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Second Images: Reflections on the Canadian Cinema(s) in the Seventies

At the end of his survey of *Le Cinéma Canadien,* published in 1968, Gilles Marsolais writes that the Canadian cinema, "will always be composed in fact of *two* cinemas: the 'Canadian' and the Québécois, of which the interests are divergent". He concludes that future critics will no longer be able to study the two cinemas together because the achievement of the Québec cinema is intimately involved with an emerging collective awareness that can lead only to independence. Given the current political situation, it would be foolhardy to reject Marsolais' position out of hand, but the relationship of Québec to English Canada remains a crucial factor in any account of the culture that we have known as "Canadian". The nature and extent of this relationship have been widely discussed but assessments of what the two cultures have in common have varied greatly. As might be expected, Québécois commentators, like playwright Jean-Claude Germain, have played down cultural similarities, suggesting that they stem merely from the indebtedness of both cultures to the same "Cultural Finance Company". English-Canadian critics, sympathetic to Québec and anxious to find a basis for a Canadian identity separate from that of the United States, have argued that it is the differences rather than the similarities that are superficial. Ronald Sutherland, for example, finds that "aside from language, it is quite probable that there are at the moment no fundamental cultural differences between the two major ethnic groups of Canada".[1]

Admittedly Sutherland's exception is a large one, but many recent critical studies in English-Canada (often inspired by Northrop Frye's theories) have confirmed his vision of a "mythic" dimension which underlies and binds together the two cultures. Critics in Québec, however, influenced more by the concern of recent French criticism with the political implications of art, have tended to stress the present differences in outlook rather than the similarities of experience on which both cultures are based. While the question of identity has not

usually been (openly) developed in political terms in English-Canada, the urgent need to preserve language and culture has clarified the issues in Québec and fostered the emergence of a political consciousness. In this context, the economic pressures to which Germain refers are particularly frustrating and the achievement of control over cultural institutions becomes a major political goal. Similar feelings have been expressed, more sporadically, in English-Canada but the specific measures needed to gain cultural self-determination are much more difficult to identify than in Québec. English-Canadians do control Canada's cultural institutions, as Québec complains, but this control is often undermined by the enormous economic and cultural influence of the United States.

In the context of the cinema, the problem of cultural institutions is exacerbated by the economic demands of a medium which is both an art and an industry. The bureaucratic structure of the National Film Board and the cultural insensitivity of the Canadian Film Development Corporation have caused widespread dissatisfaction, but in Québec these deficiencies are seen as an attempt to smother the new social and cultural awareness. These problems, however, stem from an uncertainty about the nature of Canada and the nature of film that has profound implications for the future of both cultures and both cinemas. The mandate of the NFB is "to interpret Canada to Canadians and the rest of the world" and it has built on the ability of John Grierson to use documentary techniques to project an "image" grounded in details selected from everyday reality. This approach has come under increasing pressure with growing uncertainty over the "image" that Canada should try to project and over the way it should be projected (notably a questioning of the NFB's doctrine of objectivity). But the problem also lies in the almost complete separation of the NFB from the commercial film industry, a problem that was not helped by the creation of the CFDC. The mandate of the CFDC is to create a film industry in Canada and, noting the commercial failure of the "regional" films emerging from the NFB tradition, it has tended to encourage "international" films that can compete in a distribution system which is largely U.S. controlled. Despite investment by the CFDC in many important films, its influence can be seen in Québec as yet another example of Anglo-American imperialism, encouraging "odourless, colourless, and flavourless films" which, like "the sale of our resources to ITT rather than the development of them by ourselves on a more modest scale", will bring about "the depersonalisation of Québec in exchange for short-term profits".[2]

Nowhere can the contradiction involved in Canada's attitude to its cinema and its culture be seen more clearly than in the failure to sustain

the impetus set up in the early sixties, both in Québec and English-Canada, by the appearance of a number of major films and film-makers. The hopes aroused then were more impressively fulfilled in Québec where film-makers were able to work frequently, critics tried to come to terms with their films, and the public showed a good deal of interest. In English-Canada few film-makers have enjoyed the continuity of production necessary for the full development of a consistent and confident artistic personality, few critics have bothered to treat their films as anything other than imitation American films, and the public has not responded to what little of the output they have been allowed to see. Both cinemas have been cinemas of questioning and search rather than of reassurance and affirmation, and the most painful of searches has perhaps been the search for an audience. Québécois critics like Marsolais suggest than an audience exists in Québec if only it can be freed from external cultural influences but that the English-Canadian cinema is unlikely to escape from the lethargy and apathy encouraged by the established structures of a consumer society.

In responding to questions from *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1966, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre wrote that "French Canada puts itself the question of its existence and of its survival, while English Canada puts itself no question". The questioning nature of the new Québec cinema was established from the very beginning in the quest for cultural roots of Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault's *Pour la suite du monde* (1963), the autobiographical self-examination in Claude Jutra's *A tout prendre* (1963), and the calculated confusions of Gilles Groulx' *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964). Of this latter film, Groulx said that it "takes on all the vagueness of the French-Canadians" whose "commitment has not yet been pushed to the limit."[3] Claude, the central character who cannot find a way of translating his growing social awareness into action, says, "I am Québécois, therefore I am searching." Yet this sense of rejecting old certainties and struggling to find new values has been equally important in the English-Canadian cinema that also emerged in the sixties. The confusions and questioning are perhaps even more frustrating than in Québec because there is little sense of collective struggle and hardly any hope of a political solution. In Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1964) Peter, like Groulx' Claude, is an adolescent struggling to define himself in an indifferent society. His uncertainty is heightened by a sequence in which a young French-Canadian accuses him of accepting an American way of life and Peter finds himself unable to express his own values except through negatives. He is unwilling to sacrifice his own individuality by identifying himself with a social movement and thus is unable to define his own needs.

Owen uses the French-Canadian as a means of focussing attention
on issues of which Peter is not consciously aware but which nonethe-
less affect him. These issues are reflected in both English-Canadian
and Québécois cinema in the many characters striving desperately to
free themselves from conventional values and in the search for a
cinematic style that is not based on the discarded values. Lefebvre's
attitude to English-Canada is thus an exaggeration, but it does reflect
the greater resistance to change within the English-Canadian cinema,
especially since the NFB existed specifically to support the establish-
ment and the CFDC to create a commercial industry. Yet the English-
Canadian cinema has not developed simply as a pale reflection of
Hollywood and is not wholly taken up with the issues of economics
and organisation that have inevitably dominated much discussion of
it. As *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and many subsequent films show, one
of the basic themes of English-Canadian cinema is the quest for
freedom from the materialistic prison that has become so closely
identified with "the American way of life". There is a strong parallel
between this struggle and the concerns of Québécois cinema, which
reflects a society that has shifted rapidly from a state of religious
claustrophobia to that of a materialistic *cul-de-sac*. The double strug-
gle to escape from traditional moral values and new materialistic ones
(which have become hopelessly entangled with each other) can be seen
as the basis of the search for identity, whether that identity is thought
of as Canadian or Québécois.

As Owen suggests, the experience of Québec can provide a useful
insight into the complexities of the forces at work in Canada as a
whole. There is no need to ignore the important differences between
the two cultures to see the intensity of Québec's recent history as
creating new clarity on issues which have pervaded (consciously or
unconsciously) this country of contradictions. The pace with which
Québec has emerged into the modern age has concentrated the process
of modernisation (industrialization, "Americanisation") into a rela-
tively short period of time and has thus created more clear-cut battle
lines than where the process has been somewhat more gradual. Until
the late fifties, Québec society was deeply split along class, religious,
and language lines but the majority of people (the French-Canadians)
"lived a relatively sheltered life in a rural society in which a great
measure of uniformity reigned, and in which poverty set its limits on
change and aspiration alike."[4] The influence of the Church also
worked towards creating a strong sense of community based on tradi-
tional values and opposition to progress. Québec had opted out of the
twentieth century and out of North America and the Québécois were
forced to accept a situation in which most of the wealth of the province

devolved on the English minority or was siphoned off south of the border.

The activity generated by the war, however, accelerated the forces of change and the emergence of Québec into the modern world was confirmed by the Quiet Revolution. A sense of community and security based on isolation disappeared and was replaced by the fragmentation of urban and industrial life. The experience of the city and the factory gave many Québécois the feeling of being foreigners on their own soil, a feeling that contrasted with the strong ties to the land that had been stressed in the past. An atmosphere of frustration developed into an atmosphere of terrorism: the literature, theatre, and cinema of Québec in the sixties is dominated by studies of adolescents struggling to shake off the power of the Church and of a corrupt establishment in the midst of a general apathy and numbness. The adolescent's need to find an identity and the struggle against the "hibernation" of the people during the long winter become basic images of the painful birth of a new consciousness.

The forces at work are complex and often contradictory. The new spirit, for example, rejects the reactionary influence of the Church and holds it largely responsible for the failure of Québec to assert itself against its colonisers. One of the first of the new wave of Québec films, Pierre Patry's *Trouble-fête* (1964), presents the impasse reached by uncertain adolescents who find all their options blocked by the clerical education system. Yet the rebellion is also against the forces of progress which the Church fought in the past: Pierre Gravel's novel *A Perte de temps* (1969), for example, relates terrorism to the sense of rootlessness created by the feeling that Montreal (which is never named in the novel, in keeping with its new anonymity) is becoming just another North American city, with its huge new buildings dedicated to commerce and profiteering. The attitude to the Church thus remains deeply ambiguous, as is that to the pioneering nationalistic efforts of Abbé Groulx. Clément Perron's *Partis pour la gloire* (1976) illustrates this ambiguity; the Cardinal of Québec is shown giving his blessing to the invocation of the War Measures Act, while the parish priests actively or passively support the young men who resist conscription.

The basic problem is thus the need for a strategy that can revive the sense of identity that existed in the past but that will avoid both its attendant reactionary spirit and the temptations of North American materialism. For the Parti Québécois such a strategy requires independence not only because the Anglo-Saxon establishment has exploited Québec since the conquest of 1759 but also because English Canada has shown itself so ready to embrace the forces of Americanisation and

to accept its own cultural extinction. The concern for the survival of their language gives the Québécois at least a basis for a vital community but any concerned English Canadian can understand the feeling of impotence expressed by René Lévesque in 1968:

> In a world where, in so many fields, the only stable law seems to have become that of perpetual change, where our old certainties are crumbling one after the other, we find ourselves swept along hopelessly by irresistible currents.

The new consciousness in Québec fights these feelings of alienation and attempts to revitalise a society that Lévesque described as having reached "the point of being unacceptable even to itself". This spirit of renewal in Québec can be defined as a shift from the perspective of the "French Canadian" who "feels in the minority in his own home" to the "dazzling, overflowing, ribald" feeling of being a "Québécois".[5]

The movement from an attitude of self-effacement to one of self-affirmation is reflected in the sudden upsurge in all the arts in Québec during the sixties and it has led some critics to draw a distinction between the political concerns of Québecois artists and the psychological introspection of their English-Canadian counterparts. John Hofsess, for example, distinguishes between the two cinemas in these terms:

> After seeing L'Acadie, L'Acadie by Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault, or Québec: Duplessis et après by Denys Arcand, the requisite response is to demand, on an emotional wave of outrage, urgent social change. After seeing Goin' Down the Road, The Rowdyman or Wedding in White, one has an understanding of the peevish complexity of human character, an understanding which precludes hoping that there is a political solution for every human failing.

A similar distinction is made, from a slightly different perspective, by Ronald Sutherland who writes that "in Québec, conveniently, there are all the ingredients for the illusion of a specific cause and a specific solution".[6] But this approach does tend to obscure the complexity of the forces at work in both cultures and it can lead to distortions, as happens in Hofsess' choice of political documentaries to represent the Québec cinema and fiction films to represent the English-Canadian. Even so his choice of films is hardly convincing: admittedly there is little hope of specific political solutions at the end of the English-Canadian films, but L'Acadie, l'Acadie (1971) ends with the collapse of the political aspirations of the young Acadians and Québec: Duplessis et après (1972) illustrates the failure of Québec politicians to translate political rhetoric into action.

There is a tremendous psychological interest in these documentaries which allow us to witness human responses to political issues. The breakdown of "old certainties" has led to the questioning of the nineteenth-century concept of psychological realism and to a new consciousness of the political dimension of works of art, but the separation of these two dimensions can lead only to a partial view of reality. The problem, of course, is that "reality" has itself become a questionable concept, but a major concern of both the English-Canadian and Québécois cinemas has been to achieve a balance between the "closeness" demanded by a psychological approach and the "detachment" that is the foundation of most approaches to political cinema. This concern has been pursued consciously in Québec in the development of a new approach to documentary building on the example of *cinéma vérité* and in the application of this approach to the fiction film. The liberation from old dramatic structures and documentary conventions parallels the social changes in Québec, but the result (for better or worse) has not been a cinema that expresses confidence in the possibility of political solutions. Rather (as in English Canada) it is a cinema of uncertainty and contradiction.

The alleged euphoria of the new Québécois spirit is not reflected in its cinema, which reflects rather the contradicting pulls and tensions to which the nationalist movement has been subjected. Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974) viewed the October Crisis from the perspective of some of its innocent victims and has been criticised by militants for failing to show any of its characters coming to a real political awareness of the events. The closed worlds of André Forcier's *Bar Salon* (1974) and *L'Eau chaude, l'eau frette* (1976) do embody a strong sense of communal values but the perverse vitality of his characters is accompanied by an equally strong feeling of communal impotence. Jean-Guy Noel's *Ti-Cul Tougas* (1975) depicts an escape to the rural isolation of the Iles de la Madeleine but the Québec landscape is merely a transitional backdrop to the characters' continuing dreams of California.

These films imply that independence is the only way to fulfill the potential offered by the new sense of a Québécois identity, since it would allow the creation of social structures that could combat economic and cultural alienation. But they also assert the need for inner change, for the working out of the contradictions that Québec has historically acquired. The cross-currents of thought and emotion that complicate the question of identity are extremely complex but they can be elucidated by reference to the three basic approaches to nationalism: the inward-looking, rural-based, conservative nationalism associated with Abbé Groulx, Maurice Duplessis, and the Union Nation-

ale; the "progressive", technological nationalism of the Quiet Revolution, associated especially with the Liberals; and the radical nationalsim of a large part of the Parti Québécois which stresses independence as a means of bringing about social justice. Even this three-way division is schematic and incomplete, and it should be emphasised that, while each of these approaches can be related to political parties or groups, they can be seen more suggestively as creating psychic tensions within most individuals in Québec.

Similar divisions and tensions could no doubt be diagnosed in English Canada, though their expression is usually less impassioned and obscured by regional distinctions. The general tendency seems to be towards a theoretical nationalism coupled with a fear of losing the economic and cultural "benefits" derived from the U.S. Recent English-Canadian cinema stresses both dissatisfaction with old values and fear of new ones; by expressing Canadian identity as a feeling of emptiness created by a loss of confidence in English and/or American values, as in Don Shebib's *Between Friends* (1973) and Don Owen's *Partners* (1976); by examining the past to expose the way in which the rigid imposition of WASP principles on Canadian society created the present identity crisis, as in Williams Fruet's *Wedding in White* (1972) and Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore* (1976); or by adopting the conventions of American genres to depict the pervasive anxiety underlying the apparent security of the consumer society, as in David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) and Fruet's *Death Weekend* (1976). The political dimension in most of these films remains implicit but there is a strong sense of frustration and emptiness that resembles the depiction of an oppressed society in Québécois films.

The basic difference between the two cinemas can perhaps be seen in the relative ease with which the film-maker and his characters in Québec can identify the source of oppression, while their English-Canadian counterparts seem to function in an environment in which psychological pressures are real but political solutions difficult to envisage. It is not that political solutions are seen as irrelevant or impossible but that the characters are prevented from attaining a political consciousness by the illusions created by the prevailing ideology. The story of Joey and Pete in Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* (1970) grows out of the opening images of Nova Scotia in which natural beauty is contrasted with human desolation. This sense of wasted potential is continued in Toronto with the contrast between the many glimpses of homeless derelicts and the luxury and extravagance of a thriving commerical city. These contrasts are impressed on us, but we also see that Joey and Pete are unable to understand what is

happening to and around them because of the dreams and myths that their culture has fostered.

There can be no political solutions because bourgeois culture has created the illusion of the remoteness of political thought and action from everyday life. The only time that Pete becomes aware of the social forces working against him is when his application for a job in advertising is greeted with scorn. He points to the futility of getting an education in Nova Scotia when the only jobs are on the boats or in the mines, but he is told to go home or go back to school. There is no common ground between Pete's dreams and the numbing reality of the useless, unproductive job he has to settle for. The violent collision of dream and reality culminates (appropriately enough) in a supermarket parking lot, but this violence can have no cathartic effect since its victim is only a junior employee defending property that does not belong to him. Pete and Joey can only try to escape further to the west but the film makes clear that escape is an illusion. This illusion is the American dream, the notion that "success" is freely open to all, on which modern consumer society thrives but which is shown to be in total contradiction to Canadian reality.

If this is an impossible escape from an intolerable situation, the ability of Québécois film-makers to identify the source of oppression does not usually generate more realistic solutions. Their characters often end in a state of impasse and the unlikelihood of change also leads to fantasies of escape, usually outside Canada, to Florida, California, New York, Mexico, the Caribbean. The experience of feeling an outsider on one's own soil leads naturally to a preference for foreign soils which offer more freedom. These characters may be more aware of where they want to go than Joey and Pete (or Peter in *Nobody Waved Goodbye*) but it is these very fantasies, confirmed by the power of the media, that intensify their alienation from their actual environment and make it impossible for them to contemplate meaningful changes in that environment or their relationship to it. While the Québec context gives the theme of impotence a clearly political dimension, essentially the same vision of home as misery and escape as fantasy dominates both the Québécois and English-Canadian cinemas.

The absence of a strong commitment to political solutions is decried by radical critics in both cultures and their complaint is echoed by the common lament that Canadian films offer a negative and pessimistic vision that nobody wants to see. Especially when compared with the positive outlook of much of American popular culture, the Canadian cinema seems to represent an extreme reaction to escapism and an invitation to despair. Actually this complaint is one that extends far beyond the cinema: D. G. Jones records a growing viewpoint that

"Canadians have developed a kind of cultural schizophrenia, a division between their conscious aspirations and their unconscious convictions, which undermines their lives and leads to the development of a profoundly negative outlook". As Jones acknowledges, there is much to support such a viewpoint but he sets out to suggest "a general way of looking at Canadian literature which would allow us to acknowledge the many negative characteristics and yet maintain that the literature has a basically positive character".[7] The negative elements in Canadian culture have been traced to many sources, including the insecurity caused by a lack of identity, the Puritan heritage, the harshness of the climate, and the sheer frustration of trying to make a living as an artist in Canada. Yet, in the cinema as in literature, the stress on these negative aspects represents a serious distortion which only serves to increase the public's alienation from its own culture.

The negative vision cannot be ignored. It provides the basis of Margaret Atwood's thesis that Canada is "a collective victim" and that the basic motif of Canadian culture is the struggle to survive. She argues that this situation leads to a dominant concern with failure and suggests that "when Canadian writers are writing clumsy or manipulated endings, they are much less likely to manipulate in a positive than they are in a negative direction".[8] Certainly, many English-Canadian films (especially) offer a vision not just of failure but of life as a constant succession of failures each one worse than the one before. There is often an overwhelming sense of a malevolent power against which the characters are helpless, a power which seems inevitably to create negative endings. Even those films which adopt popular formulas have none of the faith of the American popular cinema in action as a solution to moral dilemmas. The illicit love affair of Joseph and Domino in George Bloomfield's *Child Under a Leaf* (1974) is doomed from the beginning and the death of her child (under a blanket actually) is only one of a series of catastrophes that are inflicted on them. The downward movement of the action is punctuated by idyllic, romantic sequences which seem to take no account of the progress of the narrative. Thus the only alternatives seem to be a glossy, unreal happiness and the despair confirmed by the final freeze-frame of Domino's face as she spots Joseph's car and prepares to meet him unaware that instead of shooting her husband he has shot himself. Similarly Douglas Jackson's *The Heatwave Lasted Four Days* (1974) draws on the sub-genre of the American thriller in which an innocent individual finds himself hunted by both police and criminals, but the Canadian hero never fulfils audience expectations that he will take control of the situation. At the end, he is alone in prison, afraid to

speak out through fear for his family and separated from his wife who knows nothing about what has happened to him.

These bleak endings are all the more prominent in that the films otherwise conform to commercial formulas. But this feeling of sliding downhill is a common one in English-Canadian cinema. After a series of reverses, *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and *Goin' Down the Road* end with the main characters on the road but going nowhere; *Wedding in White* ends with Jeannie trapped in her stifling environment through her marriage with the drivelling Sandy; *Between Friends* ends with Elly and Toby in a stationary car in the wastelands of northern Ontario, alone with the bodies of her husband and her father. The usual response to this dispiriting world is an attempt to ignore it through pretence and gameplaying. Will Cole, in Peter Carter's *The Rowdyman* (1972) plays the clown and refuses to grow up. His carefree attitude is a refreshing contrast to the drab respectability asserted by his society, but it is severely tested by his confrontation with the dying old man on whom he seems to have modelled himself, by his responsibility in the death of his best friend in an industrial accident, and finally by the departure of his girl for Toronto. A visit to a dying man in hospital and the departure of his girl are also among the trials of Jim King in Paul Lynch's *The Hard Part Begins* (1973) whose dreams of success as a singer are destined to failure and seen as an evasion of domestic responsibility. His attempts to remain free are confronted by the reality of the decline of interest in country music, just as the "irresponsible" dreams of western heroism of Rick Dillon in Peter Pearson's *Paperback Hero* (1973) conflict with the reality of the claustrophobic small-town and its dying hockey team.

All of these examples are taken from English-Canadian cinema (and could be added to indefinitely) but it is equally difficult to find in Québécois cinema a character who is successfully able to assert himself against the limitations imposed by his environment. The Quiet Revolution did bring a new freedom in sexual matters which led to a number of mildly erotic films, such as Denis Héroux' *Valérie* (1968), in which the audience could experience vicariously a rejection of sexual, if not social, constraint. But, if the wages of sin were no longer hell and damnation, the rebellion could be contained by a final redemption through true love. Sexual release may be an important step in a society like Canada's, which, as Ronald Sutherland has shown, is dominated by puritanical attitudes fostered by the Calvinist tradition in English Canada and the Jansenist tradition in Québec.[9] Yet the feelings of liberation generated by Héroux' film and its successors have been undercut by the many films which deal with the oppressiveness of the new morality or with sexual sickness as a symptom of a decadent soc-

iety. While Valérie was moving triumphantly from convent to brothel to marriage bed, the heroine of Paul Almond's *Isabel* (1968) was more typically wrestling with the full weight of a family and cultural tradition that closed off for her any possibility of sexual fulfilment.

The problems of impotence and frustration dominate sexual relationships in both cinemas and reflect a social structure that seems to be designed to prevent self-fulfilment—except, for the chosen few, in material terms. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's enumeration of the problems of life in Québec could be applied also (with minor changes) to life in English Canada and his ironic way of expressing himself points to society's attempt to suppress all awareness of a bleak reality:

> THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS IN QUEBEC. I have thus expressed. . . only personal obsessions: the immobility of a society submitted to the rigours of cold and of a colonialism simultaneously British, French, American and religious; the absolute segregation at the level of the spoken language of the Québécois and consequently of social classes; imposition of capitalist structures on the economy and culture; acute crisis of communication between the individuals and the various groups of my society for the above-mentioned reasons and also, crudely and simply, for geographic reasons.

The films that emerge from such a situation must of necessity face up to the negative aspects and express an attitude that can verge on despair. But, as Lefebvre also says, "to make a film on despair, is already a sign of hope", and he argues that the Americans are mistaken "to despise despair". Since "to despair is to become aware simultaneously of the difficulty and grandeur of life and death", it becomes "a very positive kind of attitude".[10]

For Lefebvre, then, the American cinema is one that evades despair and his own films are opposed to "that culture...that way of lying—to themselves, and to others". The grip that Hollywood maintains on the collective imagination of the western world is intensified in Canada for geographic and economic reasons and Lefebvre is one of many voices warning against the temptation to create "a cinema in the image of the dominant cinema in a dominated society". The search for identity that is central to both Canadian cinemas is complicated by the way in which the "American way of life" and the "American dream" have come to define an "international" attitude to life in the postindustrial age. John Hofsess thus complains that nowhere in Canadian cinema is there "a character with the brains, balls, will or gall to master life as it must be lived in the twentieth century."[11] American culture, by its aggressiveness and emphasis on "success", not only encourages Canadians to see themselves as inferior but also creates the terms with which the problem can be discussed and the rules by which any attempt at self-assertion

must be governed. There can be no doubt that, in comparison with the American popular cinema, Canadian films do depict a failure to "master" modern life, but they also attest to a difficult and painful search for a mode of living that will not depend on mastery.

The title of Robert Fothergill's article 'Being Canadian Means Always Having to Say You're Sorry' restates Hofsess' complaint, but Fothergill concludes by suggesting a way out of the oppressed situation of looking up to the U.S. as a successful elder brother:

> Ideally there might be imagined a transvaluation of the younger brother syndrome, whereby the qualities and characteristics derived from that experience are re-affirmed as active virtues rather than passive short-comings. By inhibiting the development of "chauvinism", both nation-ally and in the individual temperament, the Canadian condition has perhaps made possible a mode of self-realization that would be socially transforming.[12]

Yet the dominant feeling in Canadian, especially English-Canadian, films is of the absence of a positive Canadian identity. The claustro-phobic world of *Wedding in White,* for example, stems from a rigid adherence to British traditions and an unwillingness to adapt to (or even create) a new environment. Here the impulse is to remain in the past, and in *Partners* this impulse is set against the future-oriented vision of American power and progress. Despite the fact that its characters are either American or very *English* Canadians, the film works tentatively towards a middle-ground that could be called "Can-adian" and could overcome the artificial divisions created by Canada's history.

Fothergill's approach would allow us to see the contradiction and uncertainties that make up the Canadian experience as not necessarily negative factors. The vision of both the English-Canadian and the Québécois cinemas is one in which many contradictions exist but in which the establishment has worked to suppress any awareness of them. In exposing these contradictions and compelling audiences to experience them, Canadian filmmakers have often placed themselves in an adversary position with regard to their audience and have found that their work itself has been virtually suppressed. The enemy, according to this vision, is any force that suppresses opposition, and therefore contradiction, whether it be the British spirit of *Wedding in White*, the English-Canadian spirit of *The Far Shore* and *Partis pour la gloire,* the invisible government machine of *Les Ordres*, the myth of masculine virility of Mireille Dansereau's *La Vie revée* (1972) and François Manckiewicz's *Le Temps d'un chasse* (1972), and so on. An awareness of contradiction and a willingness to allow this awareness to shape the aesthetic experience are essential elements of modern art's

rebellion against the fixed viewpoint of perspective and linearity that created a sense of order and harmony in the past. Today such artificial order has come to seem an evasion of the complexities of modern reality, to be a sign not of divine providence but of an excessive rigidity or complacency. Canadian films are often condemned for their failure to conform to the old standards which still dominate the structures of much popular culture and "high" art, whereas such standards are the product of a world-view against which these films are reacting.

All this is not to excuse carelessness, shoddiness, or incompetence but rather to suggest that there may be something in the Canadian experience which allows its culture (or cultures) to build on the contradictions of Marshall McLuhan's electronic age and to make contact with the mythic dimension to which Northrup Frye has drawn attention. If this is the case, the virtual suppression of the Canadian cinema can be seen as an example of the power of conservative elements in our culture to encourage and exploit a fear of the unknown and a resistance to change. Such a tension runs deep into the history of Canadian culture, with its garrison mentality constantly trying to impose European values on the colonial wilderness. The assertion of rigid social structures to suppress the dark side of human nature (associated with the savages and the wilderness that they found here) was inevitable given the puritanical backgrounds of the early settlers, but this process denied any real interaction between man and his new environment. The opposition between the spontaneous and improvised and the prescribed and inflexible that is basic to the form and content of both Canadian cinemas can be seen as a belated attempt to break free of this heritage. It involves, among other things, a questioning of the relationship of film and audience, and the experience may be unsettling for unwary audiences. But the elimination of the possibility of this experience would have consequences that extend well beyond the confines of the Canadian film industry.

NOTES

1. Gilles Marsolais, *Le Cinéma Canadien* (Editions du Jour: Montreal, 1968), p. 104; Jean-Claude Germain, '*Théâtre Québécois* or *Théâtre Protestant*', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 11, Summer 1976, p. 9; Ronald Sutherland, *Second Image* (New Press: Don Mill, 1971), p. 23.
2. Jacques Godbout, 'Le Cinéma de Papa Ottawa', *Cinéma Québec*, vol. 2, no. 9, pp. 24-5.
3. '10 Questions to 5 Canadian Film-Makers', *Cahiers du Cinema in English*, 4, p. 49; Gilles Groulx, quoted in *Second Wave* (Studio Vista: London: 1970), p. 121.
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