office successes of James Cameron, the article traces the influential presence of "distinctively Canadian (dC)" (1999 8)

creative talent in (North) American culture. Characterized by an "ironic detachment" that emerges in response to being inundated by American popular culture, the dC contribution can be described as a type of metacommentary (Pevere:1999 9). Offering a somewhat excessive simulation of American pop symbols, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (scripted by Cameron) and the *Terminator* films (both directed by Cameron) catered to a 1980's audience already "inflated with almost hysterical narcissism and invincibility" (Pevere:1999 10).

Pevere further notes that the John Rambo character was originally created by a University of Toronto professor (1999 10). However, the inclusion of this sort of trivia ultimately serves as a distraction from the subsequent observation that much of what is dC "has long [since] been sold away" by the government in the global market economy (Pevere:1999 13). Instead, the exuberantly ironic tone of the article overwhelms the impact of the final reminder. Although Pevere may be trying to avoid having to adopt a prescriptive tone, the result is an awkward nationalist position that seeks to privilege pride over self-defeat while evenly reinforcing both. This position is never fully interrogated given that the mention of the actual ownership of dC experience comprises only a couple of paragraphs at the conclusion of the article. Seeking to dispel the notion that "Canadian...[should not be limited to] what Canadians do in Canada" (1999 13), Pevere's article challenges origin while raising certain key questions about value; specifically, it becomes necessary to ask how important ownership is in the experience of national culture.

Issues of "quality and importance" inform assessments of "value" in the process of canon formation (Hawthorn 32). Quality and importance comprise ideological constructs that derive their meaning from the confluence of a variety of discourses, ranging from aesthetics to nationalism. As such, measuring a text's value necessarily involves engaging in a politics of

selection whereby the positioning of the critic plays an influential role. Sarah Corse observes that "[i]nherent textual attributes cannot explain the canonization of one set of texts over another" (168); with this statement, she situates her model of national literatures within a historical materialist approach which focuses on the context of canon formation. Thus, rather than from a search for "great texts," canons originate from a purpose that both precedes and, to a certain extent, determines selection. Hence, multiple canons emerge to satisfy the requirements of groups of critics who are positioned differently in relation to discourses of power.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

This differential positioning indicates the presence of a third criterion, herein referred to as "perspective," that directs the overall process of canon formation by informing interpretations of both origin and value. The "dominant" Canadian canon is characterized by a narrow perspective which defines origin and value in order to yield an art cinema canon that is distinctively Canadian. Concurrent with the emergence of feature film policy and the establishment of university film studies departments in the late 1960's, a diverse set of influences ranging from Canadian literary criticism to cultural policy development converged to generate a particular philosophical positioning that comprises the root of canon formation in the Canadian context. Incorporating elements of liberal humanism and nationalism, this positioning tends to be characterized by a moralistic tone and the perception of an idealized future that eludes the workings of cultural policy.

In particular, the exigencies of mass communication technology, especially the need to reach a large audience in order to achieve cultural nationalist goals, prevent a stable perception of cinema in terms of high culture; instead, the rationale for policy development exhibits a

tension between industrial and cultural goals. While any given version of a Canadian film canon would not necessarily directly demonstrate all of these traits, the effects of their often contradictory intermingling can be found in the types of value judgements that inform assessments of a text's canonical placement. Thus, the dominant canon, with its emphasis upon the production of feature films for theatrical release while also fostering a national art cinema, would be the benchmark for measuring the criterion of critical perspective. Expressed in differing forms through criticism and policy, variations of the dominant canon also serve to demarcate the boundaries against which secondary canons are defined. Consequently, these secondary canons manifest value judgements developed in response, or in opposition, to those of the dominant canon. An examination of several of the initial formative influences helps to shed light on the evolution of a particular critical perspective.

In his analysis of 1960's Canadian film criticism, Peter Morris describes "'pessimistic nationalism" as "a strand of cultural thought in Canada" that held sway in the 1930's but diminished over the course of the 1950's (1989 12). According to Morris, this attitude fostered the desire for a distinctive art cinema that also had to satisfy the requirements of a mass medium by reaching a large audience. Since this cinema had to be "'different and better' than US mass culture" (Morris:1989 12), these marketing objectives generate a somewhat schizophrenic perspective in that the desired film texts would need to be as economically successful as Hollywood productions, but aesthetically different. At the same time, the search for a distinct and superior cinema expresses a disdain for mass culture that extends beyond either nationalist or anti-American sentiment to invoke the division between high art and popular culture. Morris finds a key example of pessimistic nationalism in University of Toronto historian Frank Underhill's response to the 1951 Massey Commission Report,[2] but points out that these views

were not necessarily "influential in some direct sense on Canadian critics." (Morris: 1989 12)

Underhill disputed the Report's characterization of American culture as "'alien'" and argued instead that not only were the two countries not particularly different but that mass culture had more to do with "mass consumption and the North American environment" than with some "sinister" force that originated south of the border (Litt 227). Even though he believed that Canadian filmmakers would likely choose to participate in the production of popular texts, Underhill proposed resistance to the lure of North American mass culture in favour of the pursuit of an art cinema (Morris: 1989 12). As such, this pursuit is only nationalist inasmuch as a Canadian alternative to North American culture would leave the production of popular forms to the United States. However, the challenge, and hence the pessimism of this perspective, arises from confronting the problem of how this art cinema could be achieved when critics "could...not wean themselves from the assumption...that film is a mass medium" (Morris: 1989 12).

Nevertheless, despite his critique of the Report's thinly veiled anti-American sentiment, Underhill's response ultimately espouses a liberal humanist perspective that is similar to that of the Massey Commission. Paul Litt describes the Commission's philosophical position in terms of the belief that "high culture was a force for individual liberty through self-enlightenment"[3] (Litt 102). Although certain implications of the liberal position troubled the culture lobby, who feared that free enterprise would threaten individual liberty through the unchecked spread of mass culture, the culture elite's notion of "high culture as a panacea for the ills of modernity" provided an appealing moral edge (Litt 103).[4] In other words, from a liberal humanist perspective, the Commission and its supporters could share the aim of saving the nation's cultural soul, a result which would correspond to Underhill's desire for an alternative to the

"'sentimental and vulgar'" popular cinema of Hollywood (Morris: 1989 12).

The liberal humanism of the Massey Commission was further shaped by an approach to nationalism that embraced biculturalism but had not yet come to terms with the realities of multiculturalism; this limitation was consistent with governmental practice at the time given that another twenty years would pass before the federal government enacted multiculturalism legislation. Litt explains that the Commission's conception of national cultural identity blended nationalism with liberal humanism by "qualif[ying] the romantic ideal of cultural unity with the liberal principle of toleration" (Litt 112). Thus, the culture elite endorsed a vision of Canada that involved the two founding cultures finding a common ground while also maintaining the nation's established bicultural tradition. However, this vision did not extend to the idea of fostering an "ethnic mosaic," but instead appeared to tacitly lean toward a preference for "the integration of ethnic cultures" (Litt 112-113). Citing very limited mention in the final Report, including no direct recommendations with regard to minority cultures, Litt concludes that "[n]ationalism limited liberalism just as liberalism qualified nationalism" (Litt 113). In other words, the dissemination of high culture would lead to individual empowerment while also fostering a shared national identity but only within the contours of biculturalism.

Dorland notes the significance of the Massey Report, not only as the first comprehensive examination of Canadian cultural policy development, but also "because it accredited the kind of language that would be used for the discussion of cultural problems in the Canadian context and in the discourse on films in particular" (1998 14). The Report's recommendations limited the participation of the private sector in the dissemination of television programming, opting instead for a system of public broadcasting with the CBC as "'the single greatest agency for national unity, understanding and enlightenment'" (Litt 215). In addition, while the Commission

recognized that "'Canadians want commercial features,'" they believed that "the 'only truly and typically Canadian films'" were documentaries, particularly as exemplified by National Film Board productions (Dorland: 1998 15). Thus, the Massey Commission not only firmly established, and further stratified, the role of the state in national culture, but also indicated which direction cultural production should take.

From a liberal humanist perspective, the documentary form would be seen to possess a greater educational potential than fictional genres; and, at the same time, it would offer an alternative to American mass culture, thereby providing a distinctive national cinema.[5] Yet, popular taste is left out of the equation as no explanation is offered as to how to bridge the gap between mass culture and high culture, which are positioned as interchangeable terms; if high culture becomes a true national culture, then it would have to displace, if not supplant, mass culture which implies a process of transforming it into popular culture. Furthermore, this shift would rely on the populace being willing to alter their movie-watching behaviour and substitute documentaries for fiction features so that they could be "enlightened" for the purposes of national unity. These types of assumptions place the culture elite's goals out of reach because they are based on unresolved, if not unresolvable, contradictions and a limited, paternalistic perspective. While the Massey Report entrenched liberal humanist nationalism, especially in the realm of policy, a somewhat divergent influence comes into play with a consideration of philosophies of textual analysis drawn from the field of literature.

Northrop Frye's approach to literary criticism, as outlined in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*" (1965), offers an idealist perspective that is less humanist than that of the Massey Commission's culture elite but still shares certain similarities. Whereas liberal humanist nationalism brackets out the masses, Frye's approach

seeks to separate text from context; in each instance, popular influences do not merit serious, or sustained attention. According to Frye, a canonical text, or "profound masterpiece" (1957 17), transcends social and historical context to create "an autonomous world" (1995 237). Although this world "gives us an imaginary perspective on the actual one," (1995 237) the author manages to maintain a "razor's edge of detachment" (1995 239) and is therefore able to construct a type of meta-text that accesses aspects of universal human experience.[6] Conversely, popular literature merely replicates social mythology and is, consequently, unable to achieve the aesthetic distance of serious literature (Frye: 1995 237). Although Frye believed that there was an absence of great authors, and hence no canonized Canadian texts, the study of Canadian literature did not suffer as a result because "[i]t is much easier to see what literature is trying to do when we are studying a literature that has not quite done it" (Frye: 1995 216).

Because "no Canadian author pulls us away from the Canadian context toward the centre of literary experience itself," (Frye: 1995 216) the study of Canadian literature provides greater insight into contextual factors than it does into the concept of literariness. As such, Frye's idealism extends to his perception of the field of literary criticism. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye attempts to define criticism as "a structure of thought and knowledge...with some measure of independence from the art that it deals with" (1957 5). The result is a quasi-scientific approach that seeks to systematically combine inductive observation with deductive reasoning, while dispensing with value judgements. Even though "evaluation" is an "incidental by-product" (Frye: 1995 215), it should not be mistaken as the substance of criticism; otherwise the end result would be nothing more than a study of the history of taste, which Frye equates with the production of subjective "half truths" (1957 18).

Frye does admit that "there is as yet no way of distinguishing what is genuine criticism"

and even apologizes for the "deductiveness" of the book, possibly indicating an awareness of the limitations of his "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957 9, 29). Nevertheless, the groundwork for his systematic study remains laden with assessments of value. In particular, Frye expresses a preference for a modernist conception of high art, accompanied by a certain amount of disdain for popular culture. Perhaps most important, however, is the underlying assumption that, because Canada seems to lack great authors, the literature is basically second rate. Yet, despite the fact that Canada lacks the social conditions to produce either "genius" or "great literature," and Frye even finds himself unable to speculate as to what those conditions might be, the study of the nation's literature provides insight into the "social *imagination*" (1995 217-18); thus, in addition to attempting to account for the absence of geniuses and classics, the study of Canadian literature serves as a source of information about national identity. Oddly enough, bypassing "evaluation" allows Frye to elevate Canadian literary criticism to a more respectable status because, if taste were factored in, it "would become only a debunking project" (1995 215).

Margaret Atwood similarly seeks to eschew evaluation in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). Although she "refrain[s] from handing out merit badges" for "'literary excellence'" (12), Atwood does manage to offer a bleak assessment of the Canadian social imagination. Positing "Survival" as "the central symbol for Canada" (32), Atwood proceeds to outline four "Basic Victim Positions" (36-9) that can be used to characterize the journey of a protagonist, or even the overall orientation of a specific novel or poem. In contrast to Frye's criticism, Atwood does not distance her categories from their social context. The Victim Positions are intended to reflect Canada's colonial experience, which continues in the economic and cultural spheres. According to Atwood, authors *"by definition"* occupy the fourth

victim position "at the moment of writing" (40). Described in terms of being "a creative non-victim," someone in the fourth position is either no longer a victim or never was one in the first place (38); however, by referring to this as a Victim Position, Atwood asserts the structuring presence of "victimhood" even for those who are not currently experiencing it.

Quite self-conscious concerning the negative connotations of her study, Atwood concludes her first chapter with a series of "cheering thoughts" including the fact that exceptions to the predominance of negative positions do exist and the reminder that "[n]aming...your own disease, is not necessarily the same as acquiescing in it" (42); these pointers are not only less than cheery, they also appear to constitute an attempt on Atwood's part to disavow, or perhaps to draw attention to, her own role in the generation of these negative stereotypes, although it is unclear whether she would prefer to deny her victim position or perhaps be a creative non-victim. Unlike England's "Island" or America's "Frontier", Canada's symbol lacks romantic underpinnings or positive potential; instead, "Survival" provides "intolerable anxiety" and the "survivor has no triumph or victory" (Atwood 33). Atwood also qualifies her nationalist stance as a "sweeping generalization" that will be supported by "oversimplifications" later in the book, and that none of these should be understood as "dogma" (31). However, as with the happy thoughts, no substantive contradictions or alternatives are offered to contest the concept of a single unifying national symbol.

In an essay on the evaluative standards that informed Canadian film criticism in the sixties and early seventies, Morris notes that "pre-1972 criticism of Canadian film did not address the victimization thesis;" instead, sixties critics employed "a variety of perspectives" to discuss protagonists rather than dismissing them as "doomed losers" (1992 158). Citing the 1973 essay "Coward, Bully or Clown: The Dream Life of a Younger Brother" as film criticism's

equivalent of the Victim Position model, Morris observes that Robert Fothergill replicates Atwood's interchangeable use of the terms "victim" and "loser" (1992 158). Also, in the spirit of Atwood's recommendation that "[d]iagnosis is the first step" (Atwood 42), Fothergill attributes on-screen masculinity to the Canadian experience of being overshadowed by the United States. Even though he argues that "an energetic resistance" could be developed by recognizing the "oppressors" (245), the positive potential of Fothergill's thesis tends to get overlooked in favour of a preoccupation with the perceived ineptitude of Canadian male protagonists.

While Morris attributes much of the pessimism of canonical value judgements to the influence of Atwood, he overlooks the implicit negative connotations of Frye's Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*. There is a fundamental sense of Canadian artistic inferiority that arises from Frye's assessment of the lack of authorial genius or classic texts in this country. In fact, had there been a literature worthy of canonical status, *A Literary History of Canada* would not have had to rely on contextual categories such as politics, history and religion. Frye emphasizes the book's use of these categories because the nation's literature "more significantly studied as a part of Canadian life than as a part of an autonomous world of literature" (Frye 1995 216); as such, Frye essentially locates a positive critical position in an otherwise negative situation. In addition to the belief that "'literature is conscious mythology,'" Morris perceives Frye's key contributions to Canadian film criticism to include a focus on cultural nationalism and an emphasis on thematic analysis (1992 161). These contributions can be seen in the tendency to focus primarily on aspects of the text, at the expense of a detailed exploration of reception, as well as in continuing attempts to define the core of Canadian experience.

Despite objections raised within the literary community against Atwood's assessment of

the Canadian "will to lose," Morris writes that "Canadian film critics have not challenged the

negative connotations of these seminal thematic analyses" (1995 159). At the end of his essay,

Morris blames critics for generating the assumption that "Canadian culture was a lost cause"

(1995 162); however, this provides only a partial explanation of why the perception of a failed

national culture has persisted in film criticism. Canadian literary critics moved more quickly

and easily into poststructuralist criticism than their film colleagues. For example, Frank Davey's

1993 book, *Post-National Arguments*, explores the extent to which the "national" is no longer a

sufficient signifier for studying post-centennial Canadian fiction; similarly, Lynette Hunter

similarly cites the "emerging relevance of postmodernist strategies--long perceived as typical to

Canadian literature" (Howells & Hunter 2). Even though Harcourt suggests that "[t]here is

something somewhat attractive about the sense of a constantly fragmented, centrifugal Canada,"

he maintains his search for "a master narrative" that will allow the imagining of a "more

harmonious" Canada (1993 16, 22-23).

A NATIONAL CANON?

Thus, film criticism would continue its search for commonality while other disciplines

began to realize that it is more a question of articulating difference within a post-national

framework, than defining a shared Canadian identity. A possible explanation for this lies with

the way in which cultural policy shapes the nationalist discourse. Kevin Dowler explains that

the rationality underlying cultural policy exists "in the quest for national security" (329). Based

on Wesley Wark's description of the "'national insecurity state,'" a distinction can be made

between geographical boundaries and the metaphysical frontier of culture (Dowler 329). With

the recognition of this additional dimension, the concept of national sovereignty is extended to

administering cultural development. In other words, once territorial regions have been joined together using communications technologies, symbolic content needs to be added to the resulting "empty shell" (Dowler 337). In the Canadian context, cultural policy functions to counteract encroachments of the metaphysical frontier from American mass culture.

As a result, the impetus for maintaining a focus on unity over diversity arises from the need to assess the well-being of the state and its citizens. Dowler refers to the Massey Report's chapter about "The Forces of Geography" in which the Commission recognizes both the "'vitality of Canadian life, rooted in diversity'" and the problems created by "'the isolation of this vast country'" (Dowler 334). The introduction to the chapter invokes issues of national defence by contrasting Cold War totalitarianism and liberal democracy to argue that it is necessary "'to strengthen and enrich'" the civilization that we seek to defend (Litt 212). Thus, the Commission makes a direct link between territorial and cultural sovereignty. Faced with the paradoxical problem of regional diversity, the Commission sought to establish a cultural infrastructure that would "bring the regions into the mainstream of Canadian life" (Dowler 334). Consequently, this interaction between policy and diversity would secure the national question at the centre of Canadian film criticism.

Co-extensive with the nationalist discourse, the English Canadian perspective exerts a powerful, and often unstated, structuring influence on canon formation. The perception of a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness along with the comparatively healthy five percent of screen time separates Quebec cinema from the canon's prescriptive impulses. Jim Leach traces back to the 1960's the notion that Canada has "'*two* cinemas: the 'Canadian' and the Québécois, whose interests are divergent'" (5); he proceeds to dispute the arbitrary nature of the boundary between the two canons. Despite shifts in perspective to encompass cultural diversity, a

fundamentally dualist model remains. For example, regardless of Harcourt's brief mention of "other-culture filmmakers" and themes in Québécois cinema, the majority of his article, "Faces Changing Colour Changing Canon," deals with changes in contemporary (English) Canadian cinema; only *Eldorado* (Binamé, 1995) fits adequately with the article's central ideas (1998 7-8) As with multicultural policy, although ethnic diversity is recognized and encouraged, linguistically driven biculturalism remains.

Corse explains that the construction of national canons serves the purpose of differentiating national cultures by marking them as distinct from, and yet relative to, "relevant 'other' nations" (168). In the context of Canadian cinema, the combination of this reactionary impulse with a search for coherence exerts a reductive pressure on canon formation. The number of eligible texts drops even further due to the focus on feature films produced for theatrical release: In 1994-95, of the 14,000 film and video productions made in Canada, only 38 (less than 1 percent) were made for the theatrical market (Statistics Canada 56). Aside from the exclusion of the video format and the made-for-television film, the focus on theatrical release also neglects both short and mid-length films. With television as their most lucrative potential market, many documentaries are shot on video, often also using a 45 to 50 minute, or mid-length running time. Similarly, short films reach audiences only on the festival circuit and, to a limited extent, on television. Nonetheless, as Michael Dorland notes, post-war Canadian film history deals almost entirely with feature film production and its relationship to state policies (1998 12).

As for the process of forming a national canon, the selection of texts plays an active role in the construction of national identity rather than merely serving as a reflection of cultural experience (Corse 168). In her study of Canadian and American national literatures, Corse

highlights a shift in canon formation that proves to be particularly significant when extended to the development of the Canadian film canon. As a continuation of her exploration of the relationship between canons and cross-national difference, Corse describes literary prize winners as precanonical texts, or "educated guesses" regarding "tomorrow's classics" (100). Comparing these books to canonical texts, Corse finds that contemporary high culture literature is selected in relation to the existing canon (127). In other words, although national canons are initially formed "against an *external* other," new canonical candidates are judged in comparison to "established *internal*...tradition" (Corse 168).

This type of shift toward an inward focus works to reinforce traditional paradigms and entrench existing interpretations of the criteria of origin and value. As a result, precanonical texts are evaluated in terms of distinctive art cinema aesthetics, thematic concerns that centre on problematic identity, and, ultimately, success in the marketplace. The implications for the Canadian film canon are particularly troubling since its boundaries already exclude more than they include for critical attention. At the same time, the canon's foundation consists of an unstable, fragmentary national identity along with the perception of a displaced ideal industry. As such, the canon's shortcomings fuel the debate about the viability of canon in the Canadian context. Furthermore, with the rise of globalization, and the continuing threat of Quebec separation, questions arise as to whether or not the study of film should continue to be confined by national boundaries. The subsequent chapter examines the conceptual challenges that confront the study of Canadian cinema in a national context.

NOTES:

1. A french translation of Pevere's article appears as "La nouvelle vague ontarienne." in *Les Cinemas du Canada.* (Sylvain Garel and Andre Paquet, eds. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1992).

2. Chaired by Vincent Massey, the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences was appointed in 1949 and tabled its final report in 1951.

3. Litt attributes this perspective to the influence of Matthew Arnold's view on the value of high culture. See also Michael Dorland's essay, "Matthew Arnold in Canada: The Lonely Discourse of J. Peter Harcourt" in *Responses* (Allan et al, eds), for an examination of the Arnoldian aspects of Harcourt's approach to film criticism.

4. Litt distinguished between the culture elite, who were "[l]eading figures in universities, national voluntary associations, and government [who] were behind the founding of the Massey Commission" and the culture lobby which was comprised of voluntary associations from across Canada (4).

5. These ideas can be traced further back to the influence of John Grierson's tenure at the National Film Board (Evans 3-5); however, Grierson was not confident about the development of a Canadian feature film industry and focussed more on non-theatrical circuits (Evans 6).

6. According to Terry Eagleton, Frye's work could be considered in "a loose sense" to be structuralist, with the exception that Frye did not subscribe to the belief that meaning was purely relational (82); as such, the meta-text would be distanced, but not completely separate, from the contextual domain of referent.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE ONLY CINEMA WE'RE GOING TO GET

> Maybe this is why the celebration of the country's first century of
> moviemaking has hardly amounted to a hoedown.
>
> Geoff Pevere[1]

Michael Dorland notes that the study of Canadian cinema "remains entangled in conceptual difficulties largely of its own making" (1998 3). Many of the problems arise from a process of "perpetual displacement" that initially compensated for "historical amnesia"[2] through the creation of an idealized Canadian cinema (Dorland: 1998 5-7); this "perfect state" could, theoretically, be achieved through the confluence of similarly ideal social, political, economic and ideological conditions (Pevere:1988 324). As such, the ideal Cinema generates unrealistic goals and engenders a mode of prescriptive criticism that perceives the national cinema in terms of absence and, consequently, concentrates on devising corrective measures. At the same time, by looking forward to an unattainable future, the focus shifts away from exploring developments in actual national filmmaking practice (Dorland: 1998 7).

As a result, approaching contemporary Canadian cinema becomes even more challenging. Not only are there gaps in knowledge, but the critical discourse lacks the necessary tools to recognize that the "cinema we got" may actually be the "cinema we need;" or, perhaps to state it more accurately, the "cinema we got" may be the "only cinema we're going to get." This is not meant to echo the traditional defeatist lament of prescriptive criticism. Instead, the resurgence of feature filmmaking, following the tightening of the Capital Cost Allowance rules in the early 1980's, marks a departure from the production style that dominated the tax shelter boom.[3] Often linked to the rise of the Ontario New Wave directors in the late 1980's, this

resurgence comprises contemporary films that have received critical acclaim for achieving an art cinema sensibility that was deemed to be lacking in tax shelter films such as *Porky's* (Clark, 1981), *Prom Night* (Lynch, 1980) and *Meatballs* (Reitman, 1979), which were dismissed by critics as "dreck of the lowest order"[4] (Pevere:1988 333).

This revival of feature filmmaking gains added significance from the extent to which it satisfies the cultural goals of contributing to the development of Canadian national cinema(s). Aside from the failure to create a stable industry that could survive without tax shelter financing (Magder: 1993 170), the CCA production boom fostered a branch plant industry within which only the minimum requirements for the use of Canadian talent were being met.[5] Starting during the mid-1980's, film-educated directors, who gained further expertise with filmmaking collectives such as the Winnipeg Film Group and the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT), made their first features. Although these young filmmakers produced works which fit in with traditional Canadian critical paradigms, Pevere ironically notes that most of their films were "low-budget, independent productions" that "represent a reaction to and a break from" the commercial industry encouraged by cultural policy (1995 10).

Pevere describes the films of the Ontario New Wave in terms of a cinema of a sense of "placelessness" in which disaffected characters struggle to negotiate (inter/intra)personal relationships (1995 15-19). In contrast to the geographic precision of films such as *Life Classes* (MacGillivray, 1987) or *Black Robe* (Beresford, 1991), the absence of distinctive locational referents in films such as *White Room* (Rozema, 1990) and *Speaking Parts* (Egoyan, 1989) evokes an alienation that, Pevere argues, extends beyond the personal to the cultural (1995 16). Similarly, Guy Maddin compensates for the perceived absence of a Canadian (feature) film history through the assembly of a historically varied collage of film styles that asks whether

"Maddin [is] temporally challenged or are we?" (McSorley 15). Diasporic experience forms the basis of the narratives of both *Sam and Me* (Mehta, 1991) and *Double Happiness* (Shum, 1994); Kass Banning cites the importance of these "minoritarian films" to the process of national self-definition (292).

In each case, the texts of contemporary Canadian cinema cater to the critical predilection for exploring issues surrounding national cultural identity. Banning contests reading Mehta's and Shum's films merely as "struggles-with-assimilation tales" (292) and, instead, seeks to expand the understanding of the discursive complexity of ethnicity. In doing so, her article contributes to the volume's aim "to foster the development of new paradigms of relations between cinema, the nation, and gender" (Armatage 12). Despite the beginnings of a shift away from conceiving of difference in terms of absence, traces of the prescriptive ideal remain. For example, Jim Leach's recent article about "Canadian Cinema(s) in the Age of Multi-National Representations" ends with the statement that "it remains to be seen whether Canada will continue to have one national cinema, or two, or none" (16). However, the national cinema's existence, precarious or otherwise, depends on the reductive pressure applied by the canon.

The notion of the absence of a unified sense of national identity further links to aspects of the debate surrounding multiculturalism. When multiculturalism policy was announced in 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau "proclaimed [that] 'there are no official cultures in Canada'" (McRoberts 125). Although intended as a substitute for the concept of biculturalism, which did not serve to adequately describe Canadian society, contemporary critics argue that what emerges is "cultural relativism" (McRoberts 132). Rather than encouraging national unity by encompassing all citizens, multiculturalism stresses difference to the extent that sociologist Reginald Bibby asks "'if what we have in common is our diversity, do we really have anything in

common at all?"' (McRoberts 132). Although Bibby supplies an intriguing paradox that

demonstrates the evolution of the contradictions at the root of Canadian identity, it is important

to note that "all is [not] lost" (McRoberts 132). Even though the extensive interplay of

difference resists reductive closure and, as such, eludes simple definition, there may instead be a

more interesting, albeit complex, identity here.

Thus, what is absent is not national identity but rather an understanding of the inherent

intricacy of its coherence. However, as diversity continually threatens to overwhelm attempts to

define the essence of national identity, the result can be a focus on "'the masochistic celebration

of Canadian nothingness'" (McRoberts 132).[6] In 1977, Peter Harcourt described Canada as an

"emerging nation" that seemed to have "no national myth" (1977 3). Returning to his discussion

of "the curious fate of Canada as a nation" in 1993, Harcourt explained that it is the "discourse

about Canada" that remains "an unfinished text" (1993 21). Given Jacques Derrida's assertion

that "meaning is always deferred" as a result of the differential functioning of signs in language

(Norris 32), there appears to be nothing surprising about the recognition of the existence of an

unfinished text. However, rather than merely deferring completion, Harcourt's discourse denies

even the illusion of substance. Instead of defining Canadian identity in terms of a temporally

shifting presence, it is seen as an endlessly elusive absence.

Admittedly, the tide appears to be beginning to turn and the canon seems to be shifting

toward a descriptive rather than prescriptive mode. Articles such as André Loiselle's

examination of popular Quebec cinema and Thomas Waugh's queering of the canon pose

productive challenges to the traditionally restrictive boundaries of canon. Nevertheless, a

certain element of continuity allows Loiselle's critique to maintain an affiliation with

conventional approaches to Canadian on-screen masculinity. With male protagonists who are

"eccentric, marginal and deviant," films like *Cruising Bar* (Ménard, 1989) and *Les Boys* (Saia, 1997) "provide a subversive reversal from loser to winner" (Loiselle 79). In other words, even though these characters unexpectedly prevail, they retain their status as geeks. Their power and popularity arise from a reversal of terms through which problematic masculinity is reconceptualized as a site of resistance rather than inferiority.

As such, the inability to conform to the definitional strictures of (masculine) behaviour translates into potential as opposed to lack. Consequently, these unlikely victories subvert the evaluative force of identity regulation, thereby rendering absence as a productive construct; over the course of the narrative, these characters manage to be both winners and losers depending on shifting parameters of interpretation. The instability of this distinction, however, points to the persistent presence of a displaced ideal. The competing concepts of lack and potential both allude to a model or objective against which (in)action is measured. It is this type of mutable reading that lends uncertainty to the aforementioned paradigmatic transition in Canadian film criticism. Depending upon the way in which evaluative criteria are invoked, the film canon corresponds to a national cultural identity that is either fundamentally deficient or inherently complex.

PERFORMING CANON

An examination of the inter-relationship between canon formation and cultural identity helps to clarify the conceptual challenges facing Canadian film criticism. If the film canon serves to assert Canada's cultural sense of self within the global film community, the difficulty of achieving a strategic reduction of Canadian identity undermines one of the canon's key roles. Yet, as Sarah Corse explains, canons "are not reflections of the national character, but

manifestations of the 'invention' of the national, of the strategies used to create national identities" (74). In other words, canons themselves play an active role in both facilitating and sustaining the creation of cultural identity. Corse's statement also indicates the extent to which neither national identities nor their corresponding canons pre-exist a process of discursive construction or performance. To understand how canon is performed, it is necessary to begin by exploring the performative nature of (national) identity.

In her genealogical study of gender, Judith Butler disrupts the notion of the expression of a stable core of identity by a pre-existing subject. Instead, "identity is asserted through a process of signification...[and] continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses" (Butler 143). The appearance of a substantive identity arises through the "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 141). In other words, identity is performative, as opposed to expressive, and the individual subject is created through the discursive practices that describe "it." Although Butler refers to individual identity, several of her basic assertions can be extended to a consideration of national identity. National identity can be understood as a performative construct that comprises a series of contingent traits that are deemed to express a unique essence. However, the ideas of "uniqueness" and "essence" both emerge from within the nation-centred discourse; they are posited as pre-existing the discourse in order to render the national identity stable and inevitable.

Homi Bhabha writes that "nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1). At the same time, because identity does not pre-exist its own performance, there can be no recourse to an extra-discursive position: "There is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have." (Butler 148) Harcourt's argument that "we can make the

effort to *imagine* Canada differently" (1993 23) echoes the prevalent assumption within the film canon of the existence of an idealized alternative. Pevere similarly cites the implied presence of an "ideal Canadian Cinema" that drives prescriptive film critics to endorse a variety of corrective measures (1988 324).

Pevere blames this displaced ideal for the shortcomings of Canadian film criticism and advocates a descriptive approach wherein all film texts, "from the crass to the vanguard" would be "treated objectively as texts worthy of analysis" (1988 334). However, calling for the abandonment of evaluative analysis invokes a displaced ideal criticism. As a result, Pevere's desire for standards to become less arbitrary corresponds to Harcourt's summoning of the power of the shared cultural imagination. Although neither describes a fully extra-discursive position, each position remains equally untenable by overlooking the complex interplay of several discursive practices that restrict the "imagined possible."[7] The effort that would be required exceeds the agency of the individual subject, not to mention the combined potential "effort" of an entire nation.

In discussing "Canada's nation-building problem," Glyn Hughes cites Will Kymlicka who "attributes the strength and solidarity of USA identity to its powerful shared national mythology, something he claims has been conspicuous by its absence in Canada" (37). Despite the existence of a hierarchical cluster of regional identities, Hughes notes that "the essence of that [overall, shared] Canadian identity remains undefined" (37). However, if national identity, like individual identity, exists only as a performative construct, there is in fact no essence to seek. The illusion of an essence emerges through the signifying practices that enact identity. Furthermore, these signifying practices comprise a contingent set of elements brought together to form an artificially unified whole (Butler 94). Thus, "that elusive 'oneness' of identity" (Hughes 37) is

indeed elusive in that it does not actually exist.

In accordance with the nationalist discourse, the search for that which is uniquely Canadian finds its answer within a shared cultural imagination (Anderson 6). However, the fragmentary regionalism and poly-ethnic nature of Canadian identity hinder the formulation of a truly unifying cultural experience. Noting the presence of British films which "refuse over-arching visions of national identity," Andrew Higson asks "whether the national in national cinema always invokes the myth of consensus" (273). Since the articulation of national community overlooks the specificity of audience experience, Higson ultimately opts to reject the construct of national cinema (279). In a book review that disputes Higson's perspective, John Hill cites Paul Willemen's argument that "the national cinema which genuinely addresses national specificity will actually be at odds with nationalism" (Hill 109). Willemen explains that the specificity of a cultural formation in fact "governs the articulation of" the homogenizing project of nationalist discourses (210).

In other words, a preoccupation with issues surrounding national identity depends on the discursive focus of a socio-cultural group at any given time. As an example, Willemen refers to the temporary decline in the Australian concern with defining distinctive Australianness that occurred following bicentennial celebrations (210). In the Canadian context, challenges to national unity have arisen from multiculturalism, which has served as an uneasy replacement for biculturalism.[8] Originally conceived as a political strategy that would both distinguish the Canadian mosaic from the American melting pot and discourage Quebec separatism, multicultural policy has instead functioned to reinforce difference (McRoberts 133). Nevertheless, Willemen asserts that "national boundaries have a significant structuring impact on national socio-cultural formations" (210); as such, regardless of the inadequate workings of

nationalist strategies, unity does not always prove to be the best measure of national identity.

For instance, Hughes notes that "Canadians showing the strongest sense of regional or ethnic

identity also have a strong parallel sense of Canadian identity" (37).

Stuart Hall describes the notion of shared culture as a "way of imposing an imaginary

coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (112).[9] Hall offers a second view

of cultural identity which stresses the importance of difference. This view acknowledges the

intervention of history that brings the future and past to bear on the present. As such, cultural

identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall 112). Or, to extrapolate from

Butler's explanation of gender identity, it is "not an essence but a *positioning*" (Hall 113).

However, in contrast to the repetition of signifying acts, cultural identity involves a somewhat

more Derridean play of meaning; traces of the past, reconstructed through narrative and myth,

intertwine with present and future through an endless deferral of meaning. Within this "infinite

semiosis," meaning depends on the "contingent and arbitrary stop" that temporarily ceases the

differential play (Hall 115).

These momentary breaks constitute what is understood as the substance of identity. Hall

asserts the importance of not mistaking these temporary positionings as "natural and permanent"

endings (115); instead, identity remains incomplete and in process. Gayatri Spivak has

recommended the "*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political

interest'" (3). In such an instance, identity would be deemed to express a pre-existing essence in

order to mobilize resistance or promote solidarity; for example, "women" serves as a unifying

category, that suppresses differences in race and class, in order to foster and further feminist

goals. Since Hall's view of cultural identity as the complex interplay of difference corresponds

with Hughes' recognition of the existence of a cluster of distinct regional identities in Canada,

strategic essentialism provides a means of instituting a temporary fixity. This type of reductive closure can be used to provide coherence that would facilitate the study of cultural identity.

As a result, the film canon can serve as a strategic tool for expressing and exploring Canadian cultural identity. However, Spivak seems to be uncertain of the value of strategic essentialism. She questions the possibility of a lasting strategy (that does not solidify into theory) and notes that all group members would need to be continually critically aware of the strategy (Spivak 3-6). In other words, although the strategy is intended as a situational device, it constantly risks being reified as essence. Dorland notes that the organizers of the 1967 retrospective utilized essentialism in order to organize Canadian film history into a discrete chronology as opposed to a "'collection of side issues'" (1998 128). Although this approach may have suited the aim of promoting Canadian culture for the Centennial celebrations, the preparation of a list of "'one hundred essential films of Canadian cinema'" (Dorland: 1998 128) has since given way to numerous attempts to essentialize Canadian cinema.

Perspective Canada launched its inaugural programme, at Toronto's Festival of Festivals, with a Top Ten List, which was followed, a decade later, by a "10 X 10" anniversary programme for which a series of "underrated" features and shorts were selected (1993 313). "*Take One*'s Top 20: The Best Canadian Films of All Time"[10] offers a list chosen from the favourites of the publication's contributing editors. Although Wyndham Wise, editor-in-chief and list adjudicator, admits that the methodology used was "unscientific," he still attributes the findings to *Take One*'s "mandate" of "identifying and celebrating the best in Canadian cinema" ("Top 20"). Over time, this list-making becomes less a strategy to garner public attention than an attempt to posit a stable core of key films. Not only do these lists foreclose any discussion of the diversity of filmmaking practice, they also attempt to conceal their incompleteness. Thus, in the Foreword

to the boldly titled *Essential Guide to Films & Filmmakers in Canada*, published as the successor to two featured articles that each catalogued 100 significant names,[11] Wise refers to the 143 page volume as an "encyclopedia" (1999b 3).

Yet, the proliferation of lists also reveal their own instability. While Perspective Canada's 1984 Top Ten actually comprised 27 titles due to numerous ties (123), brisk sales caused *Take One*'s "100" to be doubled. Aside from the difference that exists between these lists, the list-makers themselves find it difficult to obey the boundaries of essentialism. Furthermore, terms such as "best" and "essential," which serve to (temporarily) seal the confines, also manage to conceal the ideological underpinnings of the lists. In other words, the discussion focuses on the content of each "canon" rather than the process by which it was formed. Even the "10 X 10"'s compilation of underrated films directs attention toward the oversights of criticism rather than the actual evaluation process or criteria. No longer strategic in nature, this type of essentialism exemplifies Spivak's uncertainty about its lasting use value by impeding the detailed exploration of Canadian cultural identity.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

A further impediment to canon formation can be traced to a fundamental contradiction at the base of Canadian identity. Although Bhabha writes that "ambivalence haunts the idea of the nation" (1), the tension at the root of Canadian identity involves a particular performative twist through which the self/other binary becomes inverted. Glyn Samuel Hughes' study of the construction of national self-image offers a framework through which this inversion can be isolated and explored. Hughes prepared a 31 item questionnaire which was administered to 150 students in 13 schools and universities across Canada (iii). The resulting data concentrates on

aspects of English Canada's national self-image, referred to as Perceived National Identity (PNI). Questions concerning the perception of the American self-image serve as a basis of comparison through which PNI can be more sharply defined.

Hughes found that the simple autostereotype, "although predominantly positive," consists of a negative perception of patriotism (83). In contrast, the simple heterostereotype (ie. how Americans see themselves) reveals that the Americans are seen as patriotic. The data shows the "conspicuous" choice of antonyms in the adjectives used to refer to the autostereotype (Hughes 85). Examples include "selfish-generous," "aggressive-apathetic," and "rude-courteous" (Hughes 85). Similarly, the projected heterostereotype ("the way I imagine Americans see themselves") "tends to highlight areas of perceived competition" (Hughes 89); perceived attributes include self-confidence and competitiveness which are seen as lacking in the autostereotype. Hughes notes that the overwhelming use of positive descriptors in the projected heterostereotype suggests that Canadians "attribute a stronger and less complex self-image to Americans" (90).

Responses to a question about the most common misconceptions that foreigners have about Canada indicate the fear that Canada may be seen as a mere extension of the United States (Hughes 66-7). Interestingly, when asked to give the nationality of a number of film stars, "only three of the Canadian stars were correctly recognized in more than 50% of the replies" compared to an 80 percent accuracy rate with international stars (Hughes 108); respondents tended to be unable to differentiate between American and Canadian stars. Hughes also notes that "almost one in four respondents were unable to cite a single admired Canadian in the field of art and culture" (122). Preferred literary personalities reflect a list of canonized figures likely "acquired formally in the school system" (Hughes 120). The difficulty in identifying Canadian popular cultural figures may be traceable to shortcomings in pedagogy since the respondents were able to

name a few authors and poets.

In his analysis of the content of the replies, Hughes isolates a contradiction in that "Canadian national character is seen to underlie both the country's superiority and inferiority" (117). National institutions and social policies provide the basis for positive perceptions in the PNI whereas inadequate patriotism and a lack of competitiveness (especially economic) tend to occur as negative descriptors. A further contradiction emerges from the construction of polarities in the auto- and heterostereotypes. The fear of not being distinct from the United States manifests itself in the antonyms selected. At the same time, however, the projected heterostereotype describes Americans in terms of an inversion of the traits that are seen to render Canadians inferior. The Perceived National Identity distances Americans through projected difference while also maintaining some of their qualities as a desirable goal.

The contradictions in the PNI show that the perceived American identity acts as a supplement to Canadian identity; it is a required presence that is simultaneously denied. The creation of polarities indicates that Canada is set up as a "self" in opposition to the American "other." Although the process of identity creation would necessitate that Canada be positioned as "self," a doubling of the self/other binary occurs. By locating both a desired "self" and a repellent "other" in the United States, the perceived American identity must serve a contradictory role; also the American "self" tends to be seen as a colonizing cultural and economic presence to numerous "others." Thus, the PNI involves the "other" projecting as "self" while denying its own status as "other." The resulting "double consciousness" resembles Cornel West's description of "middle-class Black intellectuals...caught between a quest for White approval and acceptance and an endeavour to overcome the internalized association of Blackness with inferiority" (28); this doubling occurs because achieving acceptance involves

partaking in the perceptions of Black inferiority that emerge from White discourse, thereby firmly situating the measures of success and failure outside of Black discourse. As such, the otherness associated with Black identity is ultimately reinforced.

Similarly, the denial of the "other" position remains incomplete in the face of the contradictory response to national character; in other words, it is difficult for Canadians to perceive themselves as superior to the United States when the solution to Canada's negative qualities is found in superior aspects of the Americans' national character. Despite Bhabha's aforementioned assertion that nations are founded on ambivalence, this position remains precarious, if not untenable. In contrast, the contradiction at the root of the American founding myth involves a shift from "colonized" to "colonizer" that requires the suppression of the experience of being colonized; if the experience of oppression prior to the American Revolution were re-read, the desire to be a colonizer would be problematized. Although manifest destiny can be found in both the British and American imperial endeavours, the American myth entails a fairly straightforward shift to the "other" position. For Canadians, on the other hand, becoming too similar to Americans would correspond to the PNI's feared misconception that Canada is merely an extension of the United States.

An example of how this translates to Canadian film criticism can be found in Robert Fothergill's assessment of on-screen masculinity in English Canadian cinema, which has become "one of the measuring sticks by which Canadian film continues to be evaluated" (Lowe 36). In his article "Coward, Bully or Clown: The Dream Life of a Younger Brother", Fothergill critiques the pusillanimous (239), infantile or impotent behaviour of male protagonists in films such as *Goin' Down the Road* (Shebib, 1970).[12] According to Fothergill, this low self-image and lack of success emerged in response to being "overshadowed by a superior sibling south of the 49th"

(Lowe 37). Not only does this vision of the Canadian male protagonist offer an alternative to his American counterpart but it also situates that counterpart as an object of envy. Thus, difference and desire find expression in the shifting self/other dichotomy.

In *Image and Identity*, Bruce Elder advances a perspective on Canadian identity that also corresponds to the positioning offered by double consciousness. Situating his study of Canadian cinema within a "genetic approach," Elder argues for moving "beyond defining ourselves in terms of the Other" (1989 5,14). Specifically, he asserts that the multiple levels of the imaginary relationship between Canadians and Americans obscure the reality of the Canadian experience; as a result, negative stereotypes of American cultural and economic domination "mask positive feelings about American power" (1989 14). Elder does not clarify how foreign control of domestic cultural industries engenders, or relates to, these positive feelings. Perhaps the American model provides a benchmark against which evaluations can be made of Canadian attempts to foster a viable film industry; thus, resentment and aspiration appear to inform Elder's position.

However, the "genetic approach" involves a denial of difference thereby implying a search for an essence of "sameness" which suppresses the reality of the diversity of multicultural experience. At the same time, the ambiguity of the multi-levelled self/other relationship remains an unspoken absence whose presence constantly reasserts itself in the "genetic" development of Canadian cultural identity. This tenuous denial of the "other" position may contribute to Elder's observation that "Canadian thinkers have shown a proclivity for hierophanic [sic] conceptions of reality" (1989 367). The hierophantic view of reality locates the source of meaning in absence thereby implying an absence that is somehow also a forceful presence. The absence at the base of Canadian identity arises from the inability to sustain the contradictions inherent in the PNI. In

the temporary break or positioning that constitutes identity, these ambiguities elude reductive description. As a result, regardless of the existence of a complex interplay of difference, its irreducibility to a moment of sameness emerges as absence.

The challenge of achieving a strategic reduction of Canadian identity complicates the process of canon formation. Consequently, discussion tends to converge on formulations of identity that stress absence while reinforcing the shortcomings of the nation-building project. This discursive focus further directs attention away from actual filmmaking practice. Critical paradigms associated with contemporary Canadian cinema reflect a continued search for evidence of unified cultural experience while also being informed by contradictory impulses to deplore and admire American standards. The belief that a complete break from the underlying assumptions could be achieved would involve invoking an Ideal Criticism that would be as unattainable as the Ideal Cinema. Instead, an awareness of the shift between naturalized essence and performative construct enables a more complex questioning of the form and structure of both identity and canon.

A VIABLE CONSTRUCT FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM?

In his essay "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film," Peter Morris criticizes the normative tendencies of the film canon. Morris notes the emergence of a narrow list that excludes films which are not easily analysed "within the canonical principles or analytical framework" (1992 151). Specifically, he cites the exclusion of Paul Almond (esp. *Isabel*, 1968), Denys Arcand and David Cronenberg. Although both Arcand and Cronenberg have recently gained access through a list prepared for *Take One* ("Top 20"), their inclusion does not contest traditional canonical paradigms. Corse similarly notes that canons tend to focus on a

particular vision that is generated and legitimated by a small elite group (74). At the same time, Corse's listing of bestsellers and literary prize winners (172-77) shows that canonization often fails to reflect popular taste. As a result, the study of canonical works is more informative about "high culture and elite visions" than it is about the nation as a whole (Corse 17).

The Canadian film canon faces several obstacles that include problems of access to the full range of films as well as the relatively small size of the "Canadian scholarly film community" (Morris: 1992 148). These obstacles further increase normative tendencies by placing a reductive pressure on the discussion of Canadian cinema. Morris notes that "from a simple statistical or demographic perspective, there is less chance of dissenting voices arising to contest the canon" (1992 148). Aside from the small number of voices, the films themselves face the incredibly difficult task of being noticed in critical circles. With limited access to both screen time and video distribution, the number of potential canonical films decreases; few films will reach a substantial audience and, even then, they will compete for the limited amount of available critical attention.

Regardless of its inherent biases, Morris asserts the relevance of exploring the canon in order to ascertain its underlying assumptions (1992 148-9). In fact, it is through a critical exploration of canon formation that an understanding of these biases and assumptions emerges. As an interpretive tool that provides a particular vision of national cultural identity, the film canon plays an important role in marketing. Given the limited amount of screen time dedicated to Canadian films and consequent limited access, the canon provides a key source of information about the national film industry. Continued critical exploration of the canon fulfils the dual function of rendering the biases visible while also encouraging corrective routes to overcome normative tendencies. As a result, the canon remains in a constant process of evolution. The

validity of this (per)formative process supersedes a questioning of its existence; in other words, the canon's significance as a tool precludes its exclusion from critical discourse.

Similarly, as long as film production in Canada intersects discursively with state institutions, national cinema will continue to be a significant construct. As Willemen asserts, "the boundaries of cultural specificity in cinema are established by governmental actions" (209) that shape the activities of production, distribution and exhibition. With the rise of communications technologies which disregard borders and the supra-national expansion of corporations, many globalization theorists predict "the obsolescence of the nation and the dissolution of discrete and parochial forms of identification and belonging" (Longfellow: 1996 4). Yet, if cultural identity interacts with governance, group affiliation will retain certain territorial aspects. As such, the recognition of the importance of trans-national identification signals the need to (re)conceptualize the national. However, given the distinction that Willemen makes between nationalism and national specificity, the need is less to reconceptualize the national than it is to reinstate the term's complexity.

The Canadian canon collapses this distinction and assumes that the national cinema must be defined based on the unifying forces of nationalism. Hence, from this perspective, the canon appears to be unfeasibly founded on absence. Brenda Longfellow concludes that "[p]erhaps...in the face of...irrefutable diversity lies the possibility of recasting national identity as...a negotiation between spaces of difference" (1996 15). Perhaps also, with the secure sense that, even with its diasporic emphasis, Canadian culture does indeed possess national specificity, the narrow admission criteria for precanonical texts can be relaxed, thereby encouraging the pursuit of more varied avenues of study. Untangling the conceptual difficulties that confine Canadian film criticism could result in a transition from hindering the discussion of the "cinema we got"

to deferring the completion of the canon. However, given the inward focus of contemporary

canons, certain entrenched impulses will persist. In particular, the tendency to measure

Canadian cultural experience in terms of a schizophrenic relationship to the United States

becomes especially problematic in the realm of policy.

NOTES:

1. Pevere: 1999 7.

2. Dorland relates historical amnesia to a similar trend within the writing of Canadian history (5).

3. For a discussion of the Capital Cost Allowance Program see Pendakur, pages 170ff. Magder notes that the CCA was meant to stimulate industry and was, therefore, not designed to develop a national cinema (179).

4. Some critics are beginning to re-examine tax shelter films. For example, see Randy Thiessen's article, "Deconstructing Masculinity in *Porky's*," in *Post Script*, volume 18, number 2 (Winter/Spring 1999).

5. Pendakur notes that Canadian talent was often paid just to have their names available to appear in the film's credits (174).

6. McRoberts attributes this reference to the effects of multiculturalism to a 1972 statement made by political scientist Gad Horowitz.

7. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community, Mike Gasher asserts that American colonization of the Canadian imagination, particularly through control of the industrial infrastructure, undermines the "nation's capacity to imagine itself" (1993b 97). Gasher proceeds to argue the necessity that "the imagined possible" be "self-generated rather than externally imposed" (1993b 104).

8. Kenneth McRoberts explores the contradictions that have resulted from replacing biculturalism with multiculturalism while retaining bilingualism. He notes that "[a]lthough all cultures...were to be supported, only two languages were to have official status" (133) thereby raising the question of the meaningfulness of this support. Although piecemeal measures have been taken to support non-official languages at both the federal and provincial levels, Canada remains basically a bilingual country.

9. A similar version of Hall's article was published in *Framework*, vol 36 (1989), as "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation."

10. The magazine's table of contents lists the article's title slightly differently as "*Take One's* Top 20 Canadian Films of All Time."

11. "100 Great and Glorious Years of Canadian Cinema" first appeared in Volume 5, No. 12 (Summer 1996) while "The Sequel" appeared in Volume 5, No. 15 (Spring 1997).

12. In "Canadian Narrative Cinema from the Margins: 'The Nation' and Masculinity in *Goin' Down the Road*," Christine Ramsay challenges the generalization that all Canadian male protagonists are losers and injects much-needed complexity into the study of Canadian on-screen masculinity.

CHAPTER THREE:

POLICY AND THE ABSENT AUDIENCE

Canadians deserve to see themselves, their histories, their geography
and their dramas interpreted in films.
                    Executive Summary, *The Road to Success*[1]

The antonymic schizophrenia of Canadian cultural identity, which is characterized by the

need to assert difference from, while also locating desirable qualities in, the perceived American

identity, also finds expression in policy discourse. Similar in nature to the concept of double

consciousness, Dorland describes the "double dream" of a second cinema policy capable of

establishing a vibrant national film industry that could rival the first cinema of Hollywood (1996

125). However, this dream remains "at the level of the imaginary," and secondariness is

reinforced, due to the realistic acknowledgment of the dominance of the Hollywood industry in

the areas of distribution and exhibition (Dorland: 1996 125). Dorland attributes his discussion

of second cinema film policy to Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka who argue that "[t]he

implicit and sometimes explicit aim of a second cinema...is to make films that succeed in

Hollywood's terms, in the U.S. market" (Dermody 23). Since neither text provides a precise

definition of second cinema it is necessary to explore the meanings of this term prior to

considering its impact on the performance of canon.

In their 1969 manifesto, "Towards a Third Cinema," Fernando Solanas and Octavio

Getino distinguish between first, second and third cinemas based on issues of resistance to

imperialism or participation in cultural (de)colonization. The liberatory potential of third

cinema arises from the use of aesthetic models that are distinct from the first cinema of

Hollywood and extends beyond production practices to alternative models for distribution and

exhibition. Citing examples such as "author's cinema" or "nouvelle vague," Solanas and Getino note that second cinema provides a "step forward" but is ultimately limited by economic imperatives that necessitate continued reliance upon the "System" (Solanas 51-2). For instance, in order to generate sufficient revenue to cover the costs of an independent production, a second cinema film would need to access a particular portion of the market; in addition to distribution requirements, the concurrent desire to develop a cost-effective approach to production would result in merely replicating the System, with its accompanying institutionalized structure.

In contrast to the process of "replacing 'bad officials' by 'less bad'" (Solanas 52), third cinema dispenses with stratified industrial practices by involving the people in all stages of production and adopting a grassroots approach to exhibition. As such, the distinctively local context of third cinema preempts the influence of market pressures while a direct link is drawn between the screening event and political action.[2] Although second cinema can also evoke the specificity of its national context, neo-colonial status is maintained due to a continued reliance upon, and subservience to, the "System." In fact, the need to rely on established distribution networks may extend to duplicating elements of first cinema aesthetics in order to ensure both national and international market success. Despite a tendency to conflate second cinema with art cinema, it is important to note that Solanas and Getino's argument focuses on both cultural and political elements. Thus, while an art or authorial cinema specifically counters first cinema aesthetics, even a film which mimics first cinema could be considered under the rubric of second cinema, depending on the extent to which it asserts national difference thematically.[3]

Extrapolating from the Latin American context of the initial manifesto[4] to situations which are postcolonial without being postrevolutionary, the political aspects of the debate invariably become overshadowed by economic concerns. Nevertheless, the predominance of

Hollywood aesthetics, along with the capitalist infrastructure of the "System," should not lead to a connection between first cinema status and popular entertainment; this connection invokes a division between high and low culture which does not necessarily take into account the political underpinnings of the second cinema designation. For example, popular Quebec films convey local cultural idioms and rival the box office returns of "imported" Hollywood films while retaining the categorization of second cinema. Although "these films function outside the parameters usually accepted as legitimate criteria to evaluate cinematic quality" (Loiselle 76), they manifest aspects of Quebec experience, most noticeably through the use of French Canadian slang which often cannot be fully understood by non-Quebecois. Industrial Canadian films such as *Air Bud*, on the other hand, do not evoke local or national specificity and tend instead to attempt to participate in the first cinema of Hollywood.

According to Dermody and Jacka, the "double bind" of second cinema involves the tension created by the simultaneous desire to express national identity while accepting the economic dependence of the film industry upon the American market (23). At the same time, however, they cite the objective of "succeed[ing] in Hollywood's terms" (23), which when combined with Dorland's reference to the desire to "compete with Hollywood" (Dorland: 1996 125), gives rise to the implication that first cinema goals form an inherent part of second cinema. Although this privileging of economic issues appears to overlook the cultural politics of second cinema, Steven Globerman's calculation of "acceptable risk-adjusted returns" helps to clarify the situation: He explains that, of the approximately $5.6 million in film rentals required to recoup the costs of an average unit budget of $3.5 million, only a fraction (an average of $1.6 million) can be earned in the small Canadian market, even when considering the inclusion of pay television and home video revenues (Globerman 197).[5] As a result, success in the U.S. market,

particularly given the global influence of both American distribution and marketing, is normally

required to secure any profit margin, or even to secure financing.

Therefore, the need to succeed in Hollywood terms does not necessarily reflect the

presence of first cinema goals but instead produces a particular response to the concomitant

limitations to the political potential of second cinema. Dermody and Jacka's double bind

demonstrates a negative response to the cultural ambivalence that they feel interferes with

resistance to Hollywood paradigms and "encourages stagnation in Australian film" (Dermody

24-5). In "Towards Decolonization: Some Problems and Issues for Film History in Australia,"

Sylvia Lawson notes that certain second world countries whose histories are marked by the

absence of a unified anti-imperialist struggle remain "politically divided, [and] socially and

culturally fragmented in the present" (66). While diversity of national identity is not limited to

neo-colonial experience, the key to Lawson's argument rests with the lack of "single-

mindedness" displayed in the form of nationalist opposition to continued cultural colonization.

Instead, strains of "political and cultural apathy" (66) have prevented, and continue to hinder, the

establishment of a thriving national film industry.

This is not meant to suggest that continued expression of a homogenous cultural identity

is desired but rather that the initial unifying impulse, expressed in moments of nationalism,

generates the canonical framework that is perpetuated by the inward focus described by Corse.

In other words, the performance of a contemporary national canon relies on the initial definition

of criteria of origin and value in relation to "an *external* other" (Corse 168). Consequently, the

absence of a shared anti-imperialist struggle generates an unstable or fragmentary canonical

infrastructure which contributes to the cultural stagnation that troubles Dermody and Jacka. Yet,

the significance shifts with Dorland's double dream which appears to convey the double

conscious tendency to draw on perceived American identity to locate solutions to the inferior

aspects of perceived Canadian identity. Specifically, Dorland adds the idea of "competition" to

the goal of success in the American market.

The ability to compete with Hollywood, in the domestic and/or international markets,

alludes to the potential of escaping the subservient position; yet, as Dorland points out, the

double dream remains at the "level of the imaginary" (1996 125) thereby constituting a displaced

ideal. Hence, second cinema in the Canadian context blends the internalized inferiority

associated with secondariness together with the displaced goal of achieving first cinema success

which would rival the Hollywood model. Furthermore, first cinema goals appear to confuse the

development of effective policies designed to sustain Canadian second cinema. This awkward,

and often contradictory, combination of first and second cinema desires can be seen in

government studies, such as the Juneau and Houle Reports, which each offer assessments of the

nature of the problems facing the national film industry along with potential solutions.

Attribution of blame is further addressed through policy-related criticism. Finally, an

exploration of *The Road to Success* encapsulates the directional challenges facing policy

development and points to the role of the (absent) audience in the performance of the

contemporary Canadian canon.

THE BRINK OF [CULTURAL] EXTINCTION

The Finance Minister's announcement in the 1995 Federal Budget that the "Government

would conduct 'a fundamental review of its support to, and the mandates of, the CBC, NFB, and

Telefilm Canada'" (Juneau xi) lead to the formation of The Mandate Review Committee on May

2, 1995. Chaired by Pierre Juneau, the Committee, which also included Catherine Murray and

Peter Herrndorf, consulted each of the organizations under review and referred to previous

government studies and reports prior to submitting their final report in 1996. In addition to

"taking into account budgetary constraints and new technology," the Committee's mandate

review focused on the "Federal Government's overriding cultural objective for the audiovisual

sector...[of] ensuring production and availability of, and access to, Canadian content" (Juneau

281-2).

Similarly, Telefilm's 1997 "Report on the Production and Distribution of Canadian

Feature Films," which takes the form of an unpublished Issues Paper,[6] addresses the difficulties

that impede the realization of the Federal Government's key cultural goal. Cultural and

Communications Industries Consultant Michel Houle conferred with industry representatives

with the fundamental objective of "proposing changes aimed at creating a critical mass of high-

quality films for theatrical release which will attract Canadian audiences" (Houle 1). The Terms

of Reference for the Houle Report differ slightly from Telefilm's original mandate "to assist in

developing Canadian films and a domestic feature film industry" (Juneau 197). This shift entails

a narrowing of focus that ultimately functions to conceal the breadth of production; in other

words, although solutions tend to concentrate on fostering growth in the area of "culturally

Canadian" filmmaking, general policy directives do not clearly reflect this distinction. Thus,

aside from the specific recommendations of both the Juneau and Houle Reports, what emerges is

a fundamental ambiguity in the frame of reference that underlies policy formation.

In allocating funding assistance, Telefilm employs a point system that determines the

"extent to which key creative roles are occupied by Canadians" (Juneau 198). This ten point

system awards two points each for the writer and director (one of whom must be Canadian) and

one point each for the leading and second leading performers (one of whom must be Canadian).

Of the remaining four points, one each is awarded for the head of the art department, director of photography, music composer and editor. The six point, or industrial, films tend to disguise their creative origin. The Juneau Report explains that these productions "usually end up with an American star and a foreign writer" (199). Although the director and second leading performer would have to be Canadian, the script, with its foreign origin, would likely not reflect Canadian content. Also, the film's marketing would tend to focus on the leading performer.

Direct financial assistance from Telefilm goes to the eight to ten point films.[7] The text of the Juneau Report emphasizes the word "direct" because six point films receive indirect assistance through the Feature Film Distribution Fund (FFDF). The FFDF allocates funding to Canadian distribution companies who, according to the Report, have provided increasingly less support for the projects funded by the Feature Film Fund (FFF) (Juneau 210); the Houle Report states that "two thirds of the distribution advances paid by distributors supported by the FFDF have been for films not financed by the FFF" (Houle 24). This money is often used by large integrated distribution-production companies to support the distribution expenditures of Canadian films with unit budgets that are higher than the average $3 million FFF-supported budget (Houle 24); the Report suggests that in order to qualify for FFDF funding, these companies acquire films from independent production companies but then do not focus their resources on these lower budget features (Houle 23).

Although not explicitly stated, it could be inferred that many of the larger budget films are six point industrial features. As a result, the eight to ten point films, which comprise greater participation from Canadian talent, would receive a disproportionately small amount of government funding for distribution. The Houle Report does not mention the point system; it does, however, continually discuss the budget and box office receipts of eight to ten point films

such as *Un zoo la nuit* (Lauzon, 1986), *Exotica* (Egoyan, 1993) and *Black Robe* (Beresford, 1990). While it was "not a formal requirement" at the time of the Juneau Report (Juneau 199), a 1998 overview of Telefilm's programs indicates that the agency "will not invest in productions with fewer than 8 out of 10 points" (Dept. of Canadian Heritage: 1998 3). Nevertheless, in order to clarify the intended target for distribution funding assistance, the integration of the FFF and FFDF would need to be addressed. In addition, a greater level of differentiation is necessary in the accumulation and interpretation of data to allow for a clearer understanding of the split between industrially and culturally Canadian films.

Even if these additional issues were clarified, the Juneau Report notes that "there is no perfect correlation between the minimum requirement for 8 points and genuinely indigenous production" (208). This distinction further problematizes the understanding of what makes a film culturally Canadian. If it cannot be measured by quantifying the Canadian creative contribution, perhaps a qualitative measure is required. Morris writes that the nationalist assumption underlying the film canon emphasizes that Canadian films "should speak to and from the Canadian milieu" (1992 153). Yet, the resulting subjective evaluation raises questions as to its reliability while also focusing attention on a small portion of the films produced in Canada, by Canadians. The inclusion of Canadian talent, as in the industrial films, does not appear to qualify as an expression of national identity. Instead, the films must somehow reflect the experience of being Canadian.

However, reflection theory also fails to offer an adequate solution because the metaphor of reflection cannot adequately account for "the mechanics of the process" (Corse 13); the process of optic reflection can only offer an oversimplified, and easily disputed, explanation of the relationship between the fictive world of the text and the real world of the author. In

addition, Corse argues that "the national literature as national character perspective makes it difficult for us to understand cross-national literary commonality or intra-national literary difference" (13). Within Canadian cinema, the concept of a shared national culture expressed through film would suppress the distinct experiences of diverse ethnic groups; at the same time, universal themes, such as the search for identity, would threaten the closed concept of a unique national cinema. Instead, what appears to be at stake is a distinction between first and second cinema; in particular, policy directives appear to aim to make an economically-determined second cinema into an internationally accepted first cinema.

Failure to participate in cultural decolonization relegates industrial filmmaking to the category of first cinema. There is an uneasiness to this categorization due to the extent to which it downplays the contribution of Canadian creative talent. Yet, these films tend to opt for generic settings or create "false" settings, including specific, non-Canadian locales, using the Canadian landscape, thereby erasing elements of Canadian cultural specificity and resulting in texts which mimic Hollywood product. Conversely, the eight to ten point films comprise a Canadian second cinema. Based on "a thematic analysis of twenty-four [eight to ten point][8] films by sixteen Canadian film-makers" Mike Gasher "reveals a strong correlation between contextual themes and the film-makers' recurrent thematic preoccupations" (1993a 244);[9] these links between text and context provide a potential framework for defining "genuinely indigenous production."

Although Gasher concludes that cinema is both "culturally specific" and "variably defined" (1993a 245), he does not explore contextual links for industrial films that would help to prove whether discernible local or national difference could be ascertained across the entire range of Canadian feature filmmaking. Describing Canadian film production as "an industry

with two faces," Ted Magder argues that "[i]t is pointless to enter into a debate about which face is more revealing and more authentic" (1996 174). As such, the troubling aspects of designating industrial films under the rubric of first cinema arise from suppressing the contribution of an entire segment of film production to national culture. According to Kevin Dowler, industry and culture need to be considered as "sites of friction and contestation" in order to fully comprehend the "historical development of cultural policy in Canada" (343).

In fact, the friction surrounding the definition of "significant Canadian creative and artistic content" (Juneau 213) characterizes the Juneau Report's findings and recommendations concerning the future role of Telefilm. Thus, regardless of whether or not the debate appears worthwhile to Magder, the split between industry and culture determines the direction of funding initiatives. The Juneau Report situates its recommendations regarding the role of Telefilm within the question of "whether 'the fragile Canadian cultural dialogue within our borders' will continue to exist" (193). Viewed as a whole, however, the production of "Certified Canadian Productions" (Juneau 207) does not seem to be in danger of disappearing; on the contrary, with the exception of the sluggish growth of eight to ten point films, the industry appears quite healthy.

The Report offers a breakdown of growth in the independent production sector that separates the films based on the point system (Juneau 207). Films receiving seven points or less have experienced a 322 percent increase in production between the years of 1987 and 1994. The production of eight to ten point films, on the other hand, has only increased by 134 percent; although this remains a marked increase, it is less than half of the growth experienced in the industrial filmmaking sector. Moreover, this increase lags behind that of co-productions by more than half; the Report cites a 277 percent growth in international treaty co-productions

(207). And yet, when combined with the efforts of the National Film Board, which funded 102

original productions and "accrued well over 34 million viewers in 1996-7" (NFB: 1997 9, 17),

the evidence points to the achievements of government funding policy; the assistance of the

Canada Council along with provincial institutions, such as B.C. Film, further confirms this

conclusion.

ALLOCATING BLAME

Stressing the role of Telefilm as a "cultural corporation," the Committee recommends

that "[g]overnment policy should recognize that the development of a distinctive Canadian

cinema in French and in English is essential to the cultural life of the country" (Juneau 295).

Additional recommendations encourage clarifications to various Memoranda of Understanding

with the Department of Canadian Heritage and efficient fund administration. The Committee

highlights the importance of "a framework of integrated and complementary measures" to

support the distribution of Canadian content films (Juneau 239). Recommendations for the

National Film Board include a reduction of administrative redundancy and a more limited focus

on the production of films for theatrical release; instead, production should concentrate on

documentaries, animation, experimental film and educational materials (Juneau 290). A

concurrently prepared Year 2000 Mission Statement developed by the National Film Board

supports the shift toward an almost exclusive use of the video format, with a limited number of

productions transferred to film for theatrical release (NFB).

Despite the overall increase in the production of Canadian films, the Mandate Review

Committee focuses attention on the eight to ten point films, which are alternately referred to as

"distinctively Canadian productions" and "'made-for-Canada productions'" (Juneau 207). The

latter term is particularly misleading given the aforementioned importance of box office success outside the domestic market; furthermore, the "made-for-Canada" films are distinguished from the "made-for-export," or industrial, films. This muddling of terms conveys an often contradictory blending of cultural and economic imperatives that ultimately functions to obscure the conceptual framework for discussions of canon. Dorland cites problems in the knowledge field that extend from difficulties in obtaining data from state institutions to inadequate mechanisms of data collection (1998 148). Articulating the distinctions between the filmmaking sectors, or at least offering a more accurately detailed understanding of their interaction, coupled with initiatives in research would allow for a clearer perspective on the problems facing policy development.

In addition to conceptual and research challenges, the problem for policymakers actually centres around the production and theatrical distribution of eight to ten point films. Thus, not only does the shift in-the vision statement of the NFB place the majority of its productions beyond the central preoccupations of government policy, but growth in the industrial sector also exceeds the objective of fostering a "culturally distinctive" national cinema. This does not mean that policy ignores these areas, especially since they must be examined with each re-allocation of funding, but rather that the impetus for the continual flow of government reports is the fear that the "fragile cultural dialogue" may be on the brink of extinction. Yet, the figure for screen time devoted to showing Canadian films has remained fairly stable, at approximately three percent, "[t]hroughout the 1980s and into the 1990s" (Magder: 1996 150); unfortunately, even the screen time construct does not distinguish between industrially and culturally Canadian films.

Instead, the concern for the fate of Canadian culture appears to be fuelled by unrealistic goals. Specifically, calls for legislative change demonstrate the desire to develop a second

cinema using first cinema objectives. Dorland notes that the unstated purpose of the emergence of feature film policy involved "negotiating the passage from *the pre-capitalist artisanal economy of film production*...to greater or lesser degrees of integration into the circuits of exchange of the international capitalist economy of audiovisual production" (1998 146). While this statement does not abandon the anti-imperialist objectives of second cinema, it does demonstrate an increasing interest in the capitalistic aspects of first cinema. Rather than the mere assertion of a distinctive Canadian voice in the margins of the media landscape, it seems that the overthrow of American cultural hegemony, or at least the establishment of a truly equal playing field, is the ultimate goal.

Gasher writes that "the imagination is decolonized when the imagined possible is self-generated rather than externally imposed" (1993b 104). However, in the Canadian film canon, the imagined possible is already self-generated. Unfortunately, these future goals are both imagined and measured using an external yardstick. The Houle Report offers a comparison of the box office receipts of national films in several countries including Belgium, Australia, France and the United States. Whereas national films account for approximately 97 percent of American box office revenue, they only account for about one percent in English Canada (Houle 17).[10] Meanwhile, in Quebec, national films comprise five percent of box office while the Australian figure is closer to seven percent. It is important to note that the figures used in this comparison constitute a measure of market share that represents screen time, which "need not correspond with revenue" (Acland: 1999 4).

Explaining that the measures of screen time and market share are often conflated, Charles Acland notes that "for 1994-95, Canadian film accounted for 18% of the revenue earned by film distributors from theatres" (1999 5). Because it refers to the literal presence of films

playing in movie theatres, screen time provides a more specific measure of access to the (theatrical) audience. However, it cannot be assumed that increases in screen time would have a direct correlation to increases in revenue because screen time refers to the presence of a film in a commercial theatre but does not measure the size of the audience; in other words, putting a film on two screens instead of just one does not mean that twice as many people will attend. The difference between the English and French Canadian markets tends to be reduced to an issue of linguistic difference; the English market is deemed to be more susceptible to the higher budget American productions than the French Canadian market is to the imports from either France or the United States (Houle 17). Important insight could be gained by comparing the situation in English Canada with that of Australia or Belgium. Belgium's two percent offers a numeric equivalent while Australia's seven percent provides a reasonable goal. Instead, it seems at times as though policy directives hope to push the market much closer to the American domestic figures.

The desire to eliminate foreign control and foster domestic production appears to be aimed at the unlikely goal of 97 percent of the domestic box office; otherwise there would be no need to include the United States in the Houle Report's comparative chart of national box office receipts. This is not to imply that this goal is perceived to be in reach but rather to show the use of the "ideal" against which achievement is measured. Thus, Margaret Atwood's assertion that "Canadians could overcome 'the will to lose' by identifying 'the real cause of oppression'" (Morris: 1992 161) becomes quite ironic. The selection of an unattainable ideal situates the "cause of oppression" squarely within the national film canon. Even though "the cinema we need" tends to be defined in opposition to American filmmaking, its success tends to be measured in comparison. As a result of these unrealistic goals, the canon, to a certain extent,

serves as the colonizer that Gasher wishes to expel; as long as first cinema standards are applied to second cinema dreams, prescriptive criticism will continue to view the canon as 97 percent empty rather than 3 percent full.

Certain distinctions need to be made though with respect to the idea of cultural dependency, particularly as it is articulated in Manjunath Pendakur's 1990 book, *Canadian Dreams and American Control*, and Ted Magder's 1993 book, *Canada's Hollywood*. Dorland summarizes the main difference between the two texts based on Pendakur's perception of the state as "the agent of cultural *underdevelopment*" as opposed to Magder's view of the state as "an agent of dependent cultural *development*" (Dorland: 1998 32). In other words, Pendakur's study privileges the imperialist influences of American monopoly capital in the Canadian market, whereas Magder recognizes a more active role taken by the Canadian state in establishing the boundaries of governance (Magder: 1993 237). Yet, regardless of whether they examine dependency as being structured by internal or external forces, both retain a focus on developing explanations based on theories of the state; Dorland does note that Magder's study begins to move away from conceiving of the state as a monolithic entity toward a more complex consideration of the convergence of power relations (1998 32). In *So Close to the State/s*, Dorland expands the discursive boundaries, and switches from a Marxist to a neo-Foucauldian approach, for his exploration of the early development of the feature film industry; in doing so, he manages to incorporate a relational analysis of a range of discursive structures, that includes, but is not limited to, governmentality.

Separately from the discussion of governmentality and cultural dependency that characterizes policy-related criticism, it is also necessary to contextualize the desire to overthrow American cultural hegemony within the "double dream" of second cinema.

Admittedly, although the Houle Report offers several strategies that range from voluntary quotas to imposed investment (4-8), none of these solutions would ultimately succeed in removing Canadian film from the margin. Besides, it is not the task of this thesis to address, or negate, systemic problems in the film industry but rather to investigate the underlying assumptions that fuel the performance of canon. As such, rereading the canon is better understood as a search for the nature of the problem than a search for potential solutions, particularly given incomplete knowledge concerning the "problem"'s complexity along with continued reliance upon a displaced ideal goal. Prior to exploring the conceptual challenges that impede *The Road to Success*, it is worthwhile to examine a couple of additional expressions of second cinema dreams, cloaked in first cinema desires.

Sandra Gathercole refers to "the myth that, somehow, if we are a good branch plant and forfeit control of our own market, the Americans will allow us into theirs where we will have a shot at the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" (41). According to Gathercole, this myth underlies the failure of legislation and cultural policy to sanction American control of the Canadian market. Despite her exuberant denunciation of American cultural imperialism, Gathercole implies that Canada should mimic the xenophobic market protection of the United States; yet, American protectionism gets compared to that of Red China and Russia (Gathercole 41). Interestingly, this argument encapsulates the contradictory combination of distaste and "backhanded" admiration expressed in the Perceived National Identity. Unfortunately, this essay fails to critically consider the myth that it sarcastically dispels. The fact that government support of the Canadian film industry has avoided legislative intervention "designed to restrict the activities of foreign-controlled distributors" (Houle 4) raises issues about the selective focus of governmentality as well as the economic influence of American companies.

Steven Globerman disputes the need for government intervention in the distribution

sector and argues instead that increases in screen time can be achieved merely by "making more

films that a greater number of people want to see" (204). In his article, "Foreign Ownership and

the Canadian Film Industry," Globerman examines the theory that Canadian filmmakers find

their access to the domestic audience restricted due to unfair market practices on the part of

large vertically-integrated American distributors (which he refers to as the "majors"). These

unfair practices result in a purchasing bias against Canadian films that appears to be driven by

the perception that American films possess greater box office potential. While remedies could

include a redistribution, or an enforced reinvestment, of profits into the Canadian market, these

types of intervention would not resolve the problem of the low rate of return generated by

Canadian films for Canadian-owned distributors; as such, these subsidies would not increase the

incentive to distribute Canadian product (Globerman 195).

After examining structural aspects of the exercise of market power from several

perspectives, Globerman concludes that the majors' practices are rational, efficient and

competitive with "no bias against...commercially promising Canadian films" (191). Support for

the perception of uncompetitive prospects can be found in the Houle Report which notes "broad

consensus in the industry that inadequate financing has added to the structural problems...by

fostering reductions in the average unit budgets of distinctively Canadian feature films" (10).

Despite the fact that English Canadian films with individual unit budgets in excess of $5 million

enjoyed "by far the best results in movie theatres," the average unit budget of features financed

by the FFF remains "below $3 million" thereby placing their production values "at the level of

made-for-TV films" (Houle 21, 22). In addition, more than two thirds of these films "have less

than $150,000 [which is less than 6 percent of their production budget] spent on their national

marketing campaigns" (Houle 25).

Beyond the competitive barriers created by low unit budgets and inadequate marketing expenditures, Gasher cites block-booking as an additional complication. By requiring exhibitors to purchase packages of films, that generally include both "blockbusters" and "flops," the majors exert control over the majority of available screen time (Gasher: 1993a 71-2). At the same time, block-booking practices exempt these large vertically-integrated distributors from the meritocracy that Globerman wishes to impose on the Canadian industry; Gasher explains that Canadian features would have to "outperform consistently the industry average" in order to obtain distribution (1993a 73). Oddly enough, portions of Globerman's article indicate his awareness that "most mass-appeal films lose money" thereby making economies of both scale and scope important in the distribution sector (Globerman 200-201). The Houle Report similarly recommends the need for consolidation and integration as a means to protect companies against fragile positioning in a market that combines significant risk with a need for substantial financial resources (Houle 35, 37).

Thus, Globerman appears to expect the Canadian film industry to conform to standards that are neither applicable, nor effective, in the case of the dominant American firms. Even so, Globerman recommends expanding the narrow focus of "protectionist measures" beyond support for culturally Canadian films in order to establish a more diversified, and consequently "durable" industry (Globerman 205). Ultimately, Gasher accuses Globerman of adopting an exclusively economic perspective (Gasher: 1993a 66) and offering a simple solution to a "complex systemic problem" (245). However, in defining Canadian cinema as "a vehicle for cultural expression" (246) and restricting his focus to auteurs, Gasher replicates Globerman's narrow perspective by not taking into account either industrial productions or the economic impetus underlying

development in the cultural sector. Thus, in a sense, the recommendations advanced by Gasher and Globerman represent a splitting apart of cultural and economic perspectives with the overall result of two incomplete outlooks. Instead, as Dowler explains, the evolution of cultural industries policy in Canada has involved, and continues to rely on, "a blending of these two areas into a combined strategy" (341).

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

A useful example of the tension between economic and cultural imperatives is offered by the most recent foray into feature film policy development from the Department of Heritage, entitled *The Road to Success: Report of the Feature Film Advisory Committee*. The unfortunately pun-friendly title, which may in fact be an allusion to the seminal English Canadian feature *Goin' Down the Road* (Shebib, 1970), invites observations about the directional confusion of the Report's contents. "The Road to Success" invokes the displaced ideal, that characterizes Canadian film criticism, by placing (ultimate) success at a distance even though the Executive Summary highlights recent achievements in the areas of "international acclaim and box-office success" (ii-iii); the need to embark on additional changes despite current successes, coupled with the ambitious nature of the stated objectives with respect to screen time increases implies that "success" may be permanently out of reach. Furthermore, the absence of clear distinctions between cultural and industrial filmmaking contexts results in an ambiguous frame of reference that casts doubt upon the course charted by the Committee's recommendations.

Launched by Sheila Copps, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, during Telefilm's 30th anniversary in 1998, the review of feature film policy draws from comprehensive consultations

with film industry experts and submissions from members of the public (ii). The thirteen members of The Feature Film Advisory Committee[11] represent a regionally diverse selection of industry professionals from the production, distribution and exhibition sectors. Released in early 1999, the Report sets out a series of objectives designed to increase "the production capacity, diversity and availability of Canadian films" (ii). Recommendations include structural changes to the Feature Film Distribution Fund and the Production Services Tax Credit in order to stimulate higher average unit budgets and improved production quality. Also, an additional infusion of $50 million from the Federal Government along with investment incentives for the private sector and licensing incentives for the public sector would support growth in the overall feature funding pool to approximately $188 million. Finally, stronger partnerships with broadcasters and improved marketing would contribute to renewed vitality in the distribution sector.

A key goal, and perhaps the main objective measure of the success of the recommendations, is the target of, "at minimum," an increase in the amount of screen time spent showing Canadian films from two to ten percent by the year 2004 (5). The Report does not specify that this figure must apply to English Canadian theatres since the screen time figure for Quebec is closer to five percent (Houle 17); an awareness of the different totals is reflected by a brief mention within the text of the Report (3), that is not repeated in the Executive Summary or in the list of "Goals for Canada's Feature Film Industry." In a similar manner as the Houle Report, the discussion of box office revenues resorts to a conflation of the measure of screen time with that of market share. Specifically, the statement that "Canadian films account for only 2 to 3% of movie box-office revenues annually" is followed by the result that 85 percent of the revenue goes to foreign-owned businesses (3).

Several issues are raised by this mixing of terms. While not necessarily intended by the Advisory Committee, placing three percent in comparison with 85 demonstrates an extremely wide gap. Had the 85 percent of revenue earned by foreign distributors been compared with the 15 percent earned by Canadian companies the gap would shrink and become slightly less troubling; because of its proximity to zero, three percent gives the impression that the screen time share is on the verge of disappearing. Acland calls for an exploration of the ideological implications of employing this "standardized rhetorical trope" that provides "shorthand evidence...of the agreed-upon 'problem' of Canadian film" (1999 1-2). While screen time indicates a problem in the movement of films from producer to exhibitor, it also carries a "negative assessment of audience taste" (Acland: 1999 2). As a result, in the context of film criticism, low screen time share serves as both a site of inferiority and, for policymakers, a cause for alarm.

A misleading impression of the condition of the national film industry is also encouraged through the use of statistics that fail to differentiate between the six to seven point industrial films and the eight to ten point features. The celebration of achievements in the Advisory Committee Report's Introduction incorporates the titles of films, such as *Le Confessionnal* (Lepage 1995) and *Jésus de Montréal* (Arcand, 1989) and the names of directors, including Atom Egoyan and François Girard; all of the films listed fall into the category of eight to ten point productions while the directors are either established auteurs or emerging directors whose first features would be categorized as culturally Canadian. These lists are followed by the economic assessment that the entire film and television production sector accounts for "more than 30,000 direct jobs" and contributes "$2.8 billion to Canada's Gross Domestic Product;" in addition, "every dollar of federal investment in feature film...generates an investment of $3.88

from all other sources" (2).

Despite the fact that the Executive Summary more clearly states that these figures represent the overall output of the production sector, of which feature filmmaking is only one part, the impression emerges that the production of culturally Canadian films is a lucrative endeavour. The differentiation between the various types of feature film production in the Report's examination of theatrical success overlooks the fact that screen time totals are often elevated by the release of industrial features; for example, based on *Take One*'s survey of screen time in Greater Toronto, *Air Bud* was the top-grossing Canadian film of 1997 (Wise 1998 49). Similar to the use of the phrase "Canadian screen time" to refer to English Canadian exhibition, the Advisory Committee designates the eight to ten point films as "feature films." Although this may initially appear to constitute quibbling over terminology, the significance of the Report's lack of clarity becomes apparent with a consideration of the Committee's focus on cultural goals.

Since the majority of the recommended re-structuring deals either directly or indirectly with the Feature Film Fund, which supports eight to ten point films, it would seem necessary to provide statistical data concerning the actual object of study. Additional ambiguity arises from the use of the average production budget of an American film as a basis for comparison in discussing the inadequacies of the average Canadian production budget. Unlike the American figure of $76 million, of which $20 million is spent on marketing, Canadian films funded by Telefilm boast budgets of less than $2 million, with $150,000 spent on marketing (3-4). While the Report states that "Canadian filmmakers don't seek to imitate the skyrocketing budgets of Hollywood" (4), the comparison is unavoidable since no other examples are provided; it would have been more informative to cite comparative figures from another government-subsidized national film industry such as that of Australia. Instead, this comparison reflects the application

of American measures, or first cinema goals, to assess the development of a second cinema.

In a section entitled "Cornerstone Changes," the Advisory Committee provides a plan for consolidating both existing and new resources to create a new Feature Film Fund (7). The new FFF would allocate "up to 80%" of its funds "through an automatic trigger based on box-office receipts and international success" while the remaining 20% would be selectively directed toward "projects not qualifying under the automatic fund" such as first features from emerging filmmakers or a mentoring program (13-14). These changes represent the application of economic imperatives to a Fund that has traditionally been guided by cultural goals. The potential limitative pressure exerted by the automatic trigger could function to reduce the diversity of projects funded by Telefilm. Reliance upon "objective and readily measurable" box-office and international success (13) encourages a movement toward the repetition of proven formulas. Given the Committee's expressed aversion to "smaller budgets [that] restrain storytelling and restrict artistic reach" (4), it is odd that they would opt to subject filmmakers to the kind of market pressures that may eventually produce the same unwanted results.

Additional concerns arise from the overarching focus of the Advisory Committee Report on the production of feature films for theatrical release. Aside from changes to the Production Services Tax Credit that would restrict eligibility to feature films made for theatrical release (9), the new FFF would possess a mandate that includes a directive to "put more Canadian feature films into Canadian theatres" (11). This narrow focus on theatrical exhibition as the first, if not the primary, point of audience access overlooks the relatively small portion of films that it designates. Furthermore, Globerman's recommendations regarding broadening Canadian distribution endeavours point to the importance of creating an economy of scope in order to promote overall stability in the film industry. The Report does briefly mention that the

achievement of the Committee's key recommendations will ensure that Canadian films are available in video stores, on television and "within new technologies" (6); however, aside from calling for stronger links with broadcasters, the Report offers little evidence that the full potential of the various distribution markets has been considered.

THE ABSENT AUDIENCE

A key group consistently either overlooked or oversimplified in canon formation is the audience.[12] The construct of screen time, as Acland explains, "doesn't tell you if the venue seats 50 or 500; it doesn't tell you if anyone is actually in the seats" (1999 3). Instead, screen time provides a standardized measure of the per week bookings of films in commercial theatres that does not take into account "parallel venues" (Acland: 1999 4), such as festivals, which constitute a important exhibition site for Canadian films; Harcourt notes that the annual Perspective Canada screenings at the Toronto International Film Festival "without exception, play to packed houses" (Acland: 1997 291). As a result, screen time serves as a narrow indicator of the accessibility of Canadian films in popular venues and, in more ways than one, the absence of the audience. Attempts to buttress calls for screen time increases with evidence of audience demand tend to say more about nationalism than they do about audience behaviour.

The Advisory Committee Report concludes with a statement of firm belief that their recommendations will lead to success "in all the arenas that count," the first two of which are box office and screen time (23). According to the introductory section, an Angus Reid survey[13] found that "[a] majority of respondents believe that it is important that Canadian features be shown in Canadian theatres" (1). Additional citations from the survey support the conviction that increased selection and better marketing would cause Canadians to choose domestic films

over Hollywood ones when they go to the movies; this conviction, in turn, serves as part of the rationale for the focus on funding films destined for theatrical release. However, the generalized nature of these citations suggests that the survey findings may be clouded by nationalist sentiment that does not carry over to actual viewing habits.

In fact, a perusal of the data strengthens the suspicion that the preference expressed for Canadian films, along with the belief in their superior quality, probably demonstrates a halo effect generated by nationalism. Respondents were provided with a list of 12 Canadian feature films that had nation-wide theatrical release; an additional list of eleven films released in Quebec was also provided [14-16]. Of the national titles, 36% of respondents had not seen any of the films listed, while 13% had not seen any of the Quebec films; presumably, the Quebec figure represents Quebecois respondents since an overall combined total of 45% "not seen" is also noted. Focusing on the nation-wide section, since some of the Quebec titles would have received only provincial release and others are french versions of already listed titles, the features watched by the remaining 64% of respondents break down in the following way: The most-watched film, *Decline of the American Empire*, was seen by 24% while the least-watched film, *Lilies*, was seen by only 3%; third place and sixth place are occupied by the industrial films *Johnny Mnemonic* and *Air Bud*, which were seen by 19% and 10% respectively.

These charts are followed by a section concerning the "comparability of Canadian films" which notes that 45% "strongly agree" that "Canadian features are as good as other countries [sic]" [18]. In response to the question of whether "American movies are better", 30% "strongly agree" while 40% "neither agree nor disagree" [22]. Interestingly, 40% also "neither agree nor disagree" with the statement that "Canadian productions are 'not as good' as others" [20]; since there are no questions that more specifically address international films, "others" implies

Hollywood. Furthermore, the phrasing of the statements makes it more an issue of the absence of inferiority than the presence of superiority on the part of Canadian films. Regardless, the usefulness of responses concerning comparative quality is questionable given the frame of reference possessed by the respondents. Based on the low percentages for the Canadian films that they had seen, it is debatable whether they had much viewing experience with which to make such assessments; and yet, "don't know" was never selected by more than 5% in responses to the comparative questions.

Therefore, the reliability of the key findings that "Canadians have positive attitudes about the Canadian film industry" and that "[t]he quality of the films has improved and Canadian films are comparable with those made in other countries" [4] requires clarification. Indeed, the absence of strong negative attitudes, even without broad viewing experience, provides some useful information about the perception of Canadian cinema. But, these findings could also indicate a halo effect in that positive responses could have more to do with "Canadian" than "film;" as such, negative answers would carry a certain anti-nationalist sentiment that respondents may have wished to avoid. The presence of a halo effect that skews the findings is further evidenced by the fact that, out of three possible "mentions," only 9% of respondents cite "country of origin" as an influence over their movie choices; and, it comprises only 2% of first mentions [9-10].

"Word of mouth" and "the story," with 65% and 55% respectively, are most frequently cited as motivating factors in film selection; these criteria make up 29% and 26%, respectively, of the first mentions. "Advertising" appears much lower on the list at 30% overall, and 9% of first mentions. Despite receiving a lower ranking than "critical acclaim," the influence of advertising actually extends much higher up the list, especially since word of mouth can be

sparked by promotional material. As a result, the survey's findings clearly indicate an important link between marketing and movie attendance. And yet, *The Road to Success* is particularly vague about marketing initiatives. Although marketing is listed in the summary of "cornerstone changes," the subsequent detailed segment about the distribution sector fails to explain how it would be "strengthened through regulatory or legislative options" (8/18). This is a surprising oversight particularly given that, even though 73% strongly agree about the "importance of Canadian films being shown in Canadian theatres," only 27% strongly agree that "Canadian feature films are not easily accessible" [27/31].

Instead of focussing on issues of absence in the realm of exhibition, Acland offers "an alternate reading of screen-time" that considers the effect of the simultaneous presence of a core of "relatively few, massively visible, motion pictures" (1999 6-7). This conceptual shift from absence to presence is not intended to "flip the conclusion of 'failure' into one of 'success'" but rather to expand the investigation of the ways in which national cinema is measured (Acland: 1999 9). In particular, popular viewing habits ought to be explored alongside both targets of increased accessibility and the impact of being saturated by foreign culture. It would also be worthwhile to consider the impact of the canon's awkward combination of defeatist lament with fervent prescription. The power of the overriding bleak tone creates a negative first impression of Canadian film that can be difficult to displace and may even encourage the audience to remain absent; but then, even that assumption should not be made on their behalf.

The frame of reference that guides the development of policy imperatives constitutes an incomplete equation. If feature film policy is intended "to stimulate both supply *and* demand [my emphasis]" (Houle 3), areas of study should encompass production, distribution and exhibition. The audience currently occupies a position of absence due to both low screen-time

totals for Canadian film and the lack of a complex measure of viewing habits. In addition to "revisiting the absent audience," questions should also be raised concerning the nature of the displaced goals of policy. A blending of second cinema potential with first cinema desire generates unrealistic goals which are exemplified by the Advisory Committee's minimum target of an eight percent screen-time increase, even though this figure has remained constant for almost twenty years in spite of a seemingly endless flow of commission reports and issues papers. This double dream for Canadian cinema complicates the tension between the cultural and economic forces that drive film policy development. The three percent figure should perhaps be used instead as a metaphor for the narrow focus and small scope of the community currently implicated in the performance of the contemporary Canadian canon; stronger bonds with the audience and demands for increased accessibility to the canonical infrastructure for improvements to constructs, research data and conceptual distinctions need to be encouraged in order to foster this fragile dialogue.

NOTES:

1. Department of Canadian Heritage: 1999 vi.

2. Willemen notes that "[i]n Europe, most Third Cinema products appear definitely to have been consumed in a Second Cinema way, bracketing the politics in favour of an appreciation of the authorial artistry" (183).

3. It is important to note that Solanas and Getino focus on second cinema in Argentina which consisted of "a national cinema limited by a neocolonial context" (44).

4. Stephen Crofts notes that the manifesto displays a critique of bourgeois individualism (regardless of the influence of humanism on 1960's European art cinema) of first and second cinemas which differs from third cinema's focus on the masses. He also situates Solanas and Getino's work within the context of Marxist-inspired theories (52-54). These aspects of the initial context lose their influence, to varying degrees, upon subsequent reinterpretations of third cinema.

5. Globerman's figures are from 1984 but he argues that "it is unlikely that more recent numbers would alter the conclusion" (197).

6. The Paper is described as a "progress report" that is intended to facilitate a second round of consultations. Also, a disclaimer explains that the "structure and orientation" of the Paper represent the work of the consultant, Michel Houle, and should not be "construed as representing the position of Telefilm or that of the Department of Canadian Heritage" (1-2).

7. An exception includes the funding of co-productions and "twinned production packages" which also receive direct assistance (Dept. of Canadian Heritage: 1998 3)

8. Gasher's focus on auteur cinema indicates that the films under consideration are most likely eight to ten point productions.

9. Gasher's model will be considered in greater detail with discussions of descriptive canon formation in Chapter 4.

10. This one percent figure differs from the two to three percent generally cited in other sources; no explanation is offered for this discrepancy. Both Gasher (1993a 59) and Acland (1999 2) note that the use of a figure of two to three percent to represent screen-time of Canadian films in Canadian theatres has become so common that it often appears without citation.

11. The thirteen Committee members were Tom Berry, Wayne Clarkson, Lisa de Wilde, Michael Donovan, Ted East, Roger Frappier, Michael Herman, Robert Lantos, André Link, Denise Robert, Tom Rowe, Michael Spencer and Carole Vivier.

12. The use of the term audience is intended to reflect the diversity of both its members and their viewing habits. Thus, my use of this term, which is singular, is for grammatical efficiency.

13. An Omnibus survey, with a margin of error of +/- 2.5%, 19 times out of 20, of 1,501 Canadians conducted between March 4 and 9 1998.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONSTRUCTING (CON)TEXTUAL CATEGORIES

Film history devoid of value judgments would degenerate into a
hobby like bridge or stamp collecting, respectable in its esoteric way,
but not too revelatory.

Andrew Sarris[1]

Approaching a descriptive canon of contemporary Canadian cinema involves shifting

focus from the mechanisms of canon formation to an examination of the cinema itself; in many

ways, it is a shift from questioning the canon's form to studying its content. The first three

chapters of this thesis addressed several factors that shape canon formation in the Canadian

context. The admission criteria of origin, value and critical perspective were examined in

Chapter One, while Chapter Two considered the performative nature of the canon and its

relationship to national identity. Chapter Three explored the canon's intersection with cultural

policy along with the extent to which the audience tends to be either simplified or overlooked in

policy development. All of these elements intertwine to influence how the boundaries of the

canon are determined, as well as to establish the standards used to assess its overall quality.

Although an ideal descriptive canon would seek to avoid being restricted by prescriptive

boundaries and attempt to refrain from communicating value judgements, issues of selection

remain unavoidable.

In other words, differing sets of priorities are implicated even in the process of describing

contemporary Canadian cinema. The creation of text-based categories involves grouping films

in ways that provide insight into the contours of both filmmaking practice and national cultural

identity. This chapter will consider a range of approaches that vary the centricity of nationalism

in the delineation of national cinema.[2] For example, Gasher's concept of a cinema of

appropriation demonstrates an approach to defining an English Canadian second cinema that

relies on downplaying the inextricable links between culture and industry, while also reinforcing traditional canonical paradigms. This is followed by a case study of an aesthetic category that is less implicated in the search for the distinctively national, but instead considers the necessity of developing hybrid categories that correspond to the complex relationship between image and referent, or text and context. Lastly, place and voice are posited as basic categories that can be used to survey the diversity of film production in terms of national specificity. Prior to exploring strategies for descriptive canon formation, it is necessary to examine the evaluative aspects of selection in order to better understand what happens when certain films are chosen instead of others.

MAKING SELECTIONS

Since it is not feasible "[i]n purely practical terms...[to] study every film ever made" (Staiger 8), canon formation involves privileging certain texts, while marginalizing others, for reasons that are both organizational and ideological. In her discussion of "the politics of selection," Janet Staiger describes three main rationales that inform the selection of canonical texts and provide the basis for "a politics of inclusion and exclusion" (8). Establishing a set of core texts allows for a certain amount of efficiency in that it becomes easier to briefly illustrate an argument without the need for extended explanation. Similarly, classifying films in terms of "generalizing characteristics" (9) provides order by creating smaller groupings as a first step in systematic study. In each case, however, Staiger notes the potential for the chosen texts to be mistaken as the best or only possible films for consideration, which could lead to inaccurate or reductive interpretations that ultimately hinder, rather than encourage, the development of further areas of study.

Thus, although seemingly organizational, selecting films for reasons of efficiency and typicality also carries ideological effects. Films that are not easily classified tend to be either excluded or denied sufficient mobility across categories; for the sake of coherence and consistency, organizational boundaries can become increasingly rigid and exert limitative pressure on the criteria for admission. Accessibility also plays an important role in that a film cannot become part of an economical, allusive discourse if it is not widely available (usually on video) for viewing. As a result, just as inclusion can be misunderstood as an indication of exemplary status, exclusion can be misinterpreted as meaning that a particular text is not worthy of study; there is a limit to this argument though, since a lacklustre theatrical release can impede a film's potential for wide release in the home video market thereby limiting its availability.[3] Even so, beyond the logistical aspects that affect canonical status, the biases of the critical community will influence the ways in which selection is organized.

Evaluative selection comprises the third rationale for choosing canonical texts and Staiger notes that "it is here that politics is most definitely involved" (10). In order to justify the pursuit of film studies and, in Sarris' terms, to prevent film history from becoming an esoteric hobby, evaluative standards are employed to designate each film's relative importance and to structure the ordering of categories. Although Staiger makes a distinction between basing a canon upon an evaluative standard and the use of the aforementioned rationales of efficiency and typicality, value judgements play a role whenever certain texts are privileged over others. Her suggestion that "[a] random or unbiased selection" (10) might prove the validity of inductively established categories offers an unattainable theoretical position that assumes that bias could be erased by invoking statistical certainty. Instead, this attempt to validate qualitative decisions with quantitative techniques merely substitutes one set of discursive biases for another;

claims of scientifically measurable accuracy reinforce dominant interpretations by making them appear to be the natural, or only choice, thereby foreclosing the potential for alternative approaches.

As such, an "illusion of consensus" would surround these inductively established, statistically verifiable, categories that resembles the expression of "hegemonic cultural needs" that Staiger describes at the root of evaluative standards (10). Despite the pervasiveness of value judgements in the selection process, Staiger's definition of evaluative assessment deals with the perceived goal of canon formation. In other words, unlike the "unintentional" political implications of selections based on efficiency and typicality, evaluative selection is geared toward generating information that will be beneficial for society. For instance, criteria for inclusion and exclusion can be determined in order to yield contextual insight, to validate cultural norms or to preserve "masterpieces." Yet, these evaluative standards are themselves structured in relation to the value systems, priorities and tastes of the scholars and critics who engage in canon formation. Thus, while Staiger cites the belief that "social good will be achieved with value selections," the question remains "who determines the social good?" (11)

Ultimately then, given the prevalence of value judgements in the selection process, perhaps the best way to approach a descriptive canon would involve maintaining an awareness of both the constructedness of categories and the political implications of privileging particular texts; or, in Staiger's terms, the dangers of evaluative selection can potentially be averted by making visible the politics "of centering at the expense of marginalizing classes, genders, sexual orientations, or cultures" (18). From this perspective, a descriptive canon would allow for a multiplicity of categories that are hybrid in nature and therefore open to continual de-centring. A hybrid category would be able to incorporate seemingly incongruous aesthetic tendencies as

well as the examination of texts from a number of different critical perspectives. At the same time, instituting fluid boundaries would prevent reductive categorization while also acknowledging the contested nature of the margins.

Although hybridity, multiplicity and fluidity would undermine the continuation of an efficient discourse, the diversity of Canadian film production resists easy classification. Or, perhaps more accurately stated, attempts to generalize Canadian cinema have resulted in a reductive view of actual filmmaking practice that bases its views on prescriptive evaluations of the (in)ability of canonical texts to achieve "an ideal-typical theory of a Canadian national cinema as defined by Canadian film scholars" (Dorland: 1998 7). Dorland refers to the "epistemological instability of the object of study" (1998 9) as one of the main reasons for the emergence of this concept of a displaced ideal cinema within film criticism. Although this critical focus is also attributed to concurrent trends in Canadian historiography, Dorland notes that critics initially did not choose to focus on the "complex heterogeneity" of Canadian cinema and have since remained "remarkably incurious" about the specific reasons for changes in production practice (1998 7-9). Similarly, the decision to approach a retrospective for the 1967 Centennial celebrations as a chronology rather than as an exploration of a range of styles or practices seeks to substitute "a continuum of 'creativity'" for a "'collection of side issues'" (Dorland: 1998 128).

In other words, the desire to suppress, or perhaps "smooth over," the diverse elements of Canadian film history has been expressed through a search for consistent and coherent categories. Both the displaced ideal cinema and the establishment of a chronological overview demonstrate the nationalist goal of generating an illusion of substance by asserting the (potential) presence of unified national cinema at the expense of an examination of gaps or

discontinuities. A shift toward a more descriptive approach to canon formation would involve

exploring the cinema in all of its complexity without a preconception of what the canon *should*

express, or the perception that (coherent) substance and discontinuity are mutually exclusive. It

does remain important, however, to consider the evaluative goals of forming a descriptive canon

since its texts will continue to be culled for insights that will be useful in policy-related

discussions and other social or historical discursive fields. As such, the ideal descriptive canon

also comprises a prescriptive theoretical model, but at the opposite end of the spectrum from the

critics' displaced idealist cinema.

A CINEMA OF APPROPRIATION

Replacing a prescriptive canon that asserts an unattainable goal with a descriptive canon

that resists evaluative criticism basically entails supplanting one displaced ideal with another; at

the same time, attempting such a unfeasible shift would maintain the moralistic tone of critical

discourse at the continued expense of detailed discussions of text and context. Instead, the focus

could be shifted to the construction of categories that demonstrate an awareness of the

implications of different approaches; in addition, these categories can begin to move beyond a

deterministic examination of the qualities of the text to consider aspects of the context of both

production and consumption. An example of one type of approach to descriptive canon

formation can be found in Mike Gasher's study of English Canadian auteur cinema. Gasher

combines a re-reading of the marginalization of Canadian independent filmmaking with

thematic analyses in order to devise a set of categories that evidence "a correlation between

contextual themes and the discernible preoccupations of sixteen English-Canadian film-makers

in an analysis of twenty-four films" (1993a iv).

Gasher bases his observations about English Canadian auteur cinema on an examination

of the political economy of feature film production as interpreted through the cultural theories of

Raymond Williams; he specifically focuses on Williams' writings about cultural materialism to

emphasize that cinema is best understood as a social practice that occurs within complex

historical, political and social conditions (1993a 34). In addition, Gasher refutes arguments

based on neoclassical economic theory, as exemplified in the work of Stephen Globerman, that

describe the marginal position of Canadian independent filmmaking in terms of a failure to

achieve success in a meritocratic commodity system. Not only do these arguments minimize the

impact of vertical and horizontal integration, their economic focus also overlooks the extent to

which the market privileges "Hollywood tastes" at the expense of the articulation of cultural

difference (1993a 66).

In examining the resurgence of feature filmmaking in English Canada since 1984, Gasher

locates an oppositional "cinema of appropriation" that rejects Hollywood standards and asserts a

distinctive voice in the Canadian mediascape (1993a 246). The experience of participating in a

marginalized cinema emerges via five prevalent themes which are "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" (1993a 7).

Corresponding to the filmmakers' self-conscious reflections, these thematic categories "merge in

a discernible metatext" (1993a 135). This metacinematic discourse illustrates the

interconnectedness of film texts with the material conditions of their production, leading Gasher

to conclude that "cinema is culturally specific and...variably defined;" from this perspective,

cinema cannot be reduced to either universal language or economic commodity (1993a 245). At

the same time, Gasher manages to affirm the presence of a recognizably distinct, indigenous

cinema that engages with the circumstances shaping the expression of national identity.

Noting a thematic preoccupation with issues of "mediation and representation" and their significant impact on the definition of identity, Gasher examines the films of Atom Egoyan which "dwell on the increasing mediation of modern communication and explore the ambiguous frontier between image and identity" (1993a 135).[4] At the beginning of *Speaking Parts* (1989), Lisa (Arsinée Khanjian) watches television by candlelight and the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of the video, degraded into pixels, that shows Lance (Michael McManus) in the background as an extra; a lone long-stemmed rose next to two candles marks the intimacy of the viewing experience while also evoking a sense of ritual, as it is later revealed that she habitually rents Lance's films. The next morning, Lance finds a bouquet of similar roses in a dryer of the laundry room at the hotel where he works with Lisa. Although the two rarely even speak to one another, Lisa insists that he is her "lover," demonstrating that she believes she has established an actual physical relationship based on an emotional connection with his image.

The challenge of making connections in a highly mediated environment extends to "the struggle to define community." Often forged out of difference, these communities can emerge from either a shared place or common social circumstances (Gasher: 1993a 160). Gasher describes *The Company of Strangers* (Scott, 1990) as "an allegorical portrait of the Canadian people told through the experiences of eight women" (1993a 158). In Cynthia Scott's film, the two types of community are combined in the story of a group of elderly women who become stranded in the country when their bus breaks down; temporarily dependent upon one another for survival and companionship, the women find common ground, despite differences of race, class and religion, and form a "harmonious sorority" of sorts (1993a 159). In contrast, Egoyan's films often approach community on the microcosmic level of the "dysfunctional family" (1993a 159).

For example, in *Next of Kin* (1984), Peter Foster (Patrick Tierney) opts to leave his own family and join a more nurturing environment by posing as the long lost son of Deryans.

According to Gasher, "the individual's connection to his or her society" is often explored using "art as a vehicle for self-discovery" (1993a 175). The frequent use of artists as protagonists suggests a self-reflexive examination of both the filmmaker's quest for expression and "the larger national community's search for itself" (1993a 182). *White Room* (Rozema, 1990) begins with voice over narration which introduces the protagonist, a young writer named Norman Gentle; however, despite having an active imagination, "when he tried to put words on it, it always slipped away." As a result, Norman substitutes voyeuristic prowling for his inability to articulate his stories; his silence is further reinforced in that the opening voice over comes from an unidentified female who explains Norman's situation for the audience. Similarly, Patricia Rozema has described both herself and the central character of her film, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987), as "be[ing] aware of the feeling...that there is something out there beautiful and ethereal" that eludes representation (Cagle 106); Robert Cagle relates the resulting sense of alienation to the dominant presence of American popular culture.

Issues of cultural colonization also underlie the "desire to escape 'here,'" which Gasher relates to the "experiences of Canadian film-makers with their marginalized practice" (1993a 208). Since "the [cultural] centre is anywhere but 'here,'" protagonists will often embark on a journey that can be either metaphorical or real (1993a 208). In *Highway 61* (McDonald, 1992), Pokey Jones (Don McKellar) keeps a packed suitcase in his car just in case the opportunity should arise to depart his mundane existence as the town barber in Pickerel Falls, Ontario. Although he swears that he "almost left last night," it is apparent that Pokey has been saying this for some time. Arguing that he "wouldn't fit in" with his friend Claude's "BTO tribute band,"

Pokey dreams of going somewhere he could play his horn; even Claude's claim that their repertoire extends beyond the oeuvre of Canadian band Bachman Turner Overdrive to include Metallica and Guns N Roses, it is clear that Pickerel Falls does not offer the cultural stimulation that Pokey seeks.

Although Gasher points out that the theme of "escaping 'here' is employed primarily as an escape *from*," several films present the United States as the preferred destination due to "Canadians' fascination with American popular culture" (1993a 223). Thus, as soon as he finds a tangible reason for leaving, Pokey embarks on a journey down Highway 61 toward New Orleans. Hoping to re-trace musical history along the way, from the first home of Bob Dylan to the birthplace of jazz, Pokey instead encounters Margo (Tracey Wright), a strung out superstar who insists that her guests participate in an indoor chicken hunt in order to provide fresh food for dinner. Gasher explains that Canadians' ambivalent relationship with American culture finds expression in the revelation that "its appeal is based on illusion and...delusion" (1993a 223). When he finds himself stranded, Pokey discovers that his real talent is not as a musician but as a barber and, after trying unsuccessfully to strike up a tune as a busker, switches to providing shaves for a group of bikers. As a result, even though he finds love in New Orleans, Pokey learns that America does not hold any magical fulfillment for his cultural aspirations.

Each of these five thematic categories fits in with Gasher's interpretation of cinema "as a site for contestation of ideas about nation and national community" (1993a 1-2). Taken together, these thematic preoccupations confirm the presence of a "cinema of appropriation" that can be linked to the experiences of marginalization encountered by Canadian filmmakers in the areas of production and distribution. In addition, the emergence of a metacinematic discourse resembles "the razor's edge of detachment," that, according to Frye, comprises a key distinction between

"serious" and "popular" literature; whereas popular literature merely expresses, and therefore reinforces, a social mythology, serious literature is "a conscious mythology...[which] creates an autonomous world that gives us an imaginative perspective on the actual one (1995 237-39). Therefore, in cinematic terms, the self-reflexive metatext of English Canadian auteur films provides creative insight into contextual factors that affect both filmmakers and audience members; the resulting critical distance can, in turn, be seen as a marker of artistic quality.

However, in his search to define and validate the existence of a distinctive national art cinema, Gasher replicates the standard canonical interpretations of Canadian cinema without adequate acknowledgement of what continually gets left out. The resulting descriptive canon strives to institute unity over difference by smoothing over the discontinuities and heterogeneous aspects of filmmaking practice in the national context. By restricting his study to English Canadian cinema, for reasons of "scholarly precedent" and "theoretical consistency" (1993a 20), Gasher repeats the bicultural division between two national cinemas. Admittedly, a detailed consideration of the additional contextual factors that impact film production in Quebec would increase the "cumbersomeness" that already constitutes the study's "greatest drawback" (1993a 22); thus, a parallel examination of the correlation between textual and contextual concerns in Quebec cinema could perhaps serve as the basis for a subsequent analysis.

Gasher further brackets out industrial productions in order to focus on independent filmmakers who work in the margins of the commodity-driven, foreign-dominated sectors of the Canadian film industry.[5] This distinction excludes a significant portion of the national cinema while also suppressing the extent to which the development of Canadian feature film policy took place within a "continental or transnational framework" (Dorland: 1998 115); in particular, Dorland cites shifts in the international political economy toward multi-national financing of

film production as well as the influence of Firestone's 1965 Distribution Study[6] which stressed the need for voluntary arrangements with US distributors for a share in a common North American market (1998 57 & 103-110). As such, any study that divides up Canadian cinema in economic terms needs to balance the idea of American cultural imperialism against the reality of governmental complicity and participation in the evolution of a North American cinema culture. At the same time, Acland notes that the economic argument is insufficient "because it reduces the multifarious pleasures of U.S. cinema to a simplistic notion of ideological invasion" (1997 282).

HYBRID CATEGORY - THE CREATIVE TREATMENT OF ACTUALITY

The use of an economically determined positioning allows for a similarly reductive focus on cultural issues in purely nationalist terms. Sufficiently broad to encompass a wide range of texts, the five thematic categories are brought together through links to marginalized auteur practice that emphasizes difference from the Hollywood model. Even though Gasher rejects the use of the neoclassical economic argument as a means to account for the marginalization of Canadian films, he accepts this margin as the site of noteworthy cinematic achievement; as such, the idea of a cinema of appropriation embraces second cinema status while ignoring the presence of first cinema involvement in the Canadian context. The descriptive potential of these contextual categories is undermined by the resulting zone of absence, which can be described in terms of placement "outside of our authorized language for posing questions about culture" (Acland: 1995 293). Rather than effectively describing a national canon, Gasher seems to locate a version of the idealized national cinema that has been long sought after by prescriptive critics. In the process, however, the diverse experiences of individual filmmakers are homogenized and

there is little interest in what the audience is actually doing.

An alternative approach to descriptive canon formation might attempt a post-nationalist reading in order to alleviate the reductive pressure of searching for a unified system of classification. A post-nationalist interpretation of the politics of selection would dispense with the construction of efficient, generalizable categories in favour of a more detailed examination of the complex contradictory context of production and reception. Of course, this type of approach would not be post-national in that it would continue to concentrate on aspects of cinema culture in the Canadian context; in other words, geographic boundaries remain significant given the involvement of governmental practice in the delineation of cultural policy and the specific socio-historical contours of film production. Instead, this approach hinges on the difference between nationalist unity and national specificity, with the latter allowing for areas of irreducible difference.

However, if a sense of national belonging relies, to a certain extent, on a shared identity, then these areas of difference threaten to overwhelm the concept of a national cinema; the question arises as to how centrifugal variances can be sustained without some sort of core, unless locational specificity can provide a type of centre. Even then, the fluidity of economic and cultural boundaries with the United States, along with an ambivalent perception of American identity, reveals discrepancies between the physical and metaphysical borders. Yet, the development of many aspects of North American popular culture in transnational terms makes it difficult to locate the exact boundaries of the Canadian nation. Despite this epistemological instability, distinctive categories can be found that exchange narrow coherence for an acknowledgement of shifting boundaries.

For instance, John Grierson's definition of documentary as the "creative treatment of

actuality" designates an aesthetic mode wherein texts resist easy classification. Peter Steven

elaborates on the blurring of traditional critical categories used to differentiate between narrative

and documentary, or fictional versus factual filmmaking (14-15). Noting the proliferation of

forms that have emerged in conjunction with the advent of television and the emergence of new

technologies such as video, Steven notes a shift toward distinguishing between narrative and

exposition, with documentary subsumed as an expository form; even these labels fail to offer an

adequate aesthetic distinction since "[d]ocumentary has always employed narrative techniques"

(14-16). Ultimately, Steven concludes that these hybrid texts can be categorized based on the

extent to which they incorporate fictionalized elements (16). For example, Cynthia Scott uses

documentary techniques to enhance a dramatic narrative in *The Company of Strangers* (1990),

while Anne Claire Poirier includes highly aestheticized sequences to investigate the personal and

social costs of drug addiction in *Tu as crié Let Me Go* (1996). Finally, the inclusion of Brenda

Longfellow's experimental short, *Our Marilyn* (1987), expands this discussion beyond feature

films to consider the use of documentary footage in an exploration of the fluidity of borders.

Director Cynthia Scott describes the alternative drama program at the National Film

Board as the inspiration for the techniques used in making *The Company of Strangers*. By

placing real people in fictitious situations, transcendent moments would arise from the

interaction of creativity and actuality and "[e]very once and a while there would be a scene of

such magic that whatever was happening on the screen was *more* than what was happening on

the screen" (Watson 109). In *The Company of Strangers*, eight women, with an average age of

71, are stranded when their bus breaks down. Having taken a detour from the main roads in

search of a cottage from Constance's youth, these strangers find themselves having to rely on one

another to locate food and shelter. While the scenes were structured according to a script, Scott

points out that this document was never shown to the women and asserts that she "never told them what to say" (Watson 111). Over the course of the film, the women get to know one another by recounting aspects of their personal history and, in doing so, provide insight into a segment of society that is generally overlooked, or at best marginalized.

Mary Meigs chooses the term "semi-documentary" when recounting her experience as one of the film's stars (59). "Semi" comes into play because these are women who otherwise would neither know each other nor find themselves in the situation presented in the film (Meigs 59). From over 400 applicants, Scott selected seven women with no acting experience and then based her film loosely on their lives (Scott). Bringing limited acting experience to the project, is the eighth woman, Michelle, who plays the bus driver and serves as an anchor for the necessary dramatic moments in the plot. With the exception of the opening sequence, during which Mary explains that their "short detour...turned into something completely unexpected," the film lacks voice-over narration; similarly, the women's conversations lack the structured feel of conventional interviews that tend to have distancing effect on the audience. As a result of Scott's limited intervention, there is a sense of intimacy and realism to *The Company of Strangers* that is reminiscent of the observational style of 1960's cinema direct documentaries.

In contrast to the seamlessness of Scott's film, Anne Claire Poirier repeatedly disrupts audience identification, through a blending of conventional interviews with lyrical moments of visual and aural reflection, thereby distancing the spectator and encouraging critical involvement. *Tu as crié Let Me Go* serves as an epitaph for Poirier's daughter, Yanne, who was murdered while working as a prostitute in order to obtain money to support her heroin addiction; at the same time, the film provides a harsh indictment of an intolerant society which "condemns and humiliates" victims of the war on drugs "while shielding the guilty ones." Poetic sequences

in which the director ruminates on issues of guilt, grief and loss are intercut with "talking head" interviews with other parents, health care professionals and addicts; these interviews address various aspects of the experience of addiction in an attempt, by Poirier, to better understand Yanne's circumstances. Meanwhile, the visual images of the poetic sequences dwell on vacant locations, such as a cemetery in winter and a park in spring, that tangentially illustrate Poirier's ruminations while emphasizing her sense of loss.

Joan Nicks refers to Poirier's aesthetic approach in terms of "discursive non-linear structures [that] shift between documentary, narrative subjectivity, and theatrical alienation, as in dramas of formal and critical Brechtian detachment" (227). The film's voice over narration maintains the director's personal perspective on events, at moments addressing her absent daughter while at other moments including the spectator in a "we" that must take action. Poirier explains her choice of black and white stock, as indicative of time passed and the experience of living in "shades of grey," as well as her decision not to include footage from her visits to the "street" which, when taken out of context, would have only served as "lying cliches for voyeuristic eyes." Thus, the filmmaker explores both her directorial choices and the limited ability of film to visually depict particular events and experiences. As such, *Tu as crié Let Me Go* (de)mystifies the representation of actuality while bridging the gap between the private and the public, or the personal and the political.

Similarly, Brenda Longfellow assembles and re-processes fragments of found footage in order to create "a document not of an historical referent, but of this process of transformation, this writing of history through the traces and the hallucinations we construct of it" (Longfellow: 1990 185). *Our Marilyn* recounts the story of Marilyn Bell who, in 1954, became the first person to swim across Lake Ontario. Longfellow intersperses Bell's historic swim with

documentary footage of Marilyn Munroe's contemporaneous visit to entertain American troops in Korea. The two Marilyns are, in turn, narrated by a third Marilyn who refers to the experience of growing up between their bodies. Bell and Munroe serve as "ideological markers in a discursive system which eludes and concludes them" (Longfellow: 1990 187). In other words, the complexity of their individual identities exceeds their status as culturally constructed images. Present only in voice over, the third Marilyn escapes visual, physical representation and instead considers the excess of meaning that resides within the gap.

Our Marilyn includes optically processed footage of Longfellow swimming to compensate for the middle of Bell's journey which was not documented on film (Longfellow: 1990 186). The absence of an official record is ironic given the nature of this portion of the journey. Since the border between the United States and Canada is located offshore, this boundary becomes literally fluid and a swimmer crossing the lake can "resist the awareness that a border has been crossed" (Berenstein 164). Towards the end of the film, the narrator points out that she's "still trying to remember the difference, to decipher the loss between the body in perpetual motion and the mortuary stillness of a photograph." Whereas a feminist reading would assert that this absence comprises a site of resistance, a post-nationalist reading would focus on the blending of cultural references across boundaries. In processing archival footage and interweaving the stories, the film transforms the historical fragments to arrive at a new meaning. Thus, the traces of each Marilyn that exceed the creative treatment of actuality allow for the construction of an identity which transgresses the boundaries of conventional representation.

DIS-PLACED SUBJECTIVITY

In *Careful*, Guy Maddin also poses fundamental questions about the ontological status of

representation that reach beyond the gap between image and referent to posit both as constructions. The resulting absence of fixed meaning offers the potential to re-construct different versions of the past from cinematic fragments. Through the creation of a collage of film styles that appears to compensate for the perceived absence of a Canadian film history: Tom McSorley writes that Maddin's films "in their self-conscious references to film history and, by extension, to the lack of a Canadian feature-film tradition, they do help to shape the outlines of that absence" (McSorley 15). Set in an alpine village, *Careful* conveys a bizarre Freudian tale of repression. Residing both in the shadow of, and consequently at the mercy of, the mountain, the residents of Tolzbad must refrain from making even the slightest noise or risk causing a deadly avalanche.

Careful combines elements from several temporally disparate styles and genres. The exaggerated shadows of mountain climbers and the distorted angles of the set design evoke German Expressionist techniques as exemplified in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1919). However, the film also includes two-tone Technicolor and "relies entirely on post-synchronized sound" (Gillmor 34). As these elements begin to be considered in combination, the result is a 1920's colourized, Expressionist talkie. In terms of genre, *Careful* references the German mountain film (Bergfilm). This 1920's sub-genre of the Heimatfilm (homeland film), "celebrated nature as the protagonist" (Silberman 116) and utilized the forces of nature to echo the wild passions of the films' characters. Like the Heimat film, the Bergfilm is marked by the "mythicization of unconquerable fate" (Silberman 116). By the conclusion of *Careful*, all of the main characters have died with the exception of the mute and immobile Franz and the vacuously oblivious Sigleinde.

Careful constantly draws attention to its construction because the film "is not a faithful

pastiche of anything" (Indiana). Rather than evoking a longing for the past, Maddin creates a past that never existed thereby creating a sense of temporal dislocation. McSorley argues that this refusal to "synchronize" with cinematic tradition, prompts the question "what time is it anyway?" (McSorley 15) By creating a distance from which this construction can be observed, *Careful* serves as a reminder that modernist conceptions of time and progress exist as cultural constructions. The consequences move beyond Barthes' discussion of the photograph's "illogical conjunction of the here-now and the there-then" (Elder: 1989 272). Rather than the paradox inherent in the photographic image, Maddin exposes a deeper paradox concerning the conception of time and history. The shift from the "there-then" that the film references and the "here-now" of *Careful* involves a distortion of both temporality and historical progress.

This sense of temporal and historiological dislocation has also been interpreted as a reference to the experience of being alienated from one's environment as a result of cultural colonization. Living in the substantial cultural shadow of a pernicious neighbour, the urge for national expression must be restrained in order to avert the risk of unleashing a crushing avalanche; therefore, complicity is encouraged because, as in Tolzbad, "the aware perish and the oblivious survive" (Pevere: 1993 9). But, as with McSorley's assertion that Maddin's irreverent pastiche compensates for the absence of Canadian contributions to film history, this interpretation reduces the complexity of North American culture to xenophobic nationalist sentiment. Although the questions of time that are raised by *Careful* recall Atwood's interrogation of place in *Survival*, it can also be re-read as a different type of locational quandary. Rather than seeking to account for an absent or underdeveloped national identity, the interpenetration of Canadian and American industrial film production can be understood in terms of a conflicting, or confusing sense of place.

In an article about the implications of considering British Columbia as Hollywood North, Mike Gasher discusses the locations industry and its impact on cultural definitions of place. The locations industry comprises Hollywood filmmaking activity which makes use of the Canadian landscape as a setting for non-Canadian stories; in other words, Canadian locations either stand-in as less expensive substitutes for American cities or are disguised as geographically indistinct "international" settings. With "more than $500 million in direct spending in Canada" (Gasher: 1995 232), these productions form a key portion of the industrial filmmaking sector and provide a vital source of employment for Canadian creative talent. It is important to note, however, that key creative personnel are brought in from the United States for these films; Acland cites concerns that not having the power to participate in creative decisions relegates Canadian crews to the position of being "'Mexicans in sweaters.'" (1997 285) At the same time, secondary crew in Hollywood have formed lobby groups, such as the Film and Television Action Committee, which seek to regain access to these "runaway productions" by levelling the subsidy-ridden playing field.

According to Gasher, "if location production was subject-driven in its infancy, it became economics-driven as fictional feature film became the dominant commercial form" (1995 236). Thus, although film crews at one time came to Canada to shoot newsreel footage of events, such as troops going off to war or visits from the Royal Family, the impetus for location filming has since lost its geographic specificity. Instead, a comparatively weak Canadian dollar along with tax incentives encourage foreign production companies to perceive Canadian settings as a resource that they can adapt to suit their needs. However, in a province like B.C. which offers many of the most sought after locales in the locations industry, this type of branch plant mentality has lead to "a struggle of definition over what B.C. cinema is and should be" (Gasher:

1995 239). The designation of British Columbia as "Hollywood North," or "Brollywood," emphasizes the economic link to the Hollywood film industry with mixed cultural ramifications. With local filmmaking resources involved in runaway productions, the development of an independent, indigenous production sector is hindered; at the same time, the local cinema culture acquires strong ties to the priorities of another place.

As a result, despite its economic significance, the locations industry impedes the articulation of local cultural experience and instead "alienates place by denying its social particularity;" due to the "transient" nature of the locations industry, along with the fact that the finished text belongs to someone else, geographical space becomes less "a foundation for storytelling" than "a malleable site" or "replaceable part" (Gasher: 1995 249). Gasher contextualizes the impact of the tension between indigenous production and location production within the tendency to approach "the question of place as a social space by assessing the role communication plays in defining, delimiting, and binding community" (Gasher: 1995 234). In other words, these shifting ways of understanding place are implicated within larger questions concerning cultural development and national identity.

Yet, Acland draws on the concept of the "*polysemic* nature of signs" to argue that the local viewer reads these "import/export" films in a distinct way (1997 286). The label of "import/export culture" refers to the peculiar status of industrial productions which are exports of the Canadian film industry that are then imported as part of U.S. popular culture. For the Canadian audience, part of the pleasure of watching these productions arises from the recognition of familiar places that have been disguised or re-contextualized. Citing the example of a U.S. network made-for-television movie, called *How the West Was Fun* (Margolin, 1994), Acland explains that advertisements noted that it was "shot in Calgary" thereby heightening the

program's appeal for the station's Alberta audience (1995 286). From this perspective, the nationalist practice of delimiting Canadian experience based on a strict division between self and other proves to be insufficient for explaining national cinema culture.

Instead, the ways in which a Canadian understanding of place merges with, and is often filtered through, American cultural production points to the limited resonance of geographic borders. Pevere critiques the process of defining national experience by drawing walls around the country creates categories that are "manageable, neat and comforting" (1999 13). With his discussion of the "creeping Canadianization of popular culture," he playfully inverts the younger brother syndrome and suggests that, while appearing to embrace a subordinate role, Canada has quietly infiltrated American culture through a steady flow of expatriates (1999 8). Rather than shirking their national cultural duty, these performers and craftspeople have staked an extra-national claim in the development of North American culture. Acland similarly notes that this "star-in-exile system" allows Canadian audiences to "view the success of Canadian talent" by watching "local heroes" at work in the U.S. industry (1997 286). The arguments offered by both Pevere and Acland serve to highlight the prevalence of first cinema in influencing audience taste, particularly in terms of the tendency to perceive success based on participation in the Hollywood system.

Beyond the complex transnational interrelationship between Canada and the United States, there is a further blending of national cinema cultures that occurs with international co-productions. Bilateral treaty arrangements[7] "enable Canadian and foreign producers to pool their resources in order to co-produce films, television programs and new media works that enjoy national production status in each of the countries involved" (Telefilm 9). As such, official co-productions are domestic in both (or all) countries involved resulting in a balance of

cultural and economic benefit. Not only are these productions eligible for government funding assistance and tax credits, they also benefit from access to the areas of the domestic market that are regulated by quotas, such as the Canadian content requirement for television broadcasts; conversely then, for Canadian filmmakers, co-production arrangements provide an avenue for overcoming problems associated with the smallness of the Canadian market, by allowing for larger unit budgets and guaranteed access to additional audiences.

Although the economic benefits of co-productions are readily apparent, the pooling of creative resources can erode cultural specificity, thereby resulting in hybrid films that can only achieve an awkward resonance with domestic audiences; studies undertaken by University of Alberta researchers Colin Hoskins and Stuart McFadyen have noted concerns that "the Canadian nature of the resulting program or film...is often compromised" (Hoskins 78). Robert Lepage's film, *Le confessionnal* (1995), is a Canada/United Kingdom/France co-production that manages to blend elements of cultural specificity quite effectively through a plot which builds a fictional narrative around the shooting of an Alfred Hitchcock thriller in Quebec City in 1952. The inclusion of the Hitchcock subplot enables British actress Kristin Scott Thomas to not seem out of place in Lepage's film, while also confronting linguistic and cultural barriers. For instance, Hitchcock's assistant (Thomas) has to rely on an interpreter, despite her attempt at illustrative non-verbal hand gestures, to negotiate for the use of the church as a location; she explains that Hitchcock believes the challenges faced by Hollywood, which is "mainly run by Jews," of trying to tell a universal story about the seal of the confessional for the "mainly Protestant" American audience would be best served by the Catholic ambience of Quebec City.

This sense of dislocation is echoed by Lepage's film, which begins with an establishing shot of the Chateau Frontenac Hotel that also comprises the opening sequence from *I Confess.*

Just prior to this shot are additional establishing shots of Quebec City that are accompanied by Pierre's (Lothaire Bluteau) voice-over explanation that "the past carries the present like a child on its shoulders." Pierre proceeds to note that he was present, in his mother's womb, at the local premiere of Hitchcock's film. The scene cuts to show the view from within the theatre at the screening, thereby positioning the 1952 audience as a surrogate for contemporary Quebecois audiences that identify with aspects of their surroundings being used as locations in American films. While this opening sequence would have particular resonance for Canadian audiences, cultural references that would be of specific interest to French or U.K. audiences are much less clear. With the exception of a small role played by a British actress, and a subplot about an expatriate director, *Le confessionnal* would likely be viewed by the audience as a foreign film, regardless of the domestic status it acquires as a co-production.

INTRA-NATIONAL VOICE

While examining how the boundaries between national cultures are negotiated, it is important to not overlook the articulation of intra-national difference. The sultry title character (Sharon M. Lewis) of Clement Virgo's *Rude* (1995) informs the audience that her pirate radio signal "stretches from the land of the Zulu-Zulu nation all the way to the land of the Mohawk nation" and prompts "Babylon" to "re-evaluate their immigration policy." With these mixed cultural metaphors, and the repeated magical presence of prowling lion, Virgo's film chronicles the events that take place one Easter weekend at a Toronto housing project. Central to the ensemble of stories that are interwoven with Rude's comments is that of General (Maurice Dean Wint), a former drug-dealer, who returns from prison hoping to reclaim his relationship with his family and to finish a mural that he had started prior to his arrest. General's return displaces his

brother, Reece (Clark Johnson), who had been unsuccessfully trying to establish himself both in General's former dealings and with his brother's wife.

Like his characters, Virgo grew up in inner-city Toronto "where artistically oriented black men are trained to be carpenters" (Glassman 19). Luke's desire to express himself artistically rather than criminally, along with Reece's desperate search for redemption, mark attempts to assert a more intricate and humane sense of identity in a hostile environment. In addition, the multi-ethnic references of Rude's narration correspond to aspects of Virgo's experience as a Jamaican-Canadian who has wondered "'if some immigrants ever find their roots in a foreign country'" (Glassman 20). The film's complex blending of Christian and Rastafarian imagery leads Harcourt to observe that "*Rude* as much goes beyond the stylistic eclecticism of post-modern texts as it transcends the sociological instances of the current post-colonial" (1998 9). As such, Virgo's film problematizes the process of creating rigid canonical categories based on difference, given the hybridity of cultural experience; at the same time, it also points to the necessity that critical boundaries be extended beyond the experiences depicted within film texts, to a consideration who is telling the story.

A further example of the importance of voice can be found through a comparison of Nettie Wild's *Blockade* and Alanis Obomsawin's *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. Whereas both documentaries delve into the issue of native land claims, they demonstrate different approaches to commentary. Bill Nichols defines commentary as the way in which "a documentary offers a particular statement about the world or about the perspective it has tacitly presented" (Nichols 118). *Kanehsatake* explores the Oka Crisis from behind the Mohawk barricade; despite the appearance of objectivity lent by the outside footage, the film remains firmly positioned within the native perspective. *Blockade*, on the other hand, presents a

personalized journey through the Gitskan and Wet'suwet'en land claims dispute in northern

British Columbia. Wild's voice-over narration identifies her as an outsider.

The depiction of land claims disputes from the native perspective places both of these

documentaries in Peter Steven's category of "new documentary," an attempt to "create new

working relationships with the people or groups documented" (Steven 8). The 1996 Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that "mainstream media do not reflect aboriginal

realities very well. Nor do they offer much space to aboriginal people to tell their own stories"

(Switzer 22). Although Wild provides access to the Gitskan perspective, she is not native. Thus,

it is important for her to identify herself at the beginning of *Blockade* in order to alleviate her

appropriation of the native voice. Wild's journey is also the audience's journey; she represents

the average Canadian who does not feel directly affected by land claims and yet is aware that

elements of "our history" are at stake.

Through the use of a range of examples, this chapter has demonstrated the ways in which

evaluative standards can be used to perform the canon in a particular way. Whether guided by a

nationalist search to define a distinctive Canadian art cinema or the questioning of boundaries to

create hybrid categories, each process invokes a set of value judgements that determines which

films are chosen and directs the way in which those films are then analysed. Yet, Gasher's

thematic categories manage to be both so broad and inclusive as to homogenize auteur

filmmaking experiences and so exclusive in what gets bracketed out as to be ultimately

reductive; thus, in a sense, his concept of a cinema of appropriation, although descriptive and

well-supported by links to the conditions of production, conforms to the idealized national

cinema long sought after by prescriptive criticism.

As an alternative, I have outlined a post-nationalist approach that eschews attempts to

provide an overarching view of Canadian cinema in favour of a recognition of the complex interplay of transnational and intra-national difference. A discussion of documentary as an aesthetic mode that fictionalizes actuality to varying degrees served as an example of an unstable category demarcated by fluid boundaries. This was followed by an examination of the complexity of Canadian cinema's comprehension of place in a continental and international context. However, beyond the process of delineating the national in relation to other nations, voice joins with place to articulate differences within the national context; at the same time, it is necessary to move beyond the text to consider the positioning of the filmmaker. By positing place and voice as basic categories that can be used to describe a national cinema, the expression of nationally specific experiences overtakes concepts of nationalist unity. Nevertheless, these categories are best understood as additive rather than alternative in order to avoid attempting to replace one canon with another; instead, the combination of multiple descriptive canons yields perhaps the most comprehensive appreciation of contemporary Canadian cinema.

NOTES:

1. Staiger, 11.

2. Given the nation-centred approach of this thesis as a whole, I have decided not to include a region-based approach to describing Canadian cinema. This type of approach can be found in *Les cinémas du Canada* (Sylvain Garel and André Pâquet, eds, Paris: Georges Pompidou, 1992) which has separate chapters for Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and the East and West coasts, along with essays on documentary, feminist filmmaking and experimental film. Not only would this approach have been prohibitively cumbersome in this context, but it would have generated areas of redundancy in the exploration of national cinema, rather than providing a type of overview which is more consistent with this study of national canon formation.

3. The example of *Les Boys*, which made over $5 million in Quebec and played on 50 screens but only showed for two weeks on two screen in Toronto, highlights the problems of associating box office performance with assessments of quality or even audience taste. Wise attributes the poor performance of Saia's film in Toronto to the lack of "effort on the part of the distributor to gear an ad campaign toward an English-Canadian audience." (Wise 1999a)

4. Unless otherwise stated, the examples provided for Gasher's categories are my own.

5. Gasher defines auteur cinema in terms of "a *personal* film-making practice," in which the writing, directing and producing are often done by the same person, as opposed to "an industrial style of film production, in which the director is hired by a film production company" to realize their project (1993a 23-24).

6. Dorland explains that this study, undertaken as part of the activities of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Possible Development of Feature Film Production in Canada (1964-5), "represented the most comprehensive attempt undertaken until then" to examine the distribution activities of private sector filmmaking (1998 103); Firestone's recommendations had a structuring impact on subsequent policy frameworks for feature film policy development.

7. As of 1999, Canada is involved in 46 treaties with 54 countries. (Telefilm 16-17)

CONCLUSIONS:

APPROACHING CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN CINEMA(S)

> The Canadian identity–the phrase is both a chimera and an oxymoron–is full of odd conjunctions, split visions, and unresolved tensions.
>
> William Kilbourn[1]

In rereading the Canadian film canon, this thesis has explored the convergence of criticism, that is both prescriptive and descriptive in nature, policy and film texts, with the aim of providing insight into how the boundaries of canon are established. With a focus on preventing the repetition of "what we have already learned to see before," (Johnson 3) the process of rereading allows for an examination of the underlying assumptions that direct canon formation. Concerns over the three percent of screen time spent showing domestic films in English Canadian theatres places fiction features at the centre of a discourse about absence that excludes industrial filmmaking, non-theatrical productions and popular cinema-going practices. Consequently, this zone of absence, characterized by a disdain for popular taste, has less to do with non-existence than with the positioning of a range of texts and perspectives "outside of our authorized language for posing questions about culture" (Acland: 1997 293). Instead, dominant discursive practices favour a liberal humanist search for an art cinema that will enlighten the masses, while nationalist impulses stress the need for this cinema to be "'different and better' than US mass culture" (Morris: 1989 12).

However, the extent to which Canadian cinema has developed in a North American context, with a disregard for geographical borders, has lead to canonical debates that threaten to overwhelm these reductive pressures. Pevere cites the example of *Ghostbusters* (Reitman, 1984)

as a American film that "some have even argued...rightfully belongs in our movie history, not theirs" (1999 11). According to the point system, which measures the key creative input of production personnel, *Ghostbusters* could be considered Canadian, and, under the old Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) regulations, that might have been the case (Wise: 1997 3); however, the production company, and hence the money, was American. Nevertheless, both the comedic style and popular appeal of *Ghostbusters* preclude the film's inclusion in the Canadian film canon. Wise notes that, regardless of issues of the film's origin, "Reitman will never be embraced by the Canadian cultural elite" (1997 3). Beyond the shortcomings of *Ghostbusters* with respect to art cinema expectations, the film's brisk box office performance, along with its participation in the Hollywood system, reference the tensions between industry and culture that problematize the boundaries of the Canadian film canon.

The year of the release of Reitman's film was also marked by a series of events that had a significant impact in shaping the discursive structure of contemporary Canadian cinema. As part of the Liberal government's 1984 National Film and Video Policy, Telefilm replaced the CFDC, combining federal film and television funding within a single institutional framework with the establishment of the Broadcast Fund; two years later, in 1986, the Feature Film Fund, which assists with both production and distribution, would be added to the programs administered by Telefilm. With the beginnings of the Ontario New Wave, a distinctive national art cinema emerged that appeared as though it might begin to satisfy the requirements of prescriptive critics' "ideal-typical theory of a Canadian national cinema" (Dorland: 1998 7). At the same time, participation in canon formation expanded to include the national festival circuit with the inaugural Perspective Canada programme at the Toronto International Film Festival (formerly called the Festival of Festivals), which also included a retrospective of Canadian

cinema.

Since it is necessary to make selections in order to program, study, or discuss film, "escape from canon formation [would] be difficult to achieve" (Staiger 4). Chapter One addressed the criteria of origin and value that set the parameters for a "politics of inclusion and exclusion" (Staiger 8) in the Canadian context. Due to the importance of subsidies and tax credits, governmental measures, such as the point system, are generally used to determine which films can be certified as Canadian. As such, the designation of the "Canadian-ness" of a film often has less to do with questions of authorship or the representation of national specificity than it does with issues of ownership and financial control. Instead, these aspects of cultural specificity are addressed with the assessments of a film's "quality and importance" (Hawthorn 32) that make up the criterion of value; even then, the appraisal of a film's value arises from the intersection of a critical and governmental discourses rather than from notions of "transcendentally 'great'" cinema (Corse 168).

Incorporating elements of liberal humanism, blended with a biculturalist vision of nationalism, the perspective that influenced the initial formation of the "dominant" Canadian film canon can be found in the ideals expressed by the culture elite in the 1951 Massey Commission Report. In particular, the perception of cultural sovereignty in relation to ideas of territorial defence conflates the nation's physical and metaphysical borders, while also reinforcing anxieties about American imperialism; this becomes especially problematic when confronted with the transnational focus of feature film policy development, not to mention the financial necessity of reaching beyond the confines of the relatively small Canadian market. As such, the conflicting conceptions of high cultural enlightenment and mass commodity success would become entrenched as a continuing tension between cultural and industrial goals.

Assessments of textual quality were further informed by a particularly idealistic approach to value judgements that can be traced to influences from both historiography and literary criticism.

At the same time, although Canadian literary criticism made a more straightforward, and timely, shift to incorporate poststructuralist approaches, film criticism would instead perpetuate the idealist search to define the essence of a shared national identity. Chapter Two examined the inter-relationship between canon formation and national cultural identity, positing both as performative constructs. If momentary breaks in the differential interplay of past and present experiences can be understood to constitute the substance of national identity (Hall 115), then canon(s) can be seen as an interpretive tool that can be used to express that identity. In other words, the film canon serves to assert Canada's cultural sense of self within the global film community but the diversity of regional and multicultural experience resists the type of reductive closure that lends coherence to the study. Nevertheless, the difficulty in achieving an over-arching formulation of Canadian identity does not negate the study of national cinema but rather points to the deficiencies of the homogenizing project of nationalist discourse (Willemen 210).

Consequently, the distinction needs to be made between the unifying goals of nationalism and the "significant structuring impact" of national boundaries (Willemen 210). Willemen subsumes the nationalist quest for unity as one potential feature of a socio-cultural group and notes that it is not necessarily the best measure of the group's sense of identity. In the Canadian context, the articulation of national specificity more often emerges in terms of a parallel sense of regional and national identity (Hughes 37). The importance of the construct of national cinema is further reinforced by the regulatory involvement and funding support of state institutions. Whereas prescriptive criticism favours art cinema, policy directives re-cast the debate in economic terms in a way that achieves an unsteady, and even somewhat contradictory,

approach to cultural industries development. In particular, the failure of most policy documents to differentiate between the six point industrial productions and the eight to ten point art films renders it unclear as to what type of national cinema is to be fostered.

The extent of these directional challenges can be observed in policy documents such as the 1999 Report of the Feature Film Advisory Committee, *The Road to Success*, which outlines a series of key objectives, the first of which is an increase in the amount of screen time spent showing Canadian films from two to ten percent by the year 2004 (iv). The Report attributes this focus on theatrical release and screen time to an Angus Reid survey that found that a "majority of respondents believe it is important that Canadian features be shown in Canadian theatres" (1). Yet, this survey also found that 44 percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that "Canadian films are not easily accessible" [Angus Reid 31]. Furthermore, beyond indifference toward accessibility issues, the survey found that the movie-going choices of respondents had more to do with marketing than with a film's country of origin; and yet, *The Road to Success* is particularly vague about marketing initiatives.

Designed to strengthen the overall performance of the feature film industry, the Report's recommendations include the use of "an automatic trigger based on box-office receipts and international success" to direct the flow of 80 percent of the money in a revamped Feature Film Fund (v), thereby applying economic imperatives to a Telefilm fund which has traditionally been guided by cultural goals. The construct of screen time also comprises an economic approach to assessing cultural behaviour. This narrow measure of cinema going behaviour measures access, to the theatrical audience without considering issues such as the size of the audience or its demographic makeup; thus, screen time demonstrates that a film was available for viewing, even if no one was actually there to watch it. Besides, Acland points out that the exhibition of

Canadian cinema has tended to occupy both "nontheatrical sites" and "places parallel to commercial cinema," such as film festivals (1997 290). Acland further re-conceptualizes screen time, not in terms of absence, but rather as an indicator of the simultaneous presence of a small number of massively visible films that constitute the locus of popular cinema going behaviour (1999 7).

However, the perception of screen time in terms of presence rather than absence would require an acknowledgement of the complex inter-relationship of Canadian and American cultures; this is a position that both critical and policy discourses have been loath to adopt, preferring instead to rely upon explanations of Canadian dependency or American imperialism that suppress governmental complicity in looking for collaborative approaches to "'sharing our markets'" (Dorland: 1998 112). Perhaps these explanations serve to fuel the endeavours of prescriptive criticism and cultural policy development, both of which assert displaced goals, the route to which continually eludes the best search efforts of critics and policymakers. Or, perhaps the tendency to differentiate between an under accomplished little brother and his pernicious sibling arises from the nationalist need to maintain a strict division between self and other. The attempt to enforce this type of binary split, in the absence of a shared anti-imperialist struggle, generates an unstable or fragmentary canonical infrastructure.

In other words, the tension between the existence of a North American popular culture and the displaced ideal of a distinctive national art cinema results in a "doubled consciousness" that seeks to assert difference from, while simultaneously locating desirable qualities in, the American "other." In his study of Canadians' Perceived National Identity, Hughes notes that the characteristics outlined in the perceived American identity serve a contradictory role as both the benchmark against which difference is asserted and the source of several desirable qualitites.

Similarly, Dorland describes the "double dream" of second cinema policy which involves establishing a vibrant national film industry capable of competing with the first cinema of Hollywood (1996 125). This dream combines the second cinema objective of cultural decolonization with the aspiration of achieving success within the first cinema model; but, as a dream, it also blends the implausibility of being able to rival Hollywood's economic power with the internalized inferiority associated with secondariness.

From this doubled perspective, the desire to foster domestic production, using funding tools like the proposed box office trigger, appears to be aimed toward eventually (re)gaining an equal share of the theatrical market. Examples of the presence of unrealistic goals for cultural development are manifested in the Advisory Committee's minimum target of an eight percent increase in screen time, even though with recent increases in the number of commercial mega-plexes, the screen time figure for English Canada has been actually been steadily decreasing, despite a fairly constant number of Canadian films having theatrical release. The emphasis placed on the 97 percent absence of Canadian cinema from theatrical sites fuels the perception that the national film industry continually teeters on the brink of extinction, despite healthy growth in industrial production. Thus, the "cinema we [think that we] need" occupies the core of critical and policy discourse, while the "cinema we have," which is also the "only cinema we're going to get," remains persistently under explored.

Using Gasher's concept of a marginalized Canadian cinema of appropriation as a case study, Chapter Four focussed on descriptive canon formation by examining the evaluative processes by which films are selected and classified within the canon. Gasher's contextual categories exemplify a nationalist approach to constructing a consistent and coherent vision of a Canadian art cinema; yet, despite the seemingly inclusive nature of its broad scope, the construct

of a cinema of appropriation homogenizes filmmaking experience. Instead, hybrid categories could be used to supplant the nationalist perspective with an acknowledgement of the fluidity of the metaphysical frontier and, hence the transnational aspects of Canadian cultural experience. Although it might be considered post-nationalist, this perspective would not be post-national in that it would affirm complex understandings of place and voice, to the extent that they comprise basic attributes in the expression of nationally specific experiences. As such, intra-national difference generates a series of additional boundaries beyond the ones that are "drawn" between nations. Consequently, it becomes necessary to replace the single metaphysical boundary of nationalism, which corresponds to the country's physical borders, with multiple fluid boundaries that acknowledge the intricacies of Canada's positioning in a continental context.

In attempting to explore and question the underlying assumptions that inform the process of canon formation, this is not so much a "proposal dedicated to overturning the accepted canon" (Hawthorn 35) as it is a strategy to allow for its continual de-centring. Unlike canon-busting, maintaining the performative nature of the existing canon helps to alleviate reductive closure, thereby enabling its continued strategic use as a tool for understanding Canadian cultural identity. There is, however, the potential for this approach to drift into prescriptive criticism by dictating how canon formation should proceed, while also engaging with issues surrounding the definition of national identity at the expense of a detailed study of the national cinema. In many ways, this approach resembles Linda Hutcheon's definition of irony as a postmodern strategy that allows for "working within prevailing discourses, while still finding a way to articulate doubts, insecurities, questionings, and perhaps even alternatives;" but, it is also "in a sense, a way to have your cake and eat it too." (Hutcheon 15).

NOTES:

1. Hutcheon 15

FILMOGRAPHY

Blockade. Dir: Nettie Wild, 1993.

Careful. Dir: Guy Maddin, 1992.

The Company of Strangers. Dir: Cynthia Scott, 1990.

Le Confessionnal. Dir: Robert Lepage, 1995.

Highway 61. Dir: Bruce McDonald, 1992.

I've Heard the Mermaids Singing. Dir: Patricia Rozema, 1987.

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance. Dir: Alanis Obomsawin, 1993.

Next of Kin. Dir: Atom Egoyan, 1984.

Our Marilyn. Dir: Brenda Longfellow, 1987.

Rude. Dir: Clement Virgo, 1995.

Speaking Parts. Dir: Atom Egoyan, 1989.

Tu as crié Let Me Go. Dir: Anne Claire Poirier, 1996.

White Room. Dir: Patricia Rozema, 1990.

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