INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI®

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

The Effort to Forget:
Collective Memory and Documentary Film in Québec

Philip Preville

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 1997

ABSTRACT

The Effort to Forget:
Collective Memory and Documentary Film in Québec

Philip Preville

This thesis is an exploration of collective memory with respect to Québec nationalism. Three documentaries are used as a case study through which to examine the primary themes of collective memory in Québec: Denys Arcand's *Le Confort et l'indifférence* (1981), Donald Brittain's *The Champions Part 3: The Final Battle* (1983), and Jacques Godbout's *Le Mouton noir* (1992). Particular emphasis is placed upon the dynamics of forgetting in collective memory. Specifically, this thesis argues that forgetting is not the antithesis of memory, but its complement; forgetting emerges through the process of memory narrativization itself, as embodied through the documentary films. Conclusions are drawn with respect to the role of forgetting in the imagined community of the nation, and suggestions are formulated with respect to the understanding of collective amnesia in further study on collective memory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am, by my own account, stark raving mad. My mind is burdened with thought; I pace; I talk aloud to myself; I take pleasure in children's cartoons; I find endless fascination perusing the epitaphs of tombstones. My inability to limit the flow of reality, as you might well imagine, makes the fragility of life a rather threatening proposition. Each morning, I awake knowing that, at any given moment, I might suddenly fly apart, my body shattering into millions of pieces, my flesh transformed into crispy shards of stained glass. My continued perseverance on this earth, and the completion of this thesis, I owe to the many people who have mitigated my madness over the years.

First and foremost, I owe a tremendous debt to my family – my parents, my four brothers, and a vast array of other relatives. They have endowed me with a memory so rich, it fuels my imagination to a point beyond my control. Little did they know they were nurturing an intellectual obsession with the very concept of memory itself, an obsession that risked rocketing my mind into outer space. Or perhaps they did know: My mother, Doreen Ruth, and my father, Paul Alexander, have always counseled me to keep my feet on the ground. Without them, this thesis would never have come to completion.

Yet despite their help I remain insane, my insanity now merely chained to the earth's crust. To my good fortune, I have been able to surround myself with a gaggle of other crazy people whose delirium I believe differs from mine only in inflection. Together, we are a cuckoo's nest of closet fruitcakes which, through mutual support, is able to interact effectively with the rest of the world. I must thank Daniel Doane and Susan Schutta, who taught me my first steps in the post-graduate asylum's nursery; Robert Kwak and Michael Debbané, men of unrivalled mania; Bertie Mandelblatt, who has

often lent her ear to my ravings; Robert Deleskie, a truly debonnair madman; Darcelle Hall, who brings a freshly daft outlook to all the world's incoherence; and Matthew Hays, who has been burdened with the task of carrying my sense of humour for me, as, unbeknownst to him, I delegated it to his trust some months ago.

Tina Verma, whose calm exterior belies her rabid lunacy, and I both found ourselves strapped in the thesis straightjacket side-by-side for many months; memories of our time in the padded room will forever warm the cockles of my heart. Monique Tschofen, a pink elephant of sorts, was an inspirational apparition in a time of darkness. Chantal Nadeau, my thesis advisor, who in my mind's ever-dilated eye has become a mentor of sorts, has been a tremendous source of motivation and intellectual conversation.

In French there is a saying: *le génie frôle la folie*. Two of my oldest friends, Paul Murphy and Ron Kuipers, fit this description perfectly. To my mind, they have mastered their madness and transformed it into genius. They know how to ground themselves and so do not need chains. At the same time, they are able to set their minds free without losing orientation; you might say they have learned how to fly.

Finally, Joya Balfour's steadfast character in the face of all dementia – including her own, but most particularly mine – is truly remarkable. Her voice sings the bats in my belfry to sleep; she fills my world with amenomania. More than any other, she allays my fear of self-fragmentation and helps keep me whole.

I am grateful to all these people and many more, as I have found inspiration through each and every one of them. Due to my prevailing condition, I can only hope this thesis provides some small reflection of the richness they bring to my thought and my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

MEMORY'S LEXICON

The Inuit, according to Margaret Visser, have over thirty different words which may be applied to the concept of snow. In Inuktitut, crusty snow, melting snow, powdered snow, and so forth are not distinguished through adjectives, which would merely diminish each one as a variation on the same theme; rather, each type of snow is endowed with its own noun, a separate existence in language – *katakartanaq, mannguq, minguliq*. The language's array of adjectives may then be applied, not to a single noun, but to a whole list of them, resulting in a vast and intricate lexicon intended for the sole purpose of describing the most minute inflections of winter. From her observations, Visser deducts the following maxim: "richness of vocabulary is a pointer to the importance a culture places"[1] upon particular aspects of shared existence and experience.

Based upon Visser's maxim, it would appear that memory is a linchpin of western culture. The lexicon applicable to different types of memory in western culture – be it the English or French language, to name only the two in which I am fluent – is particularly vast, calling attention to many small but important

---

1 From "It's snowing what to say", which appears in the February 1994 edition of *Saturday Night* magazine, page 30. Inuktitut goes so far as to make distinctions between different types of snowballs, and even gives a different name to snow which is gathered for melting into water.

distinctions in the various ways we perform the act of remembering. One can commemorate, which is to preserve an event in memory through celebration; or, to take it a step further, one may memorialize, which is to commemorate specifically with respect to the dead. Similarly, a distinction is made between reminiscence, the process of memory narrativization, and retrospection, which denotes an indulgence in past time. A retrieval is a momentary recovery of a particular event through memory; a revival seeks to entrench that event back into present consciousness. Remorse is a mode of remembrance characterized by regret, while nostalgia is animated by sentimentality and wistfulness. Many of these words are often used interchangeably, but they have their own separate existence for a reason: to give different inflections and different accents to the ways in which the past makes its presence felt.[2] This vast vocabulary supports the notion that there is a "basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality" (Huyssen 1995: 9), for the language itself goes to great lengths to categorize the ways in which we reach back into the past – as if, somehow, it were an unavoidable compulsion that could not be contained and so needed to be understood in all its guises. The language even goes so far as to account for the loss of agency in the act of remembering: one may be haunted by a person's or event's persistence in memory, despite all best efforts to the contrary.

Alas, western culture's obsession with remembering does not extend to forgetting. The vocabulary designated to describe forgetting is nowhere near as

---

2 Though such modes of remembering are often assumed to be sad and sombre events, they can, like Inuktitut's words for snow, take on a vast range of qualifiers. Memorializing, for example, can range from the solemnity of a Remembrance Day ritual to the more celebratory mood of an Irish wake. Memorializing can also be deliberately ambiguous, as in the case of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C., which, according to Blair et al., "demands that one either resolve the issues [surrounding the Vietnam War] in a tentative or qualified fashion, or that he/she leave with critical and gnawing questions still to consider" (Blair et al. 1994: 368).

vast, for a simple reason: on the surface, it would seem that little qualification can be given to something that is not there. To remember something is to invoke it in the present, and memories can make their presence felt in many ways. But to forget something is precisely to *not* invoke it; it is an absence. To suggest that some event is "conspicuous by its absence" in memory is in fact to remember it by calling attention to it; once the utterance is made, the event is no longer forgotten. Forgetting itself becomes the forgotten subject in the study of memory, for without an appropriate linguistic toolbox, it remains impenetrable.

The problem with this perspective, of course, is the unstated assumption that forgetting has an existence of its own which is separate and apart from remembering, and that it thus requires its own vocabulary in order to be understood. Rather, forgetting is something which occurs concomitantly with remembering: the very act of recollecting a series of events also enacts a series of omissions. Memory is not akin to a chronicle. The archives of history are far too vast; they behoove memory to choose and thus make of forgetting memory's compliment, rather than its enemy. Viewed in this light, forgetting takes on the same inflections as remembering, for it shares the same lexicon – although it gains access to that lexicon through the back door. To commemorate, to nostalgize, to memorialize, or to revive imply not only different modes of remembering, but different modes of forgetting as well; the invocation of one over the other affects both the scope and the quality of our amnesia.

This point may seem self-evident to some, but it is nonetheless one that is often overlooked in contemporary cultural scholarship. According to Andreas Huyssen, "The difficulty of the current conjuncture is to think memory and amnesia together rather than to simply oppose them" (Huyssen 1995: 7). To oppose memory and amnesia is to mistakenly turn the latter into memory's radical other, to make of amnesia something which would obliterate memory

itself. In contrast, as Homi Bhabha notes, "The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (Bhabha 1990b: 317). Likewise, forgetting is not outside remembering; it emerges precisely when we are most intimately engaged in memories of our past. Remembering and forgetting are two strands of the same twisted rope. To study forgetting is not to compare the inventory of memory against that of the archive or the chronicle – this can only serve as a first step at most. To study forgetting is to assemble amnesia out of memory itself, to examine how our effort to remember our collective past also enacts a parallel effort to forget, and to recognize both as essential components in the construction of narratives of collective identity.

Québec Documentary: A Window on Collective Amnesia

My interest in collective memory and amnesia in Québec stems primarily from my bachelor's studies in Canadian history, as well as from a certain personal stake in the matter: I am Canadian and my mother tongue is English; I have Québécois roots and speak fluent French; I have lived long portions of my life at geographical extremities within Canada; I have identified with Canada's official language majorities and minorities in all their permutations; I still cling, for better or for worse, to a particular vision of the Canadian collective project. This thesis, then, is part of a personal as well as an intellectual journey; it is part of an ongoing attempt to situate myself within different collective memories which are sometimes in harmony, often in discord, and almost always construed as incommensurable. My personal situation fuels my fascination with the issue of

forgetting: I feel I am called upon to remember an awful lot, and am dumbfounded by others' ability to forget.

This thesis will examine the issue of memory and forgetting through documentary film. Documentary is, to my mind, the ideal genre for the examination of memory: documentaries expressly take upon themselves the duty of representing the shared past, of impregnating it with meaning which makes it relevant to the present day. Chapter 1 discusses the relationship between documentary film and the rewriting of memory in Québec, and addresses how documentary film provides a unique critical perspective on questions of memory and forgetting. The chapters which follow attempt to apply that critical perspective. Chapter 2 examines two documentary films – one English, one French – that narrate the unfolding of the 1980 Québec referendum campaign: Denys Arcand's *Le Confort et l'indifférence* (1981) and Donald Brittain's *The Champions Part 3* (1983). The comparative analysis of these two films will serve to bury notions of accuracy and distortion as criteria for evaluating memory, and to highlight how the effort to forget undermines Québec nationalism's claims of insurgency. Chapter 3 provides a sustained analysis of a single documentary, Jacques Godbout's *Le Mouton noir* (1992), demonstrating how forgetting is enacted through the very act of memory itself. Finally, the conclusion of this thesis considers *Le Confort et l'indifférence* side-by-side with *Le Mouton noir* to explore how memory and amnesia can be transformed to suit the present – how they are less dependent upon the events of the past than upon the exigencies of the here and now – and to suggest new directions for the understanding of forgetting in the realm of cultural memory analysis. Throughout, this entire thesis is driven by an attempt to take up Huyssen's challenge, "to think memory and amnesia together rather than to simply oppose them" (Huyssen 1995: 7), and to make a contribution to further study in this vein.

CHAPTER ONE

DOCUMENTARY FILM, MEMORY, AND FORGETTING IN QUÉBEC

History, Collective Memory, and the State

To anyone with even a cursory familiarity with Canadian historiography, it quickly becomes abundantly clear that debates over the past often act as surrogates for debates in the present. In historical studies, Canadian and Québécois nationalist interpretations have been at loggerheads for many decades over the nature of Québec nationalism and Québec's participation in the Canadian Confederation. Canada's 'unity debate' is not merely about visions of present and future life. Viewed through a historiographical lens, the debate is equally about visions of the past: the watershed events that have led us to the present juncture, and the ways in which the lessons of the past compel us to make our political choices in the here and now.

While historiographical awareness makes this observation possible, the forces at work have little to do with academic historiography *per se*. History, as an academic discipline, is not always properly equipped to deal with the resonance that its subject matter incurs within popular discourse. As Hayden White notes, "the historical method consists in the investigation of the documents in order to determine what is the true or most plausible story that can be told

about the events of which they are evidence" (White 1984: 2). History, when confronted with a widely accepted account of history in public discourse – what amounts to a dominant collective vision of the shared past – does not seek to examine how that account functions, nor how it manages to hold its currency; instead, the historical method compels a return to the archival primary sources that might validate or invalidate the account. Historians are quick to identify the "myths" of popular memory, but their methodology does little to dispel those myths, for "since such myths do not need factual corroboration in order to reproduce themselves, they are not likely to be dispelled by the patient assembly of evidence to the contrary" (Ignatieff 1997: 16). History, by ignoring present exigencies in favor of archival traces, ultimately remains ignorant of the cultural dynamics of memory production and reproduction. Pierre Nora lays out in plain terms the tensions between history and memory:

> Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it... History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. (Nora 1989: 8-9)

The net effect of academic historical methodology is that history often becomes unable to explore its link with the present beyond anecdotal musings. A historical re-reexamination of, say, the Durham Report[3] might begin by pointing out that the debate still rages today in some form or other, then go on to ignore the present in favor of esoteric primary sources and the arcanely authoritative musings of many preceding historians. History feels little need to explore their

---

3 The Durham Report, penned in 1839 by Lord Durham, who was at the time Britain's High Commissioner to British North America – and, by extension, official head of state in the colony. The Durham Report was controversial for its characterization of French Canadian colonists as "inferior" to the English (Finlay 1984: 133), and for its recommendation to effectively assimilate all francophones into the English language and British customs.

reassertion of an event's current pertinence; with history, the exigencies of the present are encumbrances that preferably and easily cast aside. As Nora so aptly put it, "At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory" (Nora1989: 9).[4]

The discipline of cultural studies, concerned as it is with material social and cultural practices as well as the narratives which inform them, has taken up the study of collective memory in earnest. Events may be long since past, but remembering is an act which takes place very much in the present. As such, "[popular] memory is, by definition, a term which directs our attention not to the past, but to *the past-present relation*. It is because 'the past' has this living active existence in the present that it matters so much politically" (Popular Memory Group 1982: 211). Collective memory is, essentially, the narrative a community tells itself about its own progress through time. It is a crucial element of the process by which a common identity is forged among large populations across vast geographical expanses. In Benedict Anderson's words, it is part of the reason why so many individuals can never know or meet each other, can never have any idea of just how disparate they are, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983: 6). Collective memory situates those in the present within a narrative reaching beyond far beyond their own birth into the past, making them part of a single collective protagonist forging a continuous path across time.

History, of course, plays a role in forging collective memory, but the shift of focus from academic history to popular memory robs the former of much of its

---

4 Nora's perspective may be somewhat harsh in light of current debates within the discipline of history. Through the works of White, Nora and others, the philosophy of history is currently experiencing an upheaval of sorts. The proliferation of works dealing with memory, as well as the creation of the academic journal *History and Memory* in 1987, are testament to the discipline's attempt to deal with issues of memory production and reproduction.

authority. Because collective memory binds disperse groups into single communities, the forging of memory is often taken up in earnest by state institutions for purposes of national unity. In Canada, this process includes state-designed history curricula in schools, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, the observance of commemorative holidays (Remembrance Day, Canada Day, Flag Day), and many other activities coordinated by the Ministry of Canadian Heritage[5]. In Québec, the list would expand to include Radio-Québec and "La St. Jean Baptiste," among others. But such an emphasis on state-sponsored activities and commemorations is misleading, for the terrain of collective memory is so vast that it perpetually eludes the controlling impulse of any government agency. The sites of popular memory production are innumerable; a partial list would include newspapers, television newscasts and other forms of mass news dissemination; fiction and non-fiction publications intended for a general rather than a merely academic audience; films, theatre productions, and other forms of public art; postcards, posters and message t-shirts; oral family and community narratives; and ritualized forms of public speech. "Taken together," Roger Simon argues, "these sites constitute the field within which the practice of historical representation takes place; the locus of the social production of collective memory" (Simon 1994: 128-9). Because these latter sites involve a lesser degree of centralized government control, they often serve as sites of counter-commemoration or other

---

5 The Ministry of the Secretary of State was renamed the Ministry of Canadian Heritage in 1993. The choice of name is a curious one, for it suggests that an ephemeral "heritage" – not just tangible landmarks and monuments – is an object suitable for centralized management.

"forms of insurgency"[6] for groups who wish to challenge dominant versions of memory.

Insurgent Memory in Québec

The notion of insurgent memory has an impressive genealogy with respect to Canada and Québec. The codification of memory brought forth either by federal agencies or some ephemeral Canadian ethos has always been contested, to a greater or lesser degree, by Québec's nationalist movement. In a nutshell, Canadian nationalism's vision of collective memory endeavours towards a "uniform" subjectivity which is flexible enough to enlist all Canadians in a single national project; meanwhile, Québec nationalism seeks to reconfigure collective memory in such a way as to enlist the Québécois in a separate national project of their own. For Québec nationalism, the Canadian project relegates the Québécois to the realm of the forgotten; subsequently, it finds empowerment through its marginal position. Yet the marginal status of Québécois nationalist collective memory is itself highly contested. On the one hand, the French-speaking Québécois are located in the margins: culturally and linguistically, they

---

6 Simon's interest in memory studies revolves around what he terms "'insurgent commemoration'; attempts to construct and engage representations that rub taken-for-granted history against the grain" (Simon 1994: 131). By his own account, insurgent commemoration is not easily accomplished through established pedagogy, which would involve the rewriting of school history texts and a parallel upheaval of current curricula at all levels of education. As an example of insurgency, Simon offers the case of a t-shirt with the message "How could Columbus have discovered America when Native Americans were already here?" The t-shirt, according to Simon, demonstrates popular memory's diffused condition and the variety of forums which can impact upon it, for the t-shirt serves as a forum for counter-commemoration by exposing the ethnocentric assumptions underlying established accounts of American history.

are a minority within both Canada and North America and, as such, often see themselves akin to other marginalized cultural groups. On the other hand, *unlike* other such groups, they are not diasporic. Within Québec's boundaries, francophones represent a sizeable majority, and thus exercise democratic control over the province's representative and executive levels of government. This position sets the Québécois very much apart from other cultural minorities, who resist dominant collective memory from a position of considerably less political influence. There is a paradox inherent to the Québécois situation: They are simultaneously *majoritaire* and *minoritaire.* The project of a new Québec nation is made possible by the fact that francophones form a democratic majority, yet the realization of the project is predicated upon an identity which constructs the collective Québécois subject as a marginalized and disenfranchised minority.

This paradox also applies to Québec's anglophone community, though perhaps with the terms in reverse order: They are also *minoritaire* and *majoritaire* at the same time. Within Québec, anglophones are an important linguistic minority with a long history, but a minority nonetheless. Yet when considered in the absence of provincial boundaries, they count simply as part of English-speaking majority within Canada. The latter context is the one in which Québec nationalism often portrays anglophones in the province, but anglophones themselves tend to emphasize their minority status within the context of provincial politics – both in the linguistic sense and in the political sense as well, for few anglophones subscribe to the nationalist project.[7] In this sense, both

---

7 Throughout the course of 1996, anglophone media in Québec have been filled with stories of community members demonstrating to retain their rights, be it their right to have English on commercial signs or their right to remain Canadian via the partitioning of Québec's territory. These demonstrations are exemplary of a disenfranchised minority seeking to influence legislatures they do not control; they are also intended to undermine Québec nationalism, or,

communities are quite similar, for both tend to rely heavily on their minority status in order to forge internal solidarity; both also insist upon their minority status in order to place the burden of accommodation upon the other.

This situation creates a number of cultural tensions for Québec nationalism, particularly for the reorientation of collective memory and its role in forging a widespread sense of national identity. According to Ernest Renan, "the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (Renan 1990: 11). This forgetting is not incidental. Any national project involves an *effort* to forget often characterized as a form of psychic violence. Bhabha, like Renan, links national amnesia with the very origins of the national entity, and thus with its continued perseverance: The effort to forget is "the violence involved in establishing the nation's writ" (Bhabha 1990: 310). The forging of a national identity requires that many past conflicts be forgotten in the name of continued unity; the Canadian government has been quite successful in this project over the decades, despite constant opposition from the nationalist movement in Québec.

Mind you, the flipside to the nationalist project in Québec – that is, the widespread adoption of a Québécois identity and the creation of a new, corresponding sovereign state – brings us back to Renan's imperative: It also requires forgetting, this time a forgetting of a different order. If forgetting is a form of violence, then Québec nationalism seeks at once to uncover the violence done to the Québécois within Canada, and at the same time to impose a new violence, not necessarily upon its anglophone community, but upon itself. On the one hand, Québec nationalism subverts dominant Canadian memory by exposing the amnesias of previous conflicts, some long forgotten (the Conquest

---

to quote activist Howard Galganov, "it's about getting at the separatists" ("One Year Later", *The Gazette*, October 26, 1996, p. B1).

of New France by the British in 1759, the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837) and some more recent (the patriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1981, the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990), thus telling a centuries-old and ongoing narrative of discord and hostility for the Québécois within Canada. This reconfiguration of memory simultaneously reconfigures forgetting, for it encourages an amnesia of other memories that have encouraged the Québécois to subscribe to a Canadian sense of identity. To put it another way, Québec nationalism's reconfiguration of memory would require people to forget the very thing – dominant memory – it attempts to expose. These internal dynamics of memory production require further analysis. How can a community's collective memory be characterized by both a highly politicized effort to remember, to challenge dominant memory, and a concomitant effort to forget those same dominant frameworks? To supplant one amnesia in favor of another is a tricky operation to say the least. Though the notion of insurgent commemoration seems appropriate to the situation in Québec, the contextual nature of the Québécois' minority/majority status necessarily mitigates any claim to insurgency.

Memory Production and Documentary Film in Québec

Ethereal beast that it is, memory *qua* memory is not directly accessible as an object of study. Popular narratives of the past, partial as they may be, must serve as points of entry into any examination of memory and forgetting. In Québec, documentary film has been a prominent site for the production of nationalist memory; it is also an ideal medium for the investigation of collective memory. Documentary deals with events in the shared political, social and cultural life of a community; as such, it engages its community in memories of

itself. As Bill Nichols notes, "Documentary, like other discourses of the real, retains a vestigial responsibility to describe and interpret the world of collective experience" (Nichols 1991: 10). And the genre's condition inevitably ties it to collective memory, for it uses actuality footage to explore people, issues and events in the past, footage which is often familiar to viewers of evening newscasts. This applies even more so to documentary films which deal with the recent past: The film's initial interpellation of its audience occurs at the level of memory, as it asks its audience, first and foremost, "remember this?"

By all accounts, documentary filmmaking occupies a prominent role in twentieth century Québécois cultural production – particularly in relation to the National Film Board of Canada. David Clandfield identifies the years 1957-1964 as "The Golden Age of Québec Documentary" (1987: 42), due to the number of talented filmmakers and the volume of production at the time. He singles out 1958's *Les Raquetteurs* as exemplary of the Québec documentary movement, notably for the sympathetic subjectivity it conveyed towards its subject matter. "The film did not adopt the distant, ironic smile of the 'Candid Eye' films or the commentaries of Donald Brittain. Instead, it declared solidarity with the people it was watching and returned this image to them" (Clandfield 1987: 44). While Québec documentary's "golden age" may have ended in 1964, many of that period's documentarists continued to work through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Two recent documentaries featured in this thesis were directed by Québécois documentarists who were active in that period: Both Denys Arcand (*Le Confort et l'indifférence*, 1981) and Jacques Godbout (*Le Mouton Noir*, 1992) contributed to a special issue of the journal *Parti pris* criticizing the NFB for "its colonial role in Québec", though both continue to work in collaboration with the NFB to varying degrees today.

Québec documentarists' solidarity with their subject was not necessarily benign: In many ways, it was part of the larger political and socio-cultural upheaval in post-1960 Québec. Ron Burnett draws a direct link between the documentary movement in Québec and the nationalist political project:

> Theirs was a cinema rooted in the momentous changes of *La Révolution Tranquille*, a cinema devoted to taking the familiar and recasting it, writing a new history, re-writing history and crucially rewriting popular memory. Thus one cannot separate the national dreams of those filmmakers from the films they made, nor their nationalistic aspirations from the history which they tried to recover. (Burnett 1985: 7)

In this sense, documentary film in Québec was a primary site for enacting Simon's counter-commemoration, for critically revisiting accepted history and rewriting it accordingly. This rewriting process occurs in a variety of ways, and does not necessarily entail the explosion of myths or the creation of cinematic manifestoes. In Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault's *Les Raquetteurs* (1958), the rewriting of memory emerges from the simple fact that a community's leisure activities, steeped in the tradition of logging and fur trapping, are portrayed with a type of knowing wink between individuals who understand one another completely; in *Le Confort et l'indifférence*, the attempt to recodify memories of the 1980 referendum campaign are much more explicit. In either case, the rewriting of popular memory also entails the erasure of previous memory, or, what amounts to the same thing, the rewriting of amnesia. As the collective narrative is rewritten around newly uncovered remembrances, old remembrances are cast aside. Inducing amnesia is, of course, not necessarily part of the documentarist's intention; but to rewrite popular memory is inevitably to make a case for what should be remembered and what should not. The latter half of this equation is a consequence of the first. It is rare that anyone makes the outright suggestion, either in documentary or otherwise, that something should be "forgotten".

Rather, the rewriting of collective memory sets the dynamics of forgetting in motion, and forgetting enters the landscape through the back door.

Documentary film, in addition to being an ideal medium for exploring collective memory in Québec, can also shed a great deal of light upon broader theoretical questions dealing with memory itself. Unlike fiction film, documentary does not refer to events in a purely imagined world constructed as an imitation of the one we inhabit. Documentary retains the same mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche[8] – as fiction. Yet because documentary deals with events in what Nichols terms the "historical world" through actuality footage, it is not as free as fiction to apply any or all of the tropes at its disposal. Nevertheless, as Nichols says, documentary film holds a "responsibility" to interpret the shared reality of a community, and to give it cultural meaning.

> Whatever else we may say about the constructed mediated, semiotic nature of the world in which we live, we must also say that it exceeds all representations. This is a brute reality; objects collide, actions occur, forces take their toll... Occur they will; their interpretation, though, invokes the full power of our cultural system. (Nichols 1991: 110)

This condition at once imposes limitations upon the documentary genre and also gives it its particular power with respect to memory. According to Patricia Hampl, "Memory invites the camera as dreams do not because its landscape is a shared one, a kind of communal dream" (Hampl 1996: 54). Documentaries situate a collective subject within a plausible, recognizable, and ongoing historical narrative; they make the past relevant to the present, and orient communities towards further political action in the here and now.

---

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense", *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1976), page 46.

The "Formal Instinct" of Representation

The relationship between a documentary film and its subject mirror the relationship between collective memory and the vast archives of national history. Rarely is the documentarist faced with a shortage of subject matter, of events to place in sequence, of influential personalities to include, or of film footage to choose from; choices are unavoidable. Inevitably, aspects of the story being told are deemed non-essential, and are left to be forgotten on the cutting-room floor. As a result, documentaries are often criticized for those elements they exclude from the story they tell, calling into question the accuracy of the cinematic representation. Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), though not a documentary, was the subject of this type of criticism: many journalists, insisting upon Stone's responsibility to interpret the real, criticized Stone for distorting the facts.[9] Such charges are essentially positivistic, for they insist that "the evidence" of what really happened would dispel the inaccuracies of the representation.

The character of these debates is not foreign to much theoretical writing on the subject of memory. Analyses of collective or popular memory often focus on the omissions of dominant memory; as noted earlier, Bhabha has likened the nation's effort to forget as a form of "violence" in its erasure of cultural difference. bell hooks, situating herself firmly within marginal spaces located outside dominant memory, writes of "an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering and triumph, in ways that transform present reality" (hooks 1989:

---

9 For a more complete account of the debate surrounding JFK, see the epilogue to Barbie Zelizer's Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

17). Clearly, the nationalist movement in Québec sees itself in this light, as an insurgent movement attempting to resurrect memories which would otherwise be obliterated. The governing Parti Québécois' *Projet de loi sur l'avenir du Québec*, which was the object of the 1995 referendum vote in Québec, describes a memory of Canada as a story of encroachment and deceit, to the point of ultimately entailing a betrayal of identity:

> L'État canadien a transgressé le pacte fédératif en envahissant de mille manières le domaine de notre autonomie et en nous signifiant que notre croyance séculaire dans l'égalité des partenaires était une illusion. ...nous avons l'intime conviction que persister à l'intérieur du Canada signifierait s'étoiler et dénaturer notre identité même... (Éditeur officiel du Québec 1995: 9)

Certainly the Canadian state would disagree with such an interpretation of its conduct over the decades. This text, similar to a score of others, forges a collective memory which highlights conflict and resistance. Sovereignty activist Gilles Rhéaume makes precisely this claim: "L'histoire de notre peuple, c'est l'histoire de ses résistances" (Ferretti & Miron 1992: 427).[10] These texts embody what hooks terms "the struggle of memory against forgetting". They seek to counter dominant memory by bringing its omissions to light and contesting its accuracy.

The perspectives on memory espoused by critical theorists such as hooks or by political organizations such as the Parti Québécois are powerfully motivating. Nevertheless, they are based upon a diametrical opposition of memory and forgetting which is dubious at best. The amnesias of dominant

---

10 Compared to Rhéaume or to any number of other texts in Andrée Ferretti and Gaston Miron's compilation, *Les grands textes indépendantistes*, the *Projet de loi* is considerably less adamant than most. Québec Français, an academic journal, published an editorial in 1991 titled "Pour en finir avec le Canada colonial", which describes two centuries "de domination, d'inégalité et d'assimilation" (Ferretti & Miron 313). In a 1965 text titled "Il nous faut des pouvoirs", activist Pierre Renaud claimed that Québec's current autonomy was more limited than even such colonies as Tunisia and Morocco (Ferretti & Miron 358). The *Projet de loi*, by contrast, recognizes Québec as an originally willing partner in the Canadian federation.

memory are cast very much in an Orwellian light: Facts unsuitable to the exercise of power are erased from the record. Bhabha speaks in the same vein when he describes forgetting as "violence"; from this metaphor flows further metaphors of dominance, oppression, and assimilation. Concepts of forgetting-as-violence and memory-as-resistance are primarily of an ideological sort: They conceive of memory as an ephemeral lever of power, and pit memory against forgetting in a battle against false consciousness. While such analyses can be quite salient, they also tend to totalize dominant memory as oppressive, to the neglect of its other functions – for example, endowing a community with a sense of cohesiveness and temporality. Clifford Geertz labels this analytical stance "interest theory". Michael Schudson, in his essay "The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present", points to precisely this problem in memory studies. Interest theory dictates that "there is nothing more to the study of ideology than locating the material interests served by the ideas people adhere to... That is all ye know and all ye need know" (Schudson 1989: 105-7). The problem with such analyses is that they fail to nuance the dominant memory which is their object of investigation. Geertz is worth quoting at length here:

> [T]he view that social action is fundamentally an unending struggle for power leads to an unduly Machiavellian view of ideology as a form of higher cunning and, consequently, to a neglect of its broader, less dramatic social functions. The battlefield image of society as a clash of interests thinly disguised as a clash of principles turns attention away from the role that ideologies play in defining (or obscuring) social categories, stabilizing (or upsetting) social expectations, maintaining (or undermining) social norms, strengthening (or weakening) social consensus, relieving (or exacerbating) social tensions. (Geertz 1973: 202-3)

To Geertz' list of opposites I might add another obvious one: remembering (or forgetting) shared past experience. Memory and forgetting serve political ends, yes, but they serve other ends as well. To insist upon forgetting as a form of violence is to ignore a great deal of its *raison d'être.*

Ultimately, the notion that forgetting is a mace and memory an armor is based upon a historical positivism that belies its own claims as an analysis of memory. As Simon (1994: 131) points out, there are many different ways of constituting the "lessons" of history; these lessons become attached to particular events selectively highlighted in memory; the rest often fall by the wayside. Collective memory is ephemeral and fluid; it does not correspond to the historical chronicle, and to hold it against the chronicle as a measure of its appropriateness is to analyze memory not as memory, but as history. Once this incommensurable debate is allowed to proceed, memory is bound to lose, for "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (Nora 1989: 9). Yet this is precisely how the forgetting-as-violence concept proceeds, and in so doing it lays a trap for itself: In decrying the omissions of memory, the only criticism it can levy is that dominant collective memory does not correspond to the historical record – a point which should have been obvious from the get-go. As Huyssen observes, "The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity" (Huyssen 1995: 3).

Huyssen's imperative is embodied nowhere better than through the documentary genre, for documentaries exemplify the "remembering in representation" of which he writes. The fissure of representation may lead documentaries to a less-than-literal portrayal of reality, but it is also precisely the place from which they draw their creative energies. To criticize documentary for its distortions of the past is to lament the fissure and take a good running start down the slippery slope of interest theory. Philip Rosen strips this critical stance bare:

> Film historians and theorists have sometimes written as if the main pretense of documentary cinema has been the rather naive one of providing unmediated access to an ongoing profilmic event, as if the main line of the documentary cinema tradition consists in a constant attempt to convince the spectator s/he is watching the unfolding of the real... But for the generation of Griersonians who innovated the concept of documentary cinema as well as their successors, even including a number of cinema verité practitioners, this is just not true. (Rosen 1993: 87)

To criticise documentary for misrepresenting the real, then, is to fundamentally misunderstand both the genre and its relation to memory. As a point of entry into the study of memory, documentaries offer the opportunity to move beyond questions of accuracy and distortion. Memory's meanings are the master of the past, not vice-versa. Rather than asking whether documentaries ascribe the correct and verifiable meaning to what happened, documentaries beg the question of how "what happened" gets incorporated within the meaning imposed by memory.

Furthermore, Huyssen's "fissure" between an event and its representation helps in understanding documentary's relation to forgetting as well as to memory. Fissures are the site of cultural creativity; they are also, in a more literal sense, the "cracks" into which forgotten events fall. And while those events become hidden from view, the cracks themselves remain visible. Through documentary, forgetting can be understood as part of the creative process of narrativization – not as omission or distortion, but as part of what Hampl calls the "formal instinct" which screens out various elements of the shared past in order to give shape to memory's narrative. In this context, Huyssen's fissure is not only unavoidable, but necessary, for "the inability to limit the flow of reality is one definition of madness" (Hampl 1996: 76). Forgetting, because it helps limit reality's flow, becomes an act (or non-act) of self-preservation – or, on a collective scale, the preservation of identity. Documentaries, as they give the past renewed presence in the here and now, perform percisely this function, for they serve to

limit the flow of the past into the present, and they do so as much for purposes of self-preservation as for the exercise of power. This perspective does not inoculate documentary film from criticism for its omissions, but it does mitigate the critical stance. Above and beyond the question of accuracy, one must consider how documentary imagines not only the relation between past and present, but also their relationship to the collective future – whether or not documentary is able "to redefine and rearticulate what one sees as desirable and necessary for an open, just, and life-sustaining future" (Simon 1994: 131) for the imagined community.

Modes of Remembrance in Documentary Film

To eschew the criteria of accuracy and distortion in the analysis of documentary film is to acknowledge that documentaries are, to some degree, fictions. Still, while they may be fictions, the fact remains that communities live by these fictions. According to Stuart Hall, "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past" (as quoted in Huyssen 1995: 1). This perspective entails important implications for the study of documentary and memory. To speak of narrativization in memory is to use a tool of literary fiction for the disassembly of an ostensibly "real" sequence of events. While the tool may seem mismatched to its task, contemporary studies of memory, nationalism, and even history tend to place such "real" narratives in the realm of fiction – Anderson's imagined (or fictional) communities being only one example. Indeed, Anderson makes this point forcefully in relation to the work of historian Ernest Gellner:

> Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretenses that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagination' and 'creation'. ... In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (Anderson 1983: 6)

Anderson's emphasis on style, rather than on accuracy, suggests the application of literary standards to the discourses of the real. If, as Burnett argues, the documentary tradition in Québec has played an important role in re-imagining the Québécois community, then Anderson's argument turns the focus towards the style in which documentary film re-imagines the Québécois community.

To rephrase this issue in terms of memory, the question becomes: How does documentary film re-imagine the relationship between past and present? Clearly, the purpose of documentary film is not to chronicle events past, but to give them meaning by inserting them into a narrative that continues in the present day. According to historian Hayden White:

> The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture's fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of imaginary events. (White 1984: 22)

White's perspective insists upon examining not only the truth-value of the narrative's events, but also the "truth-value" of its narrative form – which, as White notes, "can only display itself indirectly" (White 1984: 23). When White speaks of narrative form, he is referring to fictional genres – epics, romances, tragedies, and so on. Transferring White's theories to the domain of memory requires that we speak in terms of modes of remembrance: nostalgia, commemoration, revival, and so on. Modes of remembrance are the 'how', the 'style' of memory – they instruct us on how we are to remember the past.

In this respect, the documentary genre once again serves as an ideal site for the study of memory and forgetting, for documentary films position their audiences within specific modes of remembrance. The lexicon of memory finds its usefulness in understanding the memory narrative in documentary film. The modes of remembrance in documentary – whether a story is told to elicit nostalgia or reverence, for example – activate the tropes and metaphors of culture and bring them to bear upon the shared past. In so doing, they inform what will be remembered – and, by extension, what will be forgotten. To give but one simple example, a documentary which seeks to memorialize the efforts of a particular politician will focus upon how that politician influenced the unfolding of history, to the exclusion of other factors which might influence history (of which there are many). In this case, forgetting does not take the form of conscious omission by the documentarist; rather, it is a function of how memory itself is enacted.

As a popular art form, documentary transports both the recent and the distant past into the present. Because it deals with non-imaginary events, it arguably holds more sway over the configuration of memory than fiction film; while documentary's overall impact on the collective imagination may not compare to that of fiction, the fact that it deals with actual events in shared history give it additional ethical weight in the realm of collective memory. In Québec, the documentary tradition's role in rewriting memory has been often asserted, but sparsely analyzed – despite the fact that the landscape of memory in Québec has changed drastically over the past 40 years and is in constant upheaval, due in large part to competing memories which are constantly invoked for the Canadian and Québécois nationalist projects.

The rugged character of memory's terrain in Québec makes Québec documentary an ideal case study not only for memory, but for forgetting as well.

Forgetting, literally that which is not present in memory, is normally invisible; in Québec, however, the ongoing transformation of memory makes an examination of amnesia possible. The persistence of competing memories insist that the criteria of accuracy and distortion be abandoned, for if facticity held sway there would be no competing memories. To paraphrase Ignatieff, it is not factual truth but moral truth that matters.[11] The prominence of these competing memories, meanwhile, provide an opportunity to examine comparative amnesias, and to ask not "which memory is more correct?", but rather "which memory is more just, more open, more vital?" Documentary film provides the opportunity to examine how different communities within Québec relate to their past by examining how modes of remembrance are activated. Through those modes of remembrance, documentary also provides a window upon amnesia: by examining how communities relate their past to their present, we can see how the exigencies of the self-preservation compel not only memory's presence, but its absence in the form of amnesia as well.

---

11 Michael Ignatieff, "Articles of Faith", *Harper's* (March 1997), p. 16.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Documentary Representations of the 1980 Québec Referendum

A comparative analysis of Denys Arcand's *Le Confort et l'indifférence* (1981) and Donald Brittain's *The Champions Part 3* (1983) gives rise to a strikingly curious moment of intertextual *déjà vu*. At some point in the process of making his documentary, Brittain – perhaps in a fit of inspiration, or of laziness – lifted an entire forty-five second montage of actuality footage from his colleague's film and inserted it seamlessly into his own.

This situation is not entirely surprising. Both documentaries chronicle the unfolding of the 1980 Québec referendum campaign on sovereignty-association, and there are many instances throughout both documentaries where the same actuality footage is used, often at different times and usually within different contexts. But this instance, it seems, is something more than a simple matter of context. The montage consists of short clips of politicians from both sides of the campaign spouting statistics and economic figures on the impact of Québec's separation, spliced together to the snap-happy sounds of a marching band. The montage holds considerable importance within both documentaries, as "the economics of separation" was as prominent an issue then as it is today. Arcand, as his film's title suggests, clearly heaps ridicule upon politicians' preoccupation with economics, money, and empirical justifications-writ-large within any

national project. The ridiculousness conveyed by the montage is not lost in *The Champions*, either, yet *The Champions* celebrates politicians as visionaries, luminaries, great leaders, and makers of history. And although Arcand is mentioned in the credits, Brittain uses the montage as if it were his own.

Thus the two documentaries bear witness not only to the same aspect of the campaign, but offer the identical cinematic montage to represent it. Yet the montage is used in the service of entirely antithetical representations of the campaign itself. How is this possible? The answer lies, obviously, in the context in which each documentary situates the footage. So there is, one might say, a contextualization of context at work here. As such, the issue of context cannot be limited to the way the montage is positioned in the moments leading up to it. For Brittain to use the montage, he must first wipe clean the interpretive stance embedded in it by Arcand.

In this sense, this particular 45 second sequence is synecdochal for the entire relationship between the two documentaries. Both are dealing with precisely the same event, yet they imbue the event with entirely different meanings. To use the analytical concept which informs this entire thesis, they both "remember" the event in a way which allows them to use a variety of footage interchangeably; yet they both "remember" the entire event towards different, even antithetical, ends. This could be dismissed simply as a matter of political choice: For Arcand, a Québécois sovereignist, a No vote amounts to a defeat; for Brittain, an English Canadian, it signals a victory. But the event itself is of a decidedly different character than any general election. Since the referendum essentially entailed the creation of a new nation-state, also at stake was the question of national identity: one's vote held a strong equivalence with one's

sense of belonging with respect to the national political formation.[12] In each case, the spectre of the "wrong" outcome entails critical consequences, for identity is suddenly being put to a vote. What happens to an identity when it loses an election? How does it survive past an event of such proportions?

It does so, not only through an effort to remember, but also through a concomitant effort to *forget*. Obviously the 1980 referendum itself, as the central topic of each documentary, is not the object of forgetting. But for the same event to be remembered differently, it must be represented within broader notions of collective memory which are differentiated not only by what is remembered, but by what is forgotten – in this case, prior to the 1980 referendum. As Benedict Anderson notes, a nation "is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (Anderson 1983: 26), yet at the same time all forms of national consciousness, "by their very nature, bring characteristic amnesias" (Anderson 1983: 204). The effort to forget helps preserve the essential qualities of national identity, by helping to limit the consequences of events, such as a referendum loss, which would undermine the cohesiveness, solidarity and perseverance of the community. As such, the effort to forget is inherent to the construction of any sense of identity.

To insist upon the importance of forgetting in this fashion entails a number of important consequences for both the case study at hand and for broader theoretical concepts of collective memory. In the case of the former, the

---

12 Maurice Charland has perhaps encapsulated the matter most succinctly: "There was a strong sense in which "Québécois" was a term antithetical to "Canadien" (Charland 1994: 214). Obviously, the question is considerably more complex than this: both notions of identity existed simultaneously then – and continue to do so now – and as such are exemplary of how individuals inhabit different identities simultaneously. Nevertheless, in the context of a referendum campaign of this type, loyalties are exacerbated both for political gain and due to the sheer nature of the either/or decision one must make in the voting booth.

insistence upon forgetting immediately challenges any notion of Québécois identity as an emancipatory or insurgent one, for it suggests that *je me souviens* is already imbedded with a good dose of *oubli*. As for the latter, the insistence upon forgetting challenges the common notion that 'remembering' and 'forgetting' are distinct, separate acts. In "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," Homi Bhabha argues that:

> Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. (Bhabha 1990b: 300)

Bhabha argues that the effort to remember works upon the "supplementary space of cultural signification" provided by the "minus in the origin" of the nation, or the effort to forget. Within this supplementary space, the counter-narratives of marginal groups are able to 'add to' the national narrative without allowing it to 'add up', thus problematizing the inherent and essential qualities of identity (Bhabha 1990b: 305). The case of the 1980 Québec referendum does indeed disturb the common-sense notion of Canadian identity, but rather than render essentialism problematic, it instead leaves us with a clash of two essentialist identities. The Québécois counter-narrative only 'adds to' as much as it 'subtracts from'.

Documentary Strategies and the Construction of the Subject

Donald Brittain's three-part series *The Champions* chronicles the political careers of two highly prominent late-twentieth century politicians in Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and René Lévesque. In *Part 3* of the series, Brittain uses actuality footage from political rallies and news reports as well as interviews

with both men's political aides and colleagues, combining them into a coherent whole through his own voice-over narration, as he chronicles the federalist victory in the referendum campaign. Brittain does not have direct access to either of his primary personalities, but he does have access to their colleagues and aides, to whom he turns repeatedly for testimony on the unfolding of events. Cabinet ministers Claude Charron and Claude Morin are repeatedly interviewed, as are advisors Daniel Latouche (Lévesque), Jim Coutts (Trudeau), and Eddie Goldenberg (Jean Chrétien). These men-in-the-corridors-of-power allow *The Champions Part 3* to appear to tell the behind-the-scenes story of the referendum campaign. In fact, through Brittain's use of other sources, he seems to suggest that this particular story is the only one worth telling. When ordinary citizens speak in *The Champions*, which is rare to begin with, they never have anything coherent to say; in most cases, individuals are shown arguing fervently with one another, shouting at one another simultaneously. Everyman is unintelligible on the issue; the political leaders, as men of vision, are the only ones who can speak with authority.

The Champions Part 3, by virtue of its extensive use of interviews, appears at first glance to attempt to mediate meaning across both sides of the debate. Because they place the burden of interpretation upon the people who appear in the film rather than the filmmaker, "Interviews diffuse authority" (Nichols 1988: 55) by providing a sense of authenticity through real people testifying to real events in real time. But such a diffusion of authority is illusory, for two reasons. First, Brittain has limited his sources to a small group individuals, all with similar jobs within political institutions. As such, Brittain represents the scope of the "political" as being restricted solely to institutional manoeuvres. *The Champions* constantly reminds us that "the breakup of the country" hangs in the balance of the entire affair, while at the same time assuring us that the battle is

not ours to fight; we elect politicians precisely to lead us through such conflicts. Within the scope of the documentary, these are political movements, not popular ones. This strategy keeps audience members at a comfortable distance from the conflict while simultaneously implicating them in it. The selective use of sources thus orients viewers towards macro-political institutions, and encourages identification with representative leaders and authoritative voices.

Second, the diffusion of authority is illusory because even the limited sources chosen are always subordinated to Brittain's extensive voice-of-God narration. Brittain's institutional voice exerts considerable pressure upon the accounts of those interviewed. *The Champions Part 3* relies upon interviews, but it rearranges and tightly brackets them in order to subordinate them to Brittain's institutional voice. For example, while *The Champions* includes personal testimony and actuality footage of prominent separatist Pierre Bourgault, the narrator characterizes him as nothing more than a "loose cannon" who is disliked and marginalized even within the sovereignty movement, thus minimizing the impact of his separatist discourse. Interviews may diffuse authority, but they do so only partially, for they are "a form of hierarchical discourse deriving from the unequal distribution of power" (Nichols 1991: 47) between the documentarist and his interviewees. Brittain exploits the hierarchical condition to its fullest. Despite its docile tone, the film trusts no one. While no individual's testimony is directly challenged by the narrator, neither is it allowed to stand on its own: It must be filtered through the institutional voice that is Brittain's. Individual testimony is, for Brittain, partial and subjective, and can only be legitimated through the concurrence of the narrator. The interviews and other images serve only as illustrations of the story being told by the narrator. Brittain uses voice-of-God narration to link the varied and disparate testimony of individuals with actuality

clips into a single and coherent narrative which "emphasizes the impression of objectivity and of well-substantiated judgment." (Nichols 1991: 35)

The overarching, controlling presence of the narrator's voice thus serves a symbolic function with respect to national institutions. Brittain's narrative voice, which documents the triumphant defeat of the sovereignist threat, is not intended to be his own: It serves as the institutional voice of the Canadian nation-state, which situates itself as the primary filter for information on and the interpretation of events. As the Canadian state has been a *fait accompli* since 1867, Brittain's narration of the referendum through the eyes of established status-quo institutions makes federalist collective memory analogous to institutional memory, giving it the quality of an "official history": It is an interpretation which proceeds from the top-down, filtering all information and bestowing meaning upon it before allowing its dissemination. As Nichols notes, expository documentary subordinates interviews to narration in such a way that "a topical issue can be addressed within a frame of reference that need not be questioned or established but simply taken for granted" (Nichols 1991: 35). As a result, the institutional voice feigns objectivity by hiding its partiality behind the frame of reference it establishes. In the case of *The Champions Part 3*, it is Canada itself that is taken for granted, and it is from an identificatory position of Canadianness that the documentary examines the referendum.

In Arcand's *Le Confort et l'indifférence*, the same three mechanisms – the selection of sources, the autonomy of their voices, and the use of narration – also play crucial roles in the construction of its subject position. In contrast to *The Champions*, however, *Confort's* voice is scarcely of pan-Canadian quality. *Confort* appears far more interactive than *The Champions* in this sense, for Arcand accords far more latitude to those he interviews. In *Confort*, "authority shifts toward the social actors recruited: their comments and responses provide a central part of

the documentary's argument." (Nichols 1991: 44) Contrary to Brittain, Arcand interviews many 'ordinary' citizens; he allows them to state their allegiances and explain their choice in relation to their lived experience, in most cases without narrative commentary. *Confort* thus portrays a different world than the one portrayed in *The Champions*: Instead of a world made up of politicians, *Confort*'s world is "represented by one who inhabits it and who makes that process of habitation a distinct dimension of the text." (Nichols 1991: 56) *Le Confort et l'indifférence* thus openly eschews any notion of either objectivity or official history, for the significance of events is determined through the individual testimony of the people who live them. In Dorland's words, "In French-Canadian ideology, the nation is concretized beyond the state." (Dorland 1987: 316) Hence, Arcand's choice of sources makes *Confort* akin to a social history; in stark contrast to *The Champions*, *Confort* encourages us to see the event through the perspective of common citizens.

Arcand's use of narration further emphasizes the importance of subjective accounts, for it serves almost exclusively to undermine politicians and their institutional perspectives. *Confort* features no exclusive interviews with political actors; it merely shows them in action, giving speeches on the hustings. Meanwhile, Arcand's narrator, an actor in the role of Machiavelli, recites passages from *The Prince* which represent their words as cunning, underhanded, self-serving manipulation. For example, Arcand's narrator notes that "le Prince qui s'est fondé entièrement sur sa parole, s'il n'a pas pris d'autres mesures, se trouve nu et condamné"; the passage is followed by a montage of federal politicians attacking Lévesque's credibility. The intimations are, to use the most obvious description, Machiavellian: in *Confort*, federal politicians are not motivated by the will of the people, but by their own lust for power. Provincial politicians are not portrayed much more favorably, for the documentary

chronicles how the Péquistes are drawn into a political game in which federalist forces have the upper hand from the outset.

While Machiavelli's running commentary is directed primarily towards the machinations of politicians, it also has severe ramifications on the testimony provided by common citizens. Having established the federal forces as purveyors of intimidation, the testimony of those who say they will vote "No" is immediately cast in a negative context. *Confort*, having established common citizens as its main source of authority, thus proceeds to undermine the authority of many of them in its own Machiavellian fashion: since federal politicians are purveyors of intimidation, No supporters are thus cast as hypocritical cowards. Hence, while *Confort* encourages viewers to witness the referendum through the eyes of individuals, it casts half its interviewees as blind, thus further foreclosing on access to authority. Arcand's combination of narration and source selection makes *Le Confort et l'indifférence* highly reflexive, for it challenges common-sense perspectives and the institutions which perpetuate them, and encourages its audience to run against the current, to 'counter-commemorate' the referendum. "Political reflexivity removes the ideological encrustations that support a given social order." (Nichols 1991: 67) Unlike *The Champions*, *Confort* goes to great lengths not only to make the institutional voice visible, but to represent it as retrograde and oppressive. In *Confort*, it is only citizens, more specifically those who vote Yes, who can act as a truth-telling subject.

Each documentary, then, situates its audience quite differently with respect to the referendum; by extension, they situate their audiences differently within memory, for neither documentary operates from within a historical void. Both make numerous references to shared history in order to situate the referendum within the broader narrative of the nation. It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that either documentary has "history" as its primary object,

for they do not proceed according to academic historical methodology. Nevertheless, they are attempting to situate the 1980 referendum within a narrative sequence of events, to make sense of the event in a way that is consistent with other memories of the past. As such, their references to previous history are not meant to be problematized; they simply provide historical points of reference by pointing to various already-understood historical moments. They thus reflect popular, commonly-accepted ways of talking about history – in other words, collective memory. Each documentary embodies a remarkably different vision of collective memory, based in many cases upon the same events; the differences between them are thus established not through remembering, but forgetting.

Official Amnesia in *The Champions*

The Champions Part 3 begins with the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, and the narrator draws an immediate historical parallel: "Two hundred and seventeen years after the Plains of Abraham, the second battle for Québec is joined." The reference secures the historical import of the documentary's object, in a seemingly brutal but in fact quite docile manner. First, to call the event 'the battle of the Plains of Abraham' obscures the notion of conquest, of the imposition of an estranged colonial ruler. In this sense, to call it a 'battle' rather than a 'conquest' is to represent the event in an almost sportsmanlike manner. Perhaps more to the point, Brittain's choice of language is perfectly akin to Anderson's notion of fratricide: English and French colonists "meet on the battlefield... if not as dancing partners, at least as brothers" (Anderson 1983: 201). To cast the event as fratricide is to represent it as a family squabble between

siblings: It obscures violence by emphasizing bonds of kinship. Canada has, throughout its history, striven to limit the importance of this particular event. A 1941 elementary school history textbook, 472 pages in length, addresses the British conquest of North America in three short paragraphs as follows:

> As time went on these neighbours [English and French colonists] were continually quarrelling. Sometimes the quarrel was about the fur trade with the Indians; often they quarrelled because their kings far across the sea were at war.
>
> Finally came the long Seven Years' War, which in Canada practically ended with Wolfe's great victory on the Plains of Abraham...
>
> When Canada passed from French to English hand no great change took place in the lives of the majority of the people. (Dickey 1941: 214)

Short of ignoring the incident altogether, this account is about as valiant an attempt at "forgetting" as can possibly be made. In this version of history, conflict in North America is framed as "quarrels" between "neighbours", originating either from native peoples or far-away monarchs – never was there any true conflict between English and French settlers; the entire Seven Years' War is reduced to a cursory mention of a singular battle; and, at the end of the day, life simply went on as before. "The Plains of Abraham" is an elliptical term referring to something Canadians are immediately obliged to forget.

Second, Brittain's assertion that this is only the "second" battle suggests that no conflict of any pertinence has occurred in the intermittent 217 years.[13]

---

13 The list is innumerable. Among the more prominent conflicts: the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837; the burning of the Parliament Houses in 1849; the Riel rebellions of 1869 and 1885; the conscription referendum of 1945; and the October Crisis of 1970. Few texts on Canadian history are able to work their way around the issue of English-French conflict. Mind you, the historiography is sharply divided on each of these events, which often leads to interpretive trade-offs: a Rebellion in Upper Canada occurred the following year, also protesting colonial rule; the Parliament Houses were burned by Loyalists only after Lower Canadian former-rebels were granted government compensation for property losses during the Rebellion, a reactionary response to true responsible government; the Province of Manitoba was created, one might say, "in exchange for" Riel's execution; we all worked together to defeat German fascism; and even separatists denounced the violent tactics of the FLQ. For each of these

Insofar as Brittain's 'Canadian' subject is concerned, since the fratricide of the Plains of Abraham, differences have been set aside, and the governing of Canada (and/or its precursor polities) has been a matter of harmonious cooperation. The suggestion of perfect harmony creates problems in terms of narrative: If internal relations have been so good, how do you explain the present discord? *The Champions* does provide reasons, but only as it simultaneously downplays them. The constitutional deadlock that has dogged politicians for nearly a half-century is represented alternately as "bickering" (not unlike the sibling rivalry, or the neighbourly disagreement over where to put the fence), "an embarrassment", and "a boring joke". Such representations cast the sovereignty option in the extreme, for who would propose the dismemberment of a nation over a mere embarrassment? They are strategies of containment that obscure any sense of real conflict or of deep cultural difference. They also obscure the fact that constitutions are in fact *constitutive* of the nation-state, and that recurrent disagreements about it, whether or not they involve any deep cultural difference, entail serious questions about the durability of the nation itself. The continuing revival of the constitutional question has, in fact, become a rather narcissistic way of commemorating Canada's existence. Like Canada Day each July 1, constitutional squabbles compel us to collectively reflect upon the importance of our nation and the meaning of our national identity. Unlike Canada Day, however, constitutional squabbles are somewhat less regular, last for many days at a time, and are characterized not by the putting-aside of our differences, but by the highlighting of those differences. Constitutional disagreements open wide the cracks and faults in our collective memory and pressure them as if begging

---

events except the October Crisis, Canada is portrayed like a Phoenix rising from the ashes: it comes out of the internal conflict all the stronger, and the event itself is turned to dust.

for a seismic disruption. But never mind. *The Champions* casts constitutional conflicts as eminently, and even preferably, forgettable.

Few other voices in *The Champions* are allowed to speak of the past, and the one that openly challenges the national memory – Bourgault – is rapidly dismissed. Bourgault's marginalization in *The Champions* has already been noted, but consider momentarily his marginalized statement:

> 1867. On a institutionnalisé notre statut de minoritaire. Et tout de suite après commencent les grandes batailles, les immenses batailles de la survivance!... La loi est anglaise! Les affaires sont anglais! La vie est anglaise! Et on doit prendre notre courage à deux mains simplement pour survivre. On peut imaginer ce que c'est en dehors du Québec, ou les minorités françaises se font litéralement massacrées!

Bourgault, in his own emphatic way, ignores the fact that the Québécois also institutionalized their majority status in comparison with the previous arrangement, the United Province of Canada. He also ignores Québécois participation in designing the Confederation, and their complicity in its realization. Nonetheless, Bourgault's comments clearly have the potential to challenge the entire frame of reference established by Brittain. In Bhabha's words, Bourgault's counter-narrative clearly disturbs the essentialism of Canadian identity inherent to *The Champions* (Bhabha 1990b: 300). Bourgault challenges the established meaning of the nation's genesis, construing it instead as an oppressive act. Since *The Champions'* narrative voice is the voice of the nation-state, the documentary cannot accept to even open such a debate, for to address Bourgault is to make visible the taken-for-granted, inherent qualities of Canadian nationhood. Dismissal is thus the most effective strategy: Brittain invokes Lévesque's distaste for Bourgault in order to marginalize him not only within Canada, but within the sovereignty movement. Bourgault reflects no widespread sentiment; he does not speak for the people; he stands alone; he speaks no truth;

his views are forgotten, as is the history he tells. Bourgault does not speak again in the film.[14]

By contrast, in another actuality clip, federal minister Jean Marchand provides what can best be titled "a brief history of the separatist movement". To Marchand's memory:

> Ils ont commencé par dire qu'ils étaient des indépandantistes; "Oh non, indépendance c'est trop fort, les gens aiment pas ça!" Ensuite ils étaient des séparatistes; "Oh non, séparation, les gens vont avoir peur!" Souverainistes; "Oh, souveraineté, les gens vont avoir peur de ça aussi!" "Souveraineté-association, même si les autres disent non!" Et là, on est dans la confusion complète.

At work here is, essentially, the construction of the ominous – or, in this case, less-than-ominous – Other. Brittain proceeds trepidatiously here, and for good reason. By taking on the institutional voice of the nation-state, Brittain must ascribe meaning to the referendum result in a way that will continue to regroup all members of the polity – including those who voted Yes. He cannot construct a wholly Québécois Other, for such a representation would undermine their inclusion in the future survival of the Canadian entity.[15] Nor can he represent all

---

14 Bourgault remains a controversial and active player on the contemporarty political scene in Québec. Bourgault is openly gay, and his openness with regard to his sexuality, though not addressed in the film, gives his presence as the marginalized "bad separatist" an added dimension. In addition to Bourgault, the sexuality of Claude Charron, referred to in The Champions as separatism's "enfant terrible", had been a private matter at the time of the referendum, but he had come out of the closet at the time the film was made; though Charron's sexuality also goes unaddressed in the film, a slight tendency seems to emerge in Brittain's choice of sources. It is equally interesting to note that, when the Parti Québécois was elected in 1994 under leader Jacques Parizeau, Bourgault became one of Parizeau's advisors; hence he is perhaps not as marginalized as *The Champions* makes him out to be.

15 It would also problematize many of the key personalities upon which his film is dependent, including Trudeau, Marchand, Jean Chrétien, and Camille Samson. It is important to consider that it is within the realm of possibility for these federal politicians to be represented as lone voices, as *Le Confort et l'indifférence* attempts to do, but I shall address this issue later. As for *The Champions*, however, they are portrayed as far more representative than anyone in Québec would dare to admit today, as both Trudeau and Chrétien are widely vilified.

Péquistes as other, for that institution will also live to see post-referendum light. Hence the necessity of including Bourgault in the documentary, despite his potential to bring the entire ideological house down: his presence allows Brittain to divide the Péquiste ranks. Hence also Marchand's description of sovereignty-association as "confusion" rather than, say, "treason". Marchand's description of the sovereignty movement clearly suggests something of a wolf in sheep's clothing. At the same time, however, Marchand's words suggest that, if only we could sort out the mess, everything would be fine; the trick lies in separating the good Péquistes from the bad.

The Champions Part 3 thus limits 'the enemy within' to a single rabble-rousing albino in the form of Bourgault. This despite the fact that a political party dedicated to Québec's independence has been formed, that it has grassroots support throughout the province, and that it has been voted into government office by the population through a general election. *The Champions* succeeds in this task not through ignorance of the past, but through a particular combination of remembering and forgetting. An ignorance of the past would undermine *The Champions'* own position, for it would unburden both the federalist and the sovereignty-associationist positions of all historical baggage and leave people perfectly free to choose. The Canadian identity put forward unproblematically by *The Champions* finds strength through historical validation, which is enacted via references to key moments in collective memory. The elliptical reference to the Plains of Abraham, combined with the flippant remarks about constitutional deadlock and to the sovereignty movement's history, provide a utopian configuration of collective memory which denies competing identities, positing in their place competing political choices within an identity. Most importantly, the marginalization of Bourgault and his ilk is made possible as much through remembering as through forgetting. Brittain's documentary is inherently

amnesiac with respect to past conflict, constitutional crisis, and the roots of the sovereignty movement, and these amnesias do far more to enable *The Champions'* representation than do its remembrances.

Cultural and Political Memory in *Confort*

Like *The Champions*, Arcand's *Le Confort et l'indifférence* also opens with a historical parallel, though his is far less elliptical and far more direct than Brittain's Plains of Abraham. The documentary begins with lengthy actuality clips of René Lévesque giving a speech in Paris, in which he provides a brief history of the *peuple Québécois*:

> Il s'agit d'un peuple qui, pendant longtemps, s'est contenté de se faire oublier pour survivre. Puis ensuite il s'est dit que, pour durer valablement, il faut aussi s'affirmer, et que pour bien s'affirmer, il peut devenir souhaitable – et même nécessaire – de s'affranchir collectivement.

Lévesque's reference to forgetting is quite salient, for it seems to lay bare the strategies of *The Champions* in a nutshell: The survival of the *peuple Québécois* has been made possible by allowing oneself to be forgotten, by not making any claim to nationhood. His statement is also paradoxical, for this forgetting has been integral to the perseverance of the *peuple* itself; in other words, forgetting has not been a threat to survival, but it has resulted in self-denial. What Lévesque forgets is, of course, that there is also a shared memory of Canada which includes the Québécois – a memory which *The Champions*, through the efforts it makes to remain inclusive despite the referendum result, makes abundantly clear. But although Lévesque is the leader of a government, in his speech he speaks of a cultural entity, not a political one – of a *peuple* rather than a polity. Furthermore, the *peuple* in question is addressed distinctly on its own terms, without reference

to Canada; in this sense, it is already 'separate'. Through Lévesque's speech, Arcand locates the nexus of memory within the notion of Québécois cultural identity, which is already in a state of separation from the identity inscribed in the Canadian nation-state.

Through Lévesque's narrative, *Confort* offers something that *The Champions* does not: a historical "explanation" for the Péquiste ascension to power in Québec City. In drawing a progression from "being forgotten" to "self-affirmation" to "collective enfranchisement", Lévesque then offers up his party's raison-d'être: "l'émancipation politique". Thus the notion of cultural identity is linked inextricably to that of national identity and the nation-state. While the cultural identity of the *peuple* has survived, it is inherently lacking something; to the extent that they have allowed themselves to be forgotten, they are enslaved. Emancipation takes the form of a single option, which is the creation of a new nation-state. The reference to emancipation is repeated later, as one individual offering his perspective on the referendum also harkens back to the Plains of Abraham:

> On ira faire un tour sur les Plaines d'Abraham la nuit du 20 au 21 [mai, la soirée référendaire] pour voir si les esprits vont nous parler en nous disant, Mais, criss', on est mort rien que pour ça? Vous avez attendu tout ce temps-là juste pour faire ça? Vous êtes aussi bien de passer comme toutes les peuples qui ont étés effacés par la civilisation Nord-Américaine – the "American way of life".

This reference to the Plains of Abraham stands in stark contrast to that which appears in *The Champions*, for in this case the notion of conquest is front-and-centre. It also makes the Plains of Abraham of material importance in the present, whereas in *The Champions* it served only to form a parallel. However, there are virtually no other references to Québécois history in *Confort*; it forgets everything

between 1760 and 1976.[16] *Confort*'s effort to forget is enacted in order to erase any trace of Canadianness from Québécois identity. Arcand drives this point home early in the film, with actuality footage of Queen Elizabeth giving a speech in French (laden with her Royal accent), free of historical references, about the benefits of Canadian federalism. Arcand then cuts back to Lévesque, who affirms that "hors de l'Europe, nous formons donc la plus importante collectivité qui soit française de souche". The implication is clear: Canada is British; we are French. Meanwhile, underwriting this effort to forget is the insistence upon a congruence between cultural and national identity: if the Québécois dare to remember who they are, they must opt for the creation of their own nation.

Casting the Québécois as definitively not-Canadian is a difficult task, since all the federalist politicians campaigning against the "Québécois" option are themselves Québécois. Here *Confort* faces a dilemma similar to that faced by *The Champions*: How does one limit 'the enemy within'? This question, however, is more complicated in this instance, due to the congruence established between cultural and national identity. *The Champions*, in placing the essentialist nexus of national identity solely within the realm of institutional politics, could simply cast notions of cultural identification (such as those of Bourgault) as a case of misguided citizenship, of cultural loyalties being invoked in an arena where they are misplaced to begin with. *Confort* has no such luxury. Trudeau, Chrétien, Marchand, Samson, and the others are unmistakably of Québécois "stock". If the

---

16 As for either French power in North America or English-French cooperation, the list of examples is once again innumerable. Most notably, fifteen years after the Plains of Abraham, the colonial office sponsored the Quebec Act, which entrenched French land tenure, Roman Catholicism, and the Napoleonic Civil Code within British rule – unprecedented for the time. Other examples abound as the acquisition of responsible government, Confederation, and the election of many French-Canadians to the office of Prime Minister yet the historiography is impervious. Whereas in Canadian nationalist historiography conflict gives rise to fratricide, in Québec nationalist historiography cooperation is treated as Imperial coercion.

essentialism of cultural identity leads to the necessity of national congruence, how does one explain this phenomenon?

Arcand provides the explanation largely through his narrator, Machiavelli – as much by his very appearance as by what he says. Machiavelli's presence itself acts more as a reference to memory than to history: Few people have actually read *The Prince*, but everyone knows who he is, what he stands for, and what "Machiavellian" means. Arcand relates less of a narrative of the referendum campaign than an argument, for he interrupts the unfolding of the campaign with the question "Remember what we learned in high school about Machiavelli?" On a smaller scale, Arcand interrupts actuality footage of a speech by Chrétien in order for his narrator to deliver these words:

> Le Prince, afin de s'attacher son ministre, le couvrira d'honneurs, de charges, de richesses, gagnera sa reconnaissance, le persuadant qu'il ne peut se passer de ses services. Les honneurs et les richesses seront si abondants que le ministre ne pourra en désirer davantage, les charges si hautes qu'il ne pourra que s'opposer à tout changement.

Arcand then returns to footage of Chrétien listing his many ministerial appointments. The implication is clear: Chrétien has been bought, and he opposes sovereignty because his own personal gain is at stake. For viewers who might still see altruistic merit in Chrétien's words, Arcand directs Machiavelli's wrath at them as well:

> Des hommes on peut dire ceci: ils sont ingrats, changeants, hypocrites, ennemis des difficultés, amis de l'argent. Tant que tu soutiens leur intérêt, its sont tous à toi. Ils t'offrent leur sang, leur fortune, leur vie, leurs enfants – pourvu que les épreuves soient éloignées. Si elles se rapprochent, ils se révoltent.

The sheer machismo inherent to Arcand's notion of Québécois identity is striking. Apparently, only real men vote Yes; the rest are cowards. Those who admit they will vote No, almost without exception, all give the same reason for their preference: economics. Sovereignty will cost too much; pensions will be

jeopardized; the price of gas will skyrocket. All are cast as selfish, putting their own personal well-being ahead of the interests of the collective. They, like the federal politicians, have been bought – in this case, bought with their own tax money. Ultimately, *Confort* represents federalism as false consciousness, "an ideological device or tactic which succeeds in introducing such a muddle into the understanding of oppression" that it manages to dupe the Québécois into participating in that oppression (Wilden 1980: 87). Federalist politicians, then, are not true members of the *peuple*. *Confort*'s reliance upon cultural memory propels it towards the denigration of federalist politicians, for it cannot make sense of them any other way.

Arcand's reliance upon cultural memory and identity also have serious implications for the representation of visible minorities. *Confort* features two prominent interviews with members of the Greek community. The first shows a Greek couple explaining their observation that all the "capitalists and monopolies" want them to vote No, and that they, as "working people", should thus vote Yes; their words reinforce Arcand's representation of federalism as Marxist false consciousness. They also observe that everyone outside Québec, which is English, wants Québec, which is French, to vote No. The conclusion: "I have to support the French people".[17] In their interview, the couple decline to offer any personal reasoning for casting a vote one way or the other; the interests of the collective are paramount. They will vote Yes, not due to this or that advantage, but because the English and the monied people want them to vote No. Furthermore, they demonstrate a willingness to subordinate their own cultural identity to that of "the French people"; they do what the French do, and this secures their inclusion within the collective.

---

17 The film's subtitles translate "the French people" as "Québécois".

In the second interview, by comparison, another Greek woman testifies that she will vote No because she has never been accepted into Québec society. When questioned, she refuses to call herself "Québécois", insisting that the Québécois are hostile to immigrant communities. "Si c'est Oui," she says, "ce sera, 'bon, toi, immigrant, ferme ta gueule'." Then (with rather uncanny foresight, considering Premier Parizeau's comments on the night of the 1995 referendum vote[18]) she says, "si c'est Non, ce sera, 'maudit immigrant, c'est ta faute qu'on n'a pas gagné'." The predominance of cultural memory in *Confort* makes it suspicious of visible minorities, for they are clearly have no direct link to the collective memory. As recent immigrants, the Plains of Abraham is not part of their collective odyssey. As a result, this woman's individualism is frowned upon – even though the vision of memory put forward in the documentary excludes her to begin with. *Confort* is highly constrictive in terms of the role it insists visible minorities must play in perpetuating the marginalization of the Québécois: it requires them to accept and incorporate not merely the laws, language and institutions of their new country, but the cultural struggle for emancipation as well.

Informed by cultural memory, *Confort* offers little latitude in terms of the meaning to be inscribed in the referendum result. Immigrants are voters, and federalism is an option, but neither can be adequately gathered into the cultural imagined community of the *peuple québécois*. But because both are present in everyday life in Québec, they cannot remain unaddressed. Arcand thus applies all the elbow grease he can muster into his effort to forget, casting federalism as

---

18 In the 1995 referendum on sovereignty, the Yes side was defeated, but garnered over 49% of the popular vote. In addressing a group of partisan supporters after the results of were announced, Premier Jacques Parizeau said he had lost because of "l'argent puis des votes ethniques".

false consciousness and insisting upon total cultural assimilation with immigrants. Whereas in *The Champions*, remembering makes forgetting seamless, in *Confort* the effort to remember, which is belaboured, entails an equally belaboured effort to forget – without which the Bhabha-esque counter-narrative would fall to pieces.

Fitting the Referendum Campaign into the Memory Processor

Clearly, references to past history in both documentaries are more than anecdotal. Present events are in constant tension with our memory of past events. Both *The Champions* and *Le Confort et l'indifférence* embody this tension, for in each one memory is addressed on two distinct but intertwined levels. First, both make selective references to the past in order to configure collective memory. Second, there is the effort to configure the memory of the 1980 referendum itself: each documentary is making a case as to how the referendum is to be remembered. In *The Champions*, the nation's history is one of small but important conflicts resolved by democratic means; in *Confort*, it is a colonial struggle in which politics compromises identity. For each documentary, the 1980 referendum campaign is but another example of the same, an event inserted into a historical "processor" which turns out a similarly processed product at every use.

In proposing this way of looking at the documentaries, I do not mean to suggest that either documentarist has embarked on a sinister project of historical distortion. The understanding of history is always informed by the ways in which we tell it, and those "ways of telling" are informed by cultural forces which originate beyond – yet find expression through – the documentarists themselves. As such, each documentary stands as an instance of the (re)production of a

particular way of telling. As texts of memory, each documentary "makes a case for what should be remembered, and how it should be remembered. This responsibility converts every judgment into a judgment on the person who makes it" (Hartman in Simon 1994: 127).

This analytical stance is particularly helpful in understanding how each documentary uses identical actuality footage in the service of antithetical conclusions. The footage of Jean Chrétien's speech, used in *Confort* to uncover the despotic nature of Canadian federalism, is used in *The Champions* to uncover its greatness and benevolence.[19] The former documentary suggests the wool has been pulled over the eyes of those lured by federalism; the latter suggests it has been pulled over those lured by sovereignty. Yet Chrétien's words were not written by either documentarist – in other words the documentarists do not exercise full control over their script. The fact that they both use the Chrétien footage suggests that the footage itself must contain the seeds of each documentary's undoing. For it to rend service to each documentary's theme, it must be inserted into a highly constructed cinematic context complete with checks and balances which will de-emphasize those parts of his speech which would challenge the documentary's representation. *Confort* underlines the maliciousness of Chrétien's comments about Claude Morin through the presence of its narrator: Machiavelli suggests that the Péquistes, in their altruistic motivations, have left themselves ripe for attack by federal despots, and then

---

19 The footage of Chrétien can be broken down into two parts. The first part shows him speaking of the natural resource riches throughout the rest of Canada – the Beaufort Sea, the Arctic Islands, the Pacific Coast, oil deposits in Alberta and Saskatchewan – which he says belongs to the Québécois as well. The second part shows Chrétien slurring Claude Morin's credibility: He accuses the Péquistes of trying to make the people of Québec give up those riches so that a "bourgeois" Morin can parade through foreign countries in big Cadillacs with the provincial flag mounted on the hood (or, in Chrétien's own inimitable eloquence, "dans des gros Cadillacs avec la flag d'la province rentrée dan'l'hood").

uses the Chrétien footage as an example. In *The Champions*, Chrétien represents the altruistic agent in the campaign, and his potshot at Morin undermines that altruistic status. *The Champions* compensates for Chrétien's "breach" of the script through its emphasis on institutional politics, which is, according to the common sense of the documentary, all about "winning votes". Political savvy in *The Champions* is considered a virtue: Politics is akin to a war in which the cause, however virtuous, must nonetheless be defended by soldiers in trenches. Brittain makes reference to Chrétien as Trudeau's "hitman", thus arming him symbolically as the one who will do the dirty work. *The Champions* thus makes Chrétien's attack on Morin akin to the bullet fired by the soldier in defense of the greater cause. *The Champions* is also very sympathetic to Morin throughout: He is frequently interviewed in support of Brittain's representation of the campaign. This serves to temper the "hitman" analogy by emphasizing the political nature of the "battle", thus reminding us that the eventual human cost is nil – a democratic form of fratricide.[20]

In addition to the efforts each film makes to contain and limit the potential meaning of its actuality footage, a comparative analysis of the two documentaries also allows one to consider the footage that is omitted from each one, the aspects of the campaign we are encouraged to forget. Arcand's insistence upon

---

20 Chrétien's speech is a rich one: His list of natural resources characterizes Canada as a land replete with hidden treasures, but he also gives "names" (Beaufort Sea, Cold Lake, Lloydminster) to the places they come from in order to emphasize human community alongside inanimate mineral wealth. His attack on Claude Morin is direct and inflammatory, but it also exposes the referendum as a mere jurisdictional conflict – which impedes Arcand as much as it does Brittain. Considered in relation to fiction film, his speech contains a complexity of characterization that would elude even the best screenwriters. Ironically, the films have no interest in such complexity, preferring instead to strive for one-dimensional characterizations despite the footage's almost tacit refusal to be simplified. The contradictions of individual allegiance are the mark of great fiction, but they are far too threatening for treatments of actuality.

subordinating politics to identity leads him, as shown earlier, to a rather malicious characterization of Québécois federalists. But there is another aspect of this enemy within: provincial politicians campaigning against sovereignty. Federal politicians may be dismissed as Machiavellian, but provincial politicians cannot lay claim to the spoils of power as can their federal counterparts – they cannot match Chrétien's list of ministerial appointments. Most notably in *Confort*, provincial Liberal leader Claude Ryan, the official leader of the No campaign, scarcely appears in the documentary. In *The Champions*, by comparison, Ryan is prominent in the narrative, characterized as an inept politician unable to manage the campaign. He is the dim-witted soldier in contrast to Chrétien's hearty appetite for trench battles. With *The Champions'* emphasis on political maneuvering, Ryan's ineptitude is a very serious lacune. Indeed, he receives less sympathetic treatment than do most Péquistes. In this sense, there is a certain affinity between the two documentaries in their treatment of Ryan, for they both consider him "forgettable": *The Champions* represents Ryan as a political nonentity, while *Confort* considers him enough of a nonentity to not even bother representing him much at all. But *Confort*'s omission of Ryan's presence serves another purpose: because he is not a federal politician campaigning, he escapes the Machiavellian characterization of federal politicians and has the potential to subvert Arcand's construction of the enemy within. For *Confort* to deal with Ryan and other provincial pro-federalist figures, Arcand would have to acknowledge the possibility of a genuine, altruistic political belief in Canadian federalism and temper his Machiavellian interpretation[21] and complicate his rigid hierarchy of the cultural over the political.

---

21 Whether or not Ryan holds such a genuine, altruistic belief in federalism is unknown, but it is also entirely beside the point with respect to my analysis. The question is not one of Ryan's

This hierarchy in *Confort* makes vices of *The Champions'* greatest virtues: political strategy, tactics, and machination. Consequently, *Confort* also demonstrates a comparative tendency to forget Péquiste political calculation and miscalculation in order to support its obliging representation of the sovereignty option. Nowhere is this more evident than in the documentaries' comparative treatment of the "Yvette" incident during the referendum campaign. Parti Québécois minister Lise Payette, decrying the patriarchal representations of women in school curricula, read aloud in the National Assembly a typical passage from elementary school textbook describing an archetypal young girl named Yvette, who liked to cook, clean, sew, and tend to babies. Perhaps caught up in a partisan fit, or "pushed by some devil" (Lévesque 1986: 306), she then accused Claude Ryan's wife of being an Yvette, ditto for all the women in his caucus. No strategists seized upon her words and set about reappropriating the label for their own ends, eventually leading to a massive all-female (though hardly all-feminist) *Yvette* rally at the Montreal Forum. The incident is entirely omitted from *Le Confort et l'indifférence*, as though it never occurred. *The Champions* of course highlights the event as the campaign's turning point, the Péquistes' most prominent political miscalculation.[22] *The Champions* also includes particularly telling interview footage with Péquiste advisor Daniel Latouche, who attests to the fact that the entire Yvette incident is one that sovereignists are obliged to forget:

---

heartfelt beliefs, but of *Confort*'s representation of pro-federalist Québécois. Ryan does not fit the Machiavellian mold, and thus can be seen to embody such altruistic notions through the film. Rather than change the mold, Ryan is simply omitted.

22 This view is corroborated by Lévesque's own autobiography, who notes that, in the wake of the Payette's barbs, "we understood that the opposition machine had finally got off the ground" (Lévesque 1986: 306).

> You're not supposed to say it was an important turn of events in the referendum, you're not supposed to say it was a tactical error of gigantic proportions by Madame Payette, but I'm convinced that it was – I mean, the figures are there.

Thus a certain sovereignist "orthodoxy" compels full amnesia of the event. Put another way, *Confort*'s memory processor is unable to process the Yvette incident. Because it is a "tactical error", it exposes the fact that the Yes campaign is also involved in political strategy and machination. As such, it forces a remembrance of precisely what *Confort* seeks to have us forget – that the sovereignty movement has at least as much to do with political calculation as it does with an inherent Québécois identity. In *Confort*, calculation is a political activity perpetrated solely by federalists, while the sovereignty movement is devoid of any such *realpolitik*.

The Yvette incident thus has the potential to disrupt not only Arcand's preferred remembrance of the referendum, but also the memory machine through which he processes it. Recall Lévesque's *histoire du peuple* at the outset: a people at first forgotten, then reaffirmed, now in the process of liberation. Arcand's fidelity to Lévesque's narrative forces an amnesia of the political in favor of the cultural, because its insistence upon sovereignty as a cultural phenomenon it denies the existence political machination or calculation within the movement itself. Along the long road to sovereignty, apparently no one in the movement ever used the rhetoric of the *peuple* for political gain, no one ever cashed in a political favor to advance a partisan cause, no one ever boycotted a federal-provincial conference to score points with a particular constituency of voters. The "political miscalculation" of the Yvette incident is thus omitted. I do not wish to overstate the impact of the Yvette incident here, but I do wish to underline the way in which *Confort*'s memory processor compels it to turn a blind eye to a wide range of elements it cannot compute. Each documentary presents an argument as to how the referendum should be both remembered and

forgotten, but they do so through actuality footage which at once both supports and undermines the argument they make. The actuality footage in effect undermines the identificatory strategies of both documentaries. Footage which exposes the constructed, argumentative nature of identity is discarded, the event it portrays forgotten; footage which supports the argument is inserted into a cinematic context replete with rebuttals to extricate those elements which might subvert it.

Forgetting and the Continuity of Memory

If a comparative analysis of these two documentaries teaches us anything, it teaches us about the effort required to articulate actuality with memory. If, as Nichols suggests, the interpretation of actual events "invokes the full power of our cultural system" (Nichols 1991: 110), these documentaries show us that such power also struggles constantly to impose itself upon those events. Present events often force cultural systems of meaning to buckle at particular pressure points, or to bend and change in order to accommodate new and divergent events. Sometimes, however, systems of meaning can be extremely reticent to bend or to change, and can indeed 'invoke their full power' in order to make an event conform to the meaning it wishes to inscribe, rather than the other way around. Collective memory, as a pillar of the cultural repertoire, can be particularly resilient, for common sense informs us that the events of the past cannot be transformed. For all that can be said about the discursive construction of history and its lessons, the fact remains that its discursive construction is naturalized through the memory of the imagined community. "After all, no one

can undo the past from which one descends, and no one can undo who one is" (Barth, quoted in Hobsbawm 1993: 11).

These observations point to a fundamental difference between the two films of inquiry. *The Champions Part 3* is not faced with a memory- or identity-threatening event, for at the end of the day the federalists win – a "happy ending", so to speak. *Le Confort et l'indifférence*, on the other hand, is faced with an event of catastrophic proportions: if sovereignty is the *telos* of the *peuple*, it becomes rather difficult to explain how it came to pass that the *peuple* refused its own ultimate and natural place in the world. In fact, one might think that the event would be impossible to explain without acknowledging some sense of competing memories and identities. Arcand, however, is clearly unwilling to recognize any such phenomenon, and he invokes the memory of the *peuple* in order to preserve the very concept of the *peuple* itself.

At the level of identity, however, the affinity between forgetting and exclusion stands more as an observation rather than a criticism. To say that forgetting is about exclusion is to ignore the fact that identity is about exclusion: To identify oneself as Québécois Canadian, immigrant, Catholic, black, white, male, or female is to set oneself apart from others. Nor is doing so necessarily a negative thing. Culturally, there is nothing objectionable about speaking of a Québécois identity based upon kinship and lineage dating back to a group of seventeenth-century French settlers, for such a kinship is assuredly an ethnographically verifiable fact. This is not simply a matter of remembering one's roots, but of forgetting them as well, for the métissage of the *peuple* is also verifiable (a number of Swiss settled in the seventeenth century as well, and there was a great deal of intermarriage with native people, British, Irish, and other latecomers). If collective memory were to truly remember all these things stretching back to time immemorial, any notion of cultural identity, Québécois or

otherwise, would cease to bear meaning. Human interaction through the centuries, like actuality footage, is far too chaotic to be understood and remembered in its entirety. Forgetting, at the same time that it works towards exclusion, is also essential to continuity. It is only through the effort to forget that one can endow a collective with a historical journey which it can claim to advance through the present. Without forgetting, one can wonder whether or not any notion of collective memory or identity would be possible.

The Champions Part 3, in its attempt to work within an all-inclusive, pan-Canadian sense of memory, obscures any sense of deep difference; in addressing its audience as citizens, who are all theoretically equal by virtue of their vote, it effectively levels issues of culture and cultural memory. Its elliptical reference to the Plains of Abraham is exemplary of Bhabha's minus in the origin,[23] obscuring the fact that the state was forged through bloodshed. The question to ask, however, is whether or not this amnesia is a silent act of violence, in the form of a violent silencing of the *peuple québécois*. Clearly this is not the case. For one, it does represent the enemy within respectfully, bestowing dignity and respect upon Charron, Morin, the other Péquistes (Bourgault excepted) and their cause. Furthermore, because it is intended primarily for an anglophone audience, it does engage in a limited form of intercultural dialogue, an attempt to explain the Québec nationalist political perspective – an attempt to hear the dissenting voice and to consider the claim it makes. While *The Champions*' ultimate *raison d'être* is ultimately to resist the denaturalizing potential of the 1980 referendum upon the structures of state-sponsored memory, it is hardly oppressive in its means of

---

23 "It is this forgetting – a minus in the origin – that constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative" (Bhabha 1990b: 310). For Bhabha, forgetting serves the purpose of obscuring the violence to be found in the creation of any nation.

doing so. This is not always the case for Canadian federalism writ large with respect to Québec, but it is the case here.

Le Confort et l'indifférence, on the other hand, represents memory in retreat, an attempt to raise a bulwark against the results of the 1980 referendum. Through Lévesque's speech in the documentary's opening minutes, it establishes the referendum as a matter of cultural identity, an effort to revive the memory of the *peuple* and compel it to support sovereignty. It is not the documentary's insistence upon cultural memory which is objectionable, but rather the way in which that memory compels the documentary to exclude, and even to lash out at, others. Hobsbawm addresses this impulse as an act of cultural retrenchment:

> Once again, "the nation", or the ethnic group, "appears as the ultimate guarantee" when society fails. You don't have to do anything to belong to it. You can't be thrown out. You are born in it and stay in it. ... And how do men and women know that they belong to this community? Because they can define the others who do not belong, who should not belong, who can never belong. (Hobsbawm 1993: 11)

Because *Confort* establishes the referendum as a matter of cultural survival, the referendum loss places that survival in jeopardy. Anglophones and immigrants are demeaned for voting against sovereignty, while the spectre of the conquest is invoked in order to vilify federalist Québécois politicians. What we witness in *Confort* is not so much an effort to remember the past, but an invocation of the past in an effort to forget the present, to deny the fact that the referendum loss has any impact upon memory's narrative. *Confort*'s fixation upon the minus in the origin, on the violent birth of a nation, leads it towards violence in the nation's continued existence – even when its existence is confirmed through the voice of the *peuple* in the referendum result.

For these reasons, *Le Confort et l'indifférence* calls into question the value of Québécois cultural memory as a means of challenging Canadian political hegemony. *Confort*'s invective makes it difficult to romanticize the sovereignty

movement as the struggle of a disenfranchised minority against an oppressive estranged government. While *Confort* definitively attempts to disturb the established and essential quality of Canadian identity, it posits in its place an essentialist identity of its own. Bhabha argues that minority discourse works to supplement the established national memory, and that this supplementary strategy "suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation" (Bhabha1990b: 305). But, in this case, we see two separate memories working frantically to ensure that they each add up; each is concerned first and foremost with reestablishing the equilibrium of its own calculation, the teleology of its own national narrative, than with entering any space of partial or multiple identification. Contrary to the goodwill Bhabha confers upon such discourses, competing cultural memory, at least that of the sort embodied in *Confort*, has in fact absolutely no intention of 'adding' to anything at all. *Confort*'s invocation of cultural memory and identity – Hobsbawm's last safe place, where xenophobia becomes "the mass ideology of the 20th-century fin-de-siècle" (Hobsbawm 1993: 11) – makes collective reconciliation impossible, for it is eternally suspicious of others. This is not to say that cultural memory has no place in the nation's narrative. Rather, it is to say that cultural memory cannot find a place in the nation's narrative if it does not care to seek one.

CHAPTER THREE

NOSTALGIAMNESIA

Family Values in Jacques Godbout's *Le Mouton Noir*

Nostalgia, according to anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, "is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one's innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed" (Rosaldo 1989: 70). He invokes a rhetorical question to emphasize his perspective: "Don't most people feel nostalgic about childhood memories?" Nostalgia is a unique mode of remembering invoked to specific ends: collectively, it allows groups to look upon their shared past in a way that recognizes changes over time, while at the same time drawing attention away from the group's responsibility or culpability for those changes. Rosaldo characterizes nostalgia as an "innocent yearning", ultimately a benign mode of remembering which "conceal[s] its complicity with often brutal domination".

Yet there is a crucial distinction to be made, I would argue, between "innocent yearning" and what I call "yearning for innocence". Both are nostalgic; the difference lies in who is being nostalgically remembered – someone else's culture and way of life, or your own? The former is invoked to remember the effects of time's passage on an Other, which Rosaldo terms "imperialist nostalgia"; the latter is invoked to remember time's effects on the Self. Don't most people feel nostalgic about early childhood memories? Absolutely, but to

remember your own childhood innocence is to simultaneously recognize your current loss of innocence, your "fall from grace" as it were. It is easier to extricate yourself from someone else's loss of innocence than from your own. A self-directed nostalgia which yearns for innocence is, in this sense, much less benign than an innocently yearning imperialist one.[24] Furthermore, the distinction between these two types of nostalgia also resonates in terms of the orientation they provide towards the future: an innocent yearning implies a past state which lives only in memory, while a yearning for innocence, in recognizing the fall from grace, implies the possibility of redemption. The innocence in question is less a way of life than a state of mind. John Nerone writes that collective memory always has a moral dimension (Nerone 1989: 96); the nostalgic yearning for innocence gives the concept of nostalgia a moral dimension and a sense of truth.

This yearning for innocence is the primary trope which animates Jacques Godbout's four-hour documentary on Québec politics, *Le Mouton noir* (1992). Godbout's documentary, as an analytical chronicle of political actuality during the one-year period which followed the demise of the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord in 1990, may seem an unlikely candidate for a nostalgic text. Yet the promotional poster for *Le Mouton noir* highlights the historical facet of the documentary, calling it "Une tentative de filmer l'histoire dans son actualité et l'actualité dans sa dimension historique." The documentary is replete with

---

24 The meaning of the word "nostalgia" has changed considerably in recent decades, most notably towards the notion of a benign or even pointless mode of remembering. Rosaldo describes the term's etymological roots as follows: "from the Greek nostos, a return home, and algos, a painful condition" (Rosaldo 71), suggesting a state of pain which is hardly pointless. The more contemporary, benign notion of nostalgia, associated with (for example) depression-era Coca-Cola billboards and Norman Rockwell 's *Saturday Evening Post* covers, has lost the sense of "pain" embedded within nostalgia's origins. A "yearning for innocence" is, I would argue, more in line with the concept's etymology, for "innocence" is the object, rather than a mere quality, of the yearning.

references to past events in Québec's political history – the Canadian Confederation of 1867, the Referendum of 1980, and other events of consequence. Despite the poster's claim, the documentary represents these events in a nostalgic/familial rather than an historic/academic dimension. *Le Mouton noir* does not yearn in the least for a return to the agrarian, strictly Catholic society that existed prior to Québec's Quiet Revolution. Rather, as it narrates the political history of the *peuple québécois* , it yearns for the lost, innocent consciousness of the *peuple*'s childhood. In *Le Mouton noir*, the Québécois' political commiseration with English colonials is represented, ultimately, as a betrayal of principle which constituted their fall from grace, an innocence lost through political compromise; cast in this light, the move to political sovereignty becomes the path of redemption.

Godbout's use of nostalgia affects his representation of Québec politics in a number of important ways. For one, nostalgia is a particularly effective way of, in Rosaldo's words, capturing people's imagination: it encourages personal identification with a collective history rather than the more detached, analytical stance implied by an academic exploration of history. It is also far less venomous, if not less estranged, in its representation of the English-Canadian other: while English Canada remains thoroughly alien in *Le Mouton noir*, the nostalgic yearning for innocence positions the peuple québécois in a collective family journey which they may transform through self-recovery rather than through the defeat of the enemy. Furthermore, the use of nostalgia in *Le Mouton noir* , in representing opposition to sovereignty as akin to a betrayal of the bonds of kinship, ultimately subsumes its political subject matter to questions of moral conscience. In so doing, *Le Mouton noir* paradoxically endeavours to forget the Québécois' political history at the same time that it purports to explore it.

All in the Family: Storytelling Around the Hearth

In *Le Mouton noir*, Godbout affects a slight but significant transformation of his documentary's collective subject: The French-speaking Québécois are transformed from *peuple* into *famille*. The film begins with the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord, construed as the rejection not of a particular political system, but of Québec as a whole and, by extension, *la famille québécoise*. Observing the fervor of celebrations on *la Saint-Jean Baptiste* immediately following the Accord's demise, Godbout remarks:

> ... après trois siècles et dix générations face à l'hiver qui est parfois rude, face à l'indien qui n'est pas toujours un allié, face à l'anglais qui nous a conquis, face à une américanisation subtile, nous nous sommes forgés une culture que nous acceptons de partager mais que nous refusons de renier.

The reference to "generations", voiced over scenes of the multitudes attending the parade, establishes a bloodline link between all of them that is direct and immediate, rather than diluted and dispersed. More direct references to family arise throughout the film: Godbout observes that Lucien Bouchard, speaking to a crowd in the Lac St. Jean area, "est en famille"; Claude Béland, president of the Mouvement Desjardins, speaks of "travailler pour les nôtres". When visiting political scientist Daniel Latouche in Magog, the rebuilding of Latouche's home is mined as a fertile metaphor for the (re)building of an independent Québec – the state as family hearth.

The transformation from *peuple* to *famille* is significant in two ways. First, the notion of family conjures up images of familiar comfort: home, hearth, elders, siblings, and so on. Second, the notion of family subordinates internal differences to the forces of inalienable familial bond – brothers and sisters, whatever their differences, must get along in the interests of "keeping the family together" – thus

construing the "nation" as an extended family. Godbout characterizes a political rally for Bloc Québécois candidate Gilles Duceppe as a "réunion de famille" wherein many long-lost siblings return to the fold.[25] The Québec wing of the New Democratic Party, despite having their own candidate in the by-election, attend the rally in support of Duceppe; numerous union organizations, often feuding, come together in support of the Bloc; François Simard, who resigned as President of the Youth Wing of the federal Liberal Party over the Meech Lake controversy, is welcomed at the rally like a prodigal son. In establishing the Québécois family as the collective subject of his documentary, Godbout also facilitates nostalgic memory. The family hearth is perhaps the most fertile site for nostalgic feelings, for it is within the family that one learns from elders, finds support in hard times, comes of age – and where memories of these times are shared. The warmth and comfort of family is, however, something of a ruse, for it masks the subtle coercion that family structures enforce. Béland, the rich banker, "toils for his own", obfuscating any notions of class difference within the family while securing capitalism's place within the nationalist élite. The young Simard, meanwhile, is the best example of how family can enforce unity with a gentle hand: he is welcomed back into the family only after he has chosen to embrace it once again by dissociating himself with Canadian federalism.

---

25 The Bloc Québécois, a political party which promotes Québec sovereignty at the federal rather than provincial level, was formed in 1990. The movement began when Lucien Bouchard, then a cabinet minister in the federal government, resigned over the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord. A number of other Progressive Conservative backbenchers joined him, as did one Liberal. Gilles Duceppe became the Bloc's first elected Member of Parliament in the Laurier-Ste. Marie riding on the island of Montreal in the 1990 by-election, which is one of the events chronicled in *Le Mouton noir*. The Bloc Québécois fielded a full slate of candidates in Québec during the 1993 general election, and currently serves as Her Majesty's Official Opposition in the House of Commons.

Godbout, as the documentary's narrator, situates himself as something of a grandfather and patriarch, a wise observer and family storyteller. Godbout narrates not under the guise of objectivity, but through his own personal, subjective voice: he comments openly on his friendships with Latouche and with Premier Robert Bourassa, and his access to these people turns otherwise inaccessible power brokers into everyone's older brother. Godbout also voices his opinions freely on other key personalities – Parti Québécois opposition leader Jacques Parizeau, federal Liberal Party leader Jean Chrétien, and others. Godbout appears often in the documentary; frequently he is shown writing in his journal, either sitting at his desk, or with the camera peering over his shoulder. Such images encourage Godbout's identification as a well-known writer of fiction: in this sense, he is already a family storyteller of sorts.[26] *Le Mouton noir* is a story fueled by actuality, yes, but it is told by an entrusted caretaker of the collective imagination and its metaphors. In this sense, Godbout's narration also facilitates a nostalgic environment: as the family storyteller rather than a detached academic, his exploration of history in *Le Mouton noir* more closely resembles memory than history. This situation does not absolve or immunize *Le Mouton noir* from political partisanship; rather, it merely subsumes those politics to a trope, namely, that of family.

Godbout's St. Jean Baptiste parade commentary also makes patently clear who is *not* part of the family – natives, Americans, the English "conquerors". Godbout emphasizes the gulf between Canada and Québec, commenting that "De Montréal à Toronto, il y a un saut de puce en avion. Mais nous sommes à des années-lumière quant à la vision politique ou culturelle." *Le Mouton noir* on

---

26 In addition to documentary filmmaking and poetry, Godbout has written seven novels, including *Salut Galarneau!* (Éditions du Seuil, 1967), *L'Isle au Dragon* (Éditions du Seuil, 1976), and *Les Têtes à Papineau* (Éditions du Seuil, 1991).

occasion interrupts its exploration of Québec's family politics to venture into the rest of Canada. In one instance, Godbout accompanies Jacques Parizeau to Toronto, where he meets with the editorial board of the *Toronto Star* and speaks at a dinner hosted by the Empire Club. Godbout remarks that Toronto's business community remains heavily 'British and Scottish' – not Canadian, as if, in premonition of Bouchard's 1996 comment that "Canada is not a real country", no such identity exists. On another occasion, Godbout travels to British Columbia to attend a French-Canadian heritage festival. Highlighting the customs, costumes and music of the *coureurs-de-bois* who first brought French language and culture to the West, the festival allows Godbout to provide a positively picayune representation of other French-Canadians – log-sawing, jig-dancing, fiddle-and-spoon-playing hillbillies. Despite the unquestionably *Québécois* origins of their heritage – for they too share the bonds accumulated over ten generations – they seem thoroughly alien. In *Le Mouton noir*, francophones outside Québec are distant, estranged cousins at best, certainly not siblings.

Such representations are not so much about degrading the rest of Canada than about ignoring it. The story of *la famille québécoise* takes place in a memory environment that is inwardly focused. Donald Smith's analysis of *Le Mouton noir* in his book *Jacques Godbout: du Roman au Cinéma* notes that, in the film, Torontonians and Vancouverites "font preuve d'une ignorance stéréotypée du Québec" (Smith 1995: 172). The same can be said of Godbout: He arguably exhibits a stereotypical ignorance of Canada. His Brit-and-Scot characterization of Toronto's business community ignores the last century of Canadian immigration and the rise to business prominence of people from southern and eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa; the characterization finds an immediate challenge in the figure of media magnate Moses Znaimer, to name but one. While Godbout largely favors Québécois politicians, academics, and businessmen as

interview subjects, he turns to individual Toronto shoppers to explore Canadian attitudes about Québec.[27] And while Torontonians seem stupefyingly fascinated with Québec, Godbout's Québec shares no reciprocal fascination: keenly focused upon Québec's political future, his Québécois interviewees demonstrate no interest whatsoever in Canada. Nor are they called upon to do so, for Godbout does not ask them to consider such issues. "Family", then, is as insular as it is coercive: in *Le Mouton noir*, Québec's sovereignty has little to do with severing ties with others, for such ties do not seem to exist. Rather, it is more akin to the resolution of an internal family squabble.

Godbout's choice of sources – anonymous shoppers in other parts of Canada, versus political and business élites in Québec – also underlines *Le Mouton noir*'s élitist vision of Québec nationalism. All those Godbout interviews are already prominent political actors in Québec; they are also, virtually without exception, exclusively white males. The focus upon Québécois male political actors has an important impact upon the representation of minority groups, for members of visible minorities are obviously not part of the family. Minority groups are addressed as a peripheral issue for about ten minutes' worth of the documentary: "Do we speak of sovereignty to feel at home amongst ourselves," Godbout asks, "or so they can feel at home with us?" Whichever question may be most appropriate for Godbout, the delineation between "us" and "them" remains

---

27 The subtitles used to represent their opinions are arguably inflammatory translations to boot. In one instance, a teenager comments that "If they want to separate, it's fine with me." His words are translated as "S'ils veulent se séparer, qu'ils s'arrangent!" His innocuous, droning tone of voice makes the translation's exclamation seem drastically misplaced, while his openness to the idea of Québec's separation hardly has the I-don't-give-a-damn-about-them implications of "qu'ils s'arrangent!" In a partisan mood, I am left to wonder why Godbout would play such a trick on a teenager, and why, despite the fact that his film takes us inside the offices of the *Toronto Star*, he never bothers to query any members of the paper's editorial board on its position.

firmly intact. With respect to women, Godbout's family is a very traditional one in which only the elder patriarchs speak with authority, and the only others that are allowed to speak are younger males entering adulthood. Only one woman, Louise O'Neill of the federal New Democratic Party, is given a prominent voice, but the documentary undermines any authority she may have by chronicling her decision to no longer speak with her own voice.[28] The family metaphor thus naturalizes the documentary's exclusionary tactics, for the innocuous and seemingly benign notions of brotherhood, sisterhood, and parenthood serve to distract attention from the exclusion of women and minorities.

Le bicéphale and the Nostalgic Lure of Sovereignty

In *Jacques Godbout: du Roman au cinéma*, Donald Smith's biography of Godbout, Smith argues that bicephalism is the root metaphor which informs both *Le Mouton noir* and Godbout's 1981 novel *Les Têtes à Papineau.* Bicephalism, in Godbout's case, is not necessarily about having two heads, but rather about being of two minds. In *Les Têtes à Papineau*, bicephalism is embodied in the novel's central character, Charles-François Papineau, who actually sports two heads, a condition with which he was born. In *Le Mouton noir*, bicephalism is symbolized through the juxtaposition of various political figures: "Cartier-Macdonald,

---

28 O'Neill's saga is followed for the first half of the film. Originally, she is a New Democratic Party candidate in a federal by-election, and speaks of her commitment to social justice; she is then abandoned by her own party, which chooses to support Duceppe. Later, she appears as the NDP's representative at a political open-house at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, where she solemnly admits that this will be her last public appearance as a federal New Democrat; she declines to comment any further on her reasons, except to say that there comes a time when "one must choose".

Trudeau-Lévesque, Mulroney-Bourassa, le bicéphalisme semble être génétiquement transmis de génération en génération" (Smith 1995: 166). In the documentary, the most notable embodiment of this bicephalous condition is the Bélanger-Campeau commission on Québec's future, whose progress Godbout follows over the course of the documentary's one-year time span. The commission was unprecedented in the sense that it also sported two heads: federalist Michel Bélanger and sovereignist Jean Campeau, both prominent businessmen, served as the commission's co-presidents. The "voguish fascination" (Bothwell 1995: 219) that surrounded the commission almost gives the impression that people were indeed gawking at a freakish two-headed creature. Godbout's narration remarks on the media's reaction to the commission's structure: "Les journalistes en rit aux larmes. Une commission bicéphale, ça ne pourrait jamais marcher. Ils n'ont visiblement pas lu *Les Têtes à Papineau*." In *Le Mouton noir*, "le bicéphalisme est partout. Il y a tant de signes contradictoires à lire... Notre ambiguïté est affichée et commentée un peu partout" (Smith 1995: 173).

Yet bicephalism, as a primary characteristic of *la famille québécoise*, is not necessarily a pleasant or unresolvable one for Godbout. Ambiguity and contradiction are indeed everywhere displayed: *Le Mouton noir* bounces to and fro between different perspectives on Québec's future, suggesting that the political affairs of *la famille* are defined by a sibling rivalry. Nevertheless, Godbout does not lend equal credence to each of the two minds; he makes his preference clearly known through recourse to family memory. Bicephalism gives way to nostalgia: Godbout establishes a hierarchy in which federalism is subordinated to sovereignty by characterizing the latter as a state of innocence for which Québec yearns.

The first sign of nostalgic yearning in *Le Mouton noir* comes in the form of cinematic flashbacks to the time of Confederation. Godbout sets the stage for the flashbacks in his narration, commenting that, with the Meech Lake Accord's rejection, "l'histoire se répète". Using excerpts from a previous NFB series (*Artisans de notre histoire*, 1962), Godbout provides a glimpse into the backroom deals which led to the creation of Canada. Georges-Étienne Cartier, one of the Fathers of Confederation, is described as a "careerist" politician adept at practical compromise; he is represented as an unwilling signatory of Confederation, ill at ease with the demands which he has been forced to accept. In some instances, Smith observes, Godbout uses sound editing to demonstrate the continuity between past and present, giving the impression that modern-day politicians speak the words of their predecessors and vice-versa (Smith 1995: 171).

At first glance, these flashbacks hardly seem nostalgic. Clearly, Godbout does not yearn for a return to the time of Confederation – the period is hardly construed as the "good old days". But if yearning for innocence entails a recognition of innocence lost, then the nostalgia of Confederation lies in its representation as a loss of innocence. Cartier, though uncomfortable with his compromises, nevertheless gives his assent to the Confederation scheme; in so doing, he has knowingly compromised the purity of his principles and thus cannot claim innocence – his hands are dirty, so to speak. As Godbout tells it, "Le Canada, ce n'est pas un projet patriotique. Les Anglais se méfient des Français et vice-versa... Avant d'être un pays, le Canada reste un contrat en perpétuelle négociation." The rejection of Meech Lake, meanwhile, is merely the repetition of history. In this light, Canada becomes a purgatory to which Québec has sentenced itself, an unending, perpetual, inescapable state of angst. Whether Canada was so perceived in 1867 is a moot point. Perhaps Confederation was considered acceptable at the time; the unfolding of history, certainly in Godbout's

memory, has demonstrated Québec's eternal reticence with the Canadian project, which has led them to continually take on the role of "black sheep". In *Le Mouton noir*, the present bears down upon the past with considerable weight.

In contrast to such flashbacks, *Le Mouton noir* also explores the innocence of contemporary youth. Godbout frequently interviews three young political activists – all of which, notably, are young men: Simard, Québec Liberal Party (PLQ) youth wing president Michel Bissonette, and Parti Québécois (PQ) youth wing president Joseph Facal. All three embrace the sovereignty ideal; Bissonette, in particular, is working to promote a declaration of sovereignty within his own traditionally federalist party. Scenes from the PLQ's youth wing convention show delegates adopting, by a strong majority, a declaration of Québec's autonomy. Listening to delegates speak, the political world is a simple, black-and-white affair: "Ottawa nous a assez roulé"; "le fédéralisme, comme c'est là, c'est fini"; "il faut envoyer une réponse claire". Later in the documentary, even the Young Chamber of Commerce of Montréal voices its unequivocal preference for sovereignty, despite the business community's traditional support for federalism.

Innocence, or impetuousness? Godbout poses this question to Premier Bourassa, who suggests that it is quite normal for young people to be emotional, but that one must always balance reason with emotion and, above all, preserve the future. The young politicians, however, see their situation differently. Asked where they think they will be in five years, Bissonette responds that "j'espère simplement être aussi militant que toujours", rejecting the common notion that young Québecers eventually 'get over their sovereignty phase.' When asked if they prefer "peace, order and good government" or "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as a constitutional principle – the former being Canadian, the latter American – their answers are most telling. Simard, the federalist-cum-

sovereignist, in classic bicephalic fashion, refuses to choose, noting that "l'une est en fiduciaire de l'autre". Facal, however, offers this response:

> Je pense que la vie politique est essentiellement quelque chose de pragmatique, et donc dans les faits on n'a pas d'autre choix que d'essayer de concilier ces choses-là. Mais il reste que, *devant sa conscience*, on a quand même des choix à faire qui impliquent une certaine priorisation. Est-ce que je préfère l'ordre, ou est-ce que je préfère la liberté? Je préfère la liberté, même si elle suppose un certain désordre de temps en temps (emphasis mine).

Facal's distinction between political pragmatics and political conscience is important, for it pervades the entire documentary – it is precisely this distinction through which Godbout establishes his hierarchy of belief. In the flashbacks, Cartier's history of pragmatic, "careerist" conciliation may have been productive on a practical level, but at a crucial moment of decision, *devant sa conscience*, he had abandoned principle. Facal, by contrast, makes an eloquent case for youth as innocence rather than recklessness. Young people, as yet uncompromised by the demands of backroom political wheeling and dealing, hold steadfastly to their principles. *Le Mouton noir* observes youth with a kind, admiring eye: *la famille québécoise*, in watching its children come of age, becomes nostalgic as it recognizes innocence lost.

"Family elders" in the film, rather than impart their collected wisdom upon the younger generation, recognize their complicity with their own lost innocence and step forward in large numbers to join them. It is here that nostalgia begins to demonstrate its moral intonations. With astonishing regularity, contemporary adult politicians in Godbout's documentary come forward and voice their "conversion" to sovereignty. In *Le Mouton noir*, microphones are transformed into confessionals, the Bélanger-Campeau commission into a Conference of Bishops: grown men and women, *devant leur conscience*, come forward to testify, seek absolution for their sins, and join the

sovereignist pilgrimage. The documentary addresses at length the creation of the Bloc Québécois, a group of federal politicians who have left either the federal Liberal or Conservative parties to form a group committed to Québec's independence. Bloc MP Gilles Rocheleau, speaking before Bélanger-Campeau, warns the federalist commissioners: "Vous aurez vous aussi à faire le constat. Moi, ça m'a peut-être pris plus de temps que d'autres à le faire." Like the apostle Peter, Rocheleau further admits to having publicly renounced his newfound beliefs: "j'étais auparavant parmi ceux qui pourfendaient les Péquistes, 'les méchants Péquistes'." Likewise, Louise O'Neill, the former federal NDP candidate who eventually lost to Duceppe, confides to Godbout her reasons for quitting the federal party after years of activism:

> Il arrive un moment où il faut faire des choix et que ça devient très difficile de vivre avec certains paradoxes. Il y a des fois où il faut savoir assumer ses contradictions... sauf que, au Québec, on en est plus là. ... On est a un moment de choix – il faut choisir maintentant.

O'Neill virtually echoes the words of Facal, the young Péquiste, in her testimony – in self-confrontation, choices must be made. As an experienced politician, however, she cannot lay the same claim to innocence as her younger sibling Facal. O'Neill appears embarrassed, even penitent, as she makes her confession. Her reflections on her work with the federal NDP seem painful; in her return to pain, she recognizes lost innocence, and her change of allegiance symbolizes her search for redemption.

The testimony of formerly federalist politicians who have converted to sovereignty demonstrate most effectively the difference between innocent yearning and yearning for innocence. Their yearning is not innocent, for they acknowledge their complicity in the compromises they have made. Lucien Bouchard captures this mode of remembrance most eloquently when speaking to a group of young Montreal businesspeople. "Le temps de la décision", he says,

reflecting on his moment of decision to resign from the Conservative caucus, "la décision du Québec". Bouchard, before an audience of young professionals, describes how the recent past brings shame upon all Québecers, speaking of former Premier René Lévesque's experience during the 1982 constitutional repatriation:

> Les Québécois eux-mêmes, démocratiquement, ont scié les jarrets de Monsieur Lévesque... René Lévesque, c'était un homme détruit par la politique, mais détruit par nous. C'est nous qui avons détruit Lévesque quand on l'a envoyé au front sans fusil... Vas-y René! Lâche pas René! Mais il est monté au front tout seul. On le savait qu'on l'avait fait à Lévesque puisque, au fond, on se l'était fait à nous-mêmes.

Bouchard – and, by extension, Godbout – thus implicate their entire audience in a moment of guilt. No one in the room is innocent. Even though most of those in Bouchard's presence were too young to understand or even remember the incident, the sins of the father are visited upon the son. The documentary turns the Lévesque incident into an instance of Québec once again condemning itself to Canadian purgatory; in 1867 it was Cartier himself, in 1981 it was Lévesque's abandonment by *la famille.* As leader of the Bloc Québécois, Bouchard seeks support though an appeal for moral retribution: sovereignty will right a previous wrong. Invoking Lévesque is a nostalgic appeal to the past, a return to pain: Let's not make the same mistake again. Let's redeem ourselves.

In this sense, the testimony of the adults stands in marked contrast to that of the younger generation. Statements by many of the youth at the PLQ youth wing convention direct a considerable degree of invective at Ottawa, blaming federalism for the current strife. In another scene, CEGEP students rehearsing a media conference decide they will refuse to answer questions in English, joking that they will tell a *Gazette* reporter to "go fuck" if he cannot speak French. On the other hand, elder statesmen such as Bouchard, Rocheleau and O'Neill place the blame not on others, but upon themselves. Godbout thus characterizes the

wisdom of the aged: The adult politicians, in their maturity, understand their complicity in the current situation, and choose a path of penitence and self-sacrifice – a particularly Catholic view of the situation. The impetuousness of youth, meanwhile, leads them not to the wrong conclusions about sovereignty, but simply to blame others for the movement's woes. This sense of wisdom allows *Le Mouton noir* to avoid addressing the Other by obscuring it altogether: Sovereignty is less a battle against an Other than a journey towards self-actualization.

For Godbout, federal Liberal leader Jean Chrétien embodies the life to which the Québécois have consigned themselves if they refuse to confront their conscience. The documentary chronicles Chrétien's arrival in Moncton, New Brunswick, an area with a large francophone population where Chrétien sought re-election to Parliament in 1990. In *Le Mouton noir*, the Moncton landscape is punctuated primarily with cemeteries. The tombstones serve as a metaphor for both the literal and symbolic fate of francophones in Canada: Family members who (mis)place their faith in Canadian federalism have already died a small death, a spiritual death. Chrétien, as a Québécois committed to Canada, has abandoned both his political and his moral obligations. Bouchard says as much directly in his earlier speech: "Un Québécois, s'il veut réussir à Ottawa, il faut qu'il fasse comme Jean Chrétien," something Bouchard is clearly unwilling to do. Exactly what it is that Chrétien "does" which is so reprehensible, mind you, is never articulated. The implication is that his actions have ephemeral rather than material consequences – Chrétien embodies a betrayal of faith. Much like Catholicism once denounced usury and insisted upon a life of agrarian self-sufficiency for the faithful, so too does the sovereignty movement: Canada may make practical sense in many respects, but it amounts nonetheless to a moral offense, a breach of dogma. As Chrétien begins a speech with the words "I have

always said that what makes Canada great is...", Godbout's camera moves outside the meeting hall, panning across empty countryside as Chrétien's voice fades into oblivion. We never hear his speech; his words have no resonance.

Ironically, Godbout appears unaware of the religious overtones that pervade his film. As Chrétien arrives in Moncton, he enjoys a humourous moment with fellow documentarist Herménégilde Chiasson: They punctuate the landing of Chrétien's plane with a chorus of "Minuit Chrétien", a hymn describing Christ's return to earth to erase the moment of original sin. According to Donald Smith, the hymn's words "s'appliquent parfaitement à la mission non apostolique du futur premier ministre du Canada" (Smith 1995: 168). The unadressed corollary to this observation, of course, is the matter of whose mission must then be considered apostolic. This is the only moment in *Le Mouton noir* where religious symbolism is overt; it is meant, in part, to associate Chrétien with the agrarian, stridently religious, and widely renounced Québec society that existed prior to the Quiet Revolution. But as a close reading of the cinematic text demonstrates, spiritual metaphors pervade the entire documentary. Throughout the film, conscientious meditation leads prominent individuals to recognize the errors of their ways: Canada ultimately symbolizes original sin. Cartier is Adam, Canada the apple. An independent Québec is not a promised land but an Eden. Political independence is only a by-product of the sovereignty movement; its first promise is redemption. Godbout's contempt for religious dogma belies his sovereignist fundamentalism.

Moral Coercion and the Fiction of Collective Innocence

The relationship between nostalgia and morality is rarely self-evident. The German word for nostalgia, "heimweh", translates directly as "home-pain", suggesting simple homesickness above all else. Indeed, Rosaldo notes that the term was coined by a seventeenth-century Swiss physician "to refer to pathological conditions of homesickness among his nation's mercenaries who were fighting far from their homeland" (Rosaldo 1989: 71). As the dominant meaning associated with nostalgia has shifted from a longing for home to a longing for an earlier, simpler time, the concept of innocence becomes part of the nostalgic landscape: individuals, cultures, and nations long for an era when their world was less complicated, less corrupt. The home-pain of nostalgia is transformed so that the actual homeland takes on allegorical connotations: The home one yearns for, be it the St. Lawrence River valley, the American heartland, or the African plains, becomes akin to the Garden of Eden.

A number of recent American films dealing with events in recent memory, most notably Oliver Stone's *JFK* and *Nixon* and Robert Redford's *Quiz Show* , encapsulate this type of nostalgia; they long for a time when Americans could place their faith in politics, the presidency, and the cultural mirror of television. The innocence in question is not legal or criminal innocence, but moral innocence. In *JFK*, district attorney Jim Garrison fails to prove the existence of a conspiracy in court, but in his closing argument Garrison, played by Kevin Costner, looks directly into the camera and confronts his audience with the choice at hand: "You decide." Since the actual court judgment is a foregone conclusion, the choice is a moral one: can Americans, in good faith, *devant leur conscience*, allow this issue to be swept under the rug?

Along similar lines in Québec, Pierre Falardeau's *Octobre* (1995) revisits the October Crisis of 1970 with much the same intonations. In *Octobre*, Falardeau attempts to inscribe a sense of nostalgia into one of the more infamous moments in the history of the sovereignty movement.[29] The abduction of Pierre Laporte by the *Front de Libération du Québec* is portrayed as the overzealous action of a group of naïve young revolutionaries who, during the course of the abduction, come to realize the severity of their actions. They struggle with the question of whether or not to kill Laporte, no longer as a question of tactical preference, but as a moral question. Then, suddenly, Laporte himself, in desperation, forces his torso through a window to scream for help, critically injuring himself in the process; his abductors are left with no choice but to kill him. Through *Octobre*, the story of the October Crisis becomes a story of lost innocence, and its moral lessons are similar to those in *Le Mouton noir*. First, *Octobre* is the story of innocent youth making rash decisions, based upon their perception that others are to blame; second, the decision to kill Laporte, much like Cartier's decision to agree to Confederation as portrayed in *Le Mouton noir*, is a decision in which they are complicit, but one they are also compelled make despite their reluctance.

It may seem bizarre to inscribe both the creation of a political entity and the murder of a human being with the same moral lesson, but this is very much what *Octobre* attempts to do. In so doing, Falardeau's film makes the October Crisis a suitable event for nostalgic remembrance – again in the form of a "return to pain", to a moment in which innocence is foregone. Once past innocence is

---

29 On October 5, 1970, British Trade Commissioner James Cross was kidnapped by the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ); five days later, the FLQ kidnapped Québec Labour Minister Pierre Laporte. The kidnappings led the federal government to suspend civil liberties in Québec through the invocation of the War Measures Act. On October 18, Laporte was found dead The abductions were widely criticized even by those in the then-nascent Parti Québécois, as were the Government of Canada's extreme measures.

invoked, so, by implication, is present guilt. Whether in the form of innocent yearning or of yearning for innocence, nostalgia always invokes the question of one's own sense of guilt before a particular memory. The two differ only to the degree that they obscure guilt: Rosaldo's innocent yearning hides complicity behind a veil of compassion, while yearning for innocence, as articulated through Falardeau's *Octobre* or Godbout's *Le Mouton noir*, draws attention to that complicity. In doing so, the moral implications of nostalgia become much more apparent.

Both types of nostalgia are also similar in the sense that they both project a vision of past innocence, an earlier era of youthful purity. This innocence is always assumed *a priori* – it is always inarticulated and transparent, for the "innocence of youth" is far too commonsensical a notion to require elaboration. Yet this youthful innocence, at least on a collective scale, is clearly a fiction. In the case of individual memory, a person can remember a time in his/her life, a state of personal youth, that they may characterize as innocent. But in the case of collective memory, the innocence of an earlier epoch remains impossible to ascertain. In cultural terms, "youth" can only be used to describe an emergence, the forging of a new and distinct mode of living. Nonetheless, even a young culture is forged, at least in part, by many conniving, lecherous adults and a good number of mischievous youngsters. In collective memory, nostalgia is a state of romanticized depression in which one yearns for a lost condition that was never there to begin with. It is here that we find the particular mode of forgetting embedded in nostalgia, which is not "forgetting" per se but instead remembering something that never was in the place of remembering nothing at all. Such is the case in Godbout's *Le Mouton noir*: sovereignty becomes a means of reclaiming a lost innocence, but that time of innocence remains inarticulated in the film – inarticulated precisely because it is inarticulable, for it has no referent.

The fiction of innocence should nevertheless come as no surprise. As Hayden White observes in "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory", the logic of fiction is always involved in the transition from historical fact to historical narrative:

> This transition is effected by a displacement of the facts onto the ground of literary fictions or, what amounts to the same thing, the projection onto the facts of the plot-structure of one or another of the genres of literary figuration. (White 1984: 24)

In this sense, the forces of fiction at work in historical narratives should not be understood as distortions or falsehoods, but as systems of meaning required to transform a mere chronicle of events into a coherent whole. As such, White argues, it is preferable to analyze an historical narrative based not upon its omissions or falsehoods, but upon the "poetic troping of the 'facts'" (White 1984: 24) which render them into narrative – which make the account's omissions and falsehoods possible and render them transparent, if you will. In the case of *Le Mouton noir*, one could engage in an endless debate over Cartier's true feelings and intentions with regard to Confederation, or over the actual culpability of all Québécois in Lévesque's destruction. But nostalgia will persist in infusing a fictitious dimension into memory. Hence, rather than argue over the "real reality", it is more productive to focus upon how Godbout facilitates "nostalgiamnesia" – how the remembering of a fictitious innocence maintains the illusion of actual remembrance.

Le Mouton noir's central metaphor in this regard is that of the *Québécois* as *famille*. As I have argued, the metaphor of the family has a number of implications for Godbout's narrative: it focuses attention inward; it suggests the comfort of home and hearth; it represents youth activism as childhood innocence; it facilitates nostalgia by encouraging remembrance of innocence lost; it draws attention to people's own complicity in that loss. It is important to keep in mind,

however, that *Le Mouton noir* is ostensibly dealing with political actuality: the documentary follows a series of political developments over the course of a year, from the demise of the Meech Lake Accord to the Oka crisis to the unfolding of the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau commissions. Through the metaphor of family, Godbout turns the political into the familial: his documentary emphasizes the dynamics of family, which involves private bonds and common purposes, over the dynamics of politics, which involves the peaceful resolution of public conflict. *Le Mouton noir*'s subject matter – politics – is everywhere to be seen, yet thoroughly obscured.

In this light, one of the most important consequences of the analogy of *la famille québécoise* is the way in which it directs nostalgic yearning – how it assigns complicity with innocence lost. When blood alliances take precedence over political alliances, the latter can be more easily represented as a betrayal. Bouchard's comments about René Lévesque provide the most glowing example of this state of affairs. When Bouchard insists that Lévesque was "détruit par nous" at the time of the 1982 repatriation, he implies that we have betrayed a family member. Here, complicity lies in a betrayal of family solidarity, and behooves us to unite as family in the face of future tribulations. This focus upon kinship allows both Bouchard and Godbout to obscure a complicity of a different, political order: In the 1980 referendum, *la famille québécoise* voted majoritarily against Lévesque's sovereignty-association option, a situation which might arguably compels people to respect a previous choice. The metaphor of family invokes a moral code which, in many instances, supersedes politics.

By contrast, as politician after politician comes forth in *Le Mouton noir* to testify to their internal confrontation with their personal/collective conscience, Godbout concludes that "la démocratie au Québec, cet automne, se porte bien." For Godbout, democracy works well when it serves the narrowly-defined

interests of *la famille*. Herein lies the ruse of Godbout's narrativization: the warm-fuzziness and home-fire pleasantries conjured up by the metaphor of family serve to mask the subtle moral coercion affected by the documentary's nostalgic mode of remembrance. The film does not portray a political journey in search of solutions; it portrays a nostalgic journey in search of lost innocence. The metaphor of family simultaneously enables and obscures the documentary's moral implications by couching the coercion of kinship in the comforts of home. Godbout's representation of sovereignty is – much to his dismay, no doubt – an extremely Catholic one, in the sternest sense of the word.

Yet because collective innocence is a fiction, it has important implications for understanding how the effort to forget is enacted in any narrative text. The lost innocence of *la famille québécoise* is not a falsehood, but a fiction; it is a metaphorical contextualization of memory which enables a coherence of meaning across time. It brings a particular mode of remembrance – in this case, nostalgia – to bear upon the collective past. Forgetting, when understood in this fashion, cannot be reduced simply to omissions in the historical record. Indeed, in *Le Mouton noir*, the idea of forgetting as omission holds no water. Godbout's family metaphor obscures politics by injecting a moral dimension into all political memory, but he can hardly be accused of omitting politics from memory, for his documentary is made up almost entirely of political actuality and commentary.

Instead, the effort to forget is embedded within the mode of remembrance itself. The nostalgic remembrance of collective innocence is a fictitious remembrance of sorts: While it remembers events which actually took place, it remembers a collective state of being which is purely imaginary. *Le Mouton noir* enacts its amnesia with regard to the distant shared past not through any attempt at deceit or omission, but through a metaphorical contextualization which

performs the selection of past events in order to ensure their congruence with the nostalgic mode of remembrance. As White observes, "the narrative level of any historical account has a referent quite different from that of its 'chronicle' level" (White 1984: 28). From the moment historical facts and events are transformed into a collective narrative, narrative fidelity takes precedence over the events themselves – the logic of fiction assumes predominance. Ultimately, collective memory is performative:

> To be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse that *performs* the problematic totalization of the national will. (Bhabha *1990b*: 311)

Because forgetting is not a matter of historical memory, it is not necessarily problematic in terms of any omission or falsification of the past. Above all else, *Le Mouton noir* demonstrates that any critical investigation of the effort to forget must account for the tropological elements which mould the way in which events are remembered. Ultimately, the effort to forget is not enabled through omissions, but through the mode of remembrance it enacts, the meanings it produces and the discourse it circulates.

CONCLUSION

LEST WE REMEMBER

The Trappings of Amnesia

> *The true alternative is this: to be the young man in the white shirt in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square, or to be the driver of the tank. Our myths tell us that we are the young man. The truth is that we are seated in the tank.*
>
> - Québec playwright René-Daniel Dubois*

Through these words, René-Daniel Dubois demonstrates how the construction of national identity is intimately linked to the power of forgetting. Though he does not speak directly of memory, his reference to "myths" make allusion to the configurations of memory and the lessons to be drawn from the past. Dubois' choice of analogy is perhaps extreme; many people might object to the scenario he describes, suggesting instead that, in the context of the Canada-Québec question, it may be more accurate to say that there are in fact two tanks facing one another. But in either case, the task of forgetting in memory would be the same: to make a tank disappear.

---

* René-Daniel Dubois as quoted in Guy Lawson, "No Canada?", *Harper's Magazine*, April 1996, page 72.

To focus solely on the harrowing military hardware described in Dubois' analogy, however, is to insist on its literal implications at the expense of its metaphorical intonations. The question to ask is: What kind of tank is he talking about? In literal terms, the only "tanks" in recent *québécois* memory are those which occupied the streets of Montreal during the October crisis, in which case Dubois' words could be understood somewhat literally. But rather than refer to the presence of any actual tank, Dubois is attempting to draw metaphorical attention to an important characteristic of Québécois collective memory: a tendency for the imagined community to represent itself to itself as being perpetually disenfranchised. Collective memory in Québec imagines the peuple québécois as being powerless, or at the very least marginalized, regardless of whether or not such is actually the case.

Both *Le Confort et l'indifférence* and *Le Mouton noir* demonstrate a tendency to reflect Dubois' analogy, for both embody this characterization of the *peuple québécois* as a marginalized collective. *Confort*'s narrative of federalism as despotic imperial intimidation portrays a Québec that is forever under the thumb of an essentially foreign Canadian government. *Le Mouton noir*'s notion of the "black sheep" represents Québec as a loner, isolated, consigned to a situation with which it is perennially ill at ease. Furthermore, in both documentaries, the *peuple québécois* is forever striving to attain a goal – independence, or sovereignty – which is consistently denied. The omnipresence of sovereignty in both films contributes to this sense of marginalization. In *Confort*, sovereignty is denied by an external agent, while in *Le Mouton noir*, it is more a matter of self-denial; nevertheless, in both documentaries, sovereignty is something which is denied them, rather than something they choose to forego. The denial of sovereignty in both documentaries is construed as one of memory's constants, even though the memories to which they refer are quite distinct. In the face of differing present

circumstances, each documentary calls upon different collective memories and amnesias to support its representation: *Confort* invokes the injustice of the Conquest, while *Le Mouton noir* invokes the ambivalence of Confederation. In both, the theme of marginalization inherent to memory does not shift in order to accommodate new and divergent events; rather, it is the other way around. Memory, as a subjective site of knowledge, is reconfigured to suit the exigencies of the present and preserve the marginal character which is an essential part of the community's self-definition.

The essential marginal character of nationalist identity is effected and maintained not by the effort to remember, but through the effort to forget. While both documentaries call upon different memories in order to continually re-imagine the *québécois* community as inherently marginalized, their amnesia – the disappearance of Dubois' metaphorical tank, the lack of empowerment which is reinscribed into every moment in the present through recourse to the past – remains constant. Both act to preserve the marginal character of the imagined community by ensuring that, in Renan's words, *tous aient oublié bien des choses*.[30] Collective amnesia is invoked to preserve the imagined community of the *peuple québécois*, a community imagined primarily as excluded, resistant, and disenfranchised.

To suggest that marginalization comes from the effort to forget, rather than the effort to remember, has broader consequences for the study of memory and identity. On the one hand, the effort to forget, as Renan, Anderson and others have rightly noted, is essential to the preservation of the imagined community and to the perseverance of a particular sense of identity; as such, it performs an essential cultural function. On the other hand, however, the effort to

---

30 Ernest Renan as quoted in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, page 199.

forget is precisely that which, at the same time, prevents a community from re-imagining itself. When the effort to forget is employed to preserve the notion of "marginalization" as an inherent aspect of identity, it calls into question the effectiveness of minority discourse as a means of cultural intervention through memory. When marginalization becomes essential, the effort to forget can render accommodation and cohabitation with other communities difficult, if not impossible. For if the community's identity is based upon its marginalization, then any attempt to change that marginal status ultimately entails a betrayal of both identity and community.

Memory, Teleology, Sovereignty

Le Confort et l'indifférence and *Le Mouton noir* appear to be two very different portrayals of the sovereignty issue and of collective memory in Québec. But in attempting to understand their differences in representation, it is essential to consider the specific exigencies that each film faced at the time it was made. The films were made only ten years apart (*Confort* in 1981, *Le Mouton noir* in 1991), but the changes in Québec between those years were vast. Each film portrays events which take place at markedly different junctures in Québec's history, particularly in the history of the sovereignty movement – *Confort* is situated at the time of a devastating setback for the movement, while the events in *Le Mouton noir* take place at a time when the movement is experiencing a vitality it had not known since the time of the Parti Québécois' first electoral victory in 1977. According to Charles Taylor, in the space of a single decade Québec's political landscape was transformed considerably:

> ...now for the first time the [sovereignty] option looks conceivable, possible, even safe. In this regard even the last decade has seen a change. In 1980, most Quebecers still found sovereignty a somewhat frightening proposition. The referendum revealed that clearly. In 1990, this no longer seems to be so. A great deal of the difference seems to stem from the currently perceived high-profile place of francophones as big players in our economic life. ...the basic change is undeniable. Separation really is thinkable. (Taylor 1993: 167-168)

This change of public mood also helps explain the divergent representations of sovereignty each film provides. *Confort*, made just after the 1980 referendum, was faced with the exigency that the sovereignty-association option had been defeated in the referendum. Consequently, when the film invokes collective memory, it harkens back to the Conquest of 1759. The fact that the community voted against sovereignty, that it chose not to accept that option, is an event which contains the capability to eradicate the option itself. *Confort*, in invoking the memory of the Conquest, makes the referendum result congruent with the conquest: the loss of the YES side is explained through the coercive imposition of another government. *Le Mouton noir*, by contrast, was made at a time when nationalist sentiment was at a peak and when, as Taylor notes, a sense of economic empowerment was widespread; unlike Arcand, Godbout has no need to be heavy-handed in his invocation of memory. With pro-nationalist sentiment firmly entrenched, *Le Mouton noir* explores more ambiguous moments in memory such as Confederation, events in which, like the film's current juncture, the community had some degree of control over its destiny. Through its religious overtones of penitence and sacrifice, *Le Mouton Noir* suggests that there is a degree of self-marginalization within the community; nevertheless, *Le Mouton noir*'s representation of Confederation strongly suggests that the community has not assumed full control over its destiny. *Le Mouton noir*'s self-

marginalization stands in contrast to *Confort*'s imposed marginalization, but marginalization is nevertheless the common thread between the two.

Thus the two films are not as different as they may appear on the surface. One offers a defiant nationalism, the other a more self-reflexive one; while each may be different in tone, each is also responding to a specific political context and to a different type of nationalist discourse effective at the time in which each was made. Indeed, even through their differences, when taken together they demarcate common boundaries with respect to memory's imagination. Both seek to locate a particular interpretation of events – namely, the interpretation that Canadian federalism is an honorable and valuable preference to sovereignty – outside the realm of the utterable. In *Confort*, those who utter the inutterable are shamed, as the Machiavellian narration chides No voters as "ingrats" and "paresseux". In *Le Mouton noir*, those who utter the unutterable are not shamed by the film's narrator, but by themselves; through their personal testimony, they openly repent for their previous utterances of their own free will. In fact, in most cases, they dare not repeat their previous utterances.[31]

Through the two films, then, there emerges a similar *telos*, or final ultimate end, which is attributed to the *peuple québécois*. The community is forever striving to attain a goal – independence, or sovereignty – which is denied. In both documentaries, this teleological orientation is never asserted overtly; rather, its omnipresence informs the meaning that is attributed to the events they each chronicle. As Maurice Charland writes, the teleological orientation of narratives positions the subject within the narrative in such a way that it provides the

---

31 In his review of *Le Mouton noir* in the *Globe and Mail* (September 19, 1992), Ray Conlogue notes that "although the film talks admiringly about democracy, almost all the people interviewed want independence for Québec" with the exception of perhaps a few teenagers on the street in Toronto.

illusion of agency while at the same time tightly bracketing it, for "the subject is constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain the narrative's consistency" (Charland 1994: 220). With specific reference to Québec, Charland notes that in the case of the Parti Québécois' 1979 White Paper on sovereignty-association,[32] the historical narrative it included "is predicated upon Québécois asserting their existence as a collective subject through a politics of independence" (Charland 1994: 220). Similarly, in both *Confort* and *Le Mouton noir* it is taken for granted that sovereignty is not only desirable, but natural; sovereignty is also something which is denied them, not something they choose to forego. As noted in Chapter 2, *Confort* expends a great deal of energy preserving that telos in the face of a referendum result which would deny its perseverance. *Le Mouton noir*, meanwhile, with its description of Confederation as a sort of purgatory – "un contrat en perpétuelle négotiation", or a never-ending eleventh-hour collective bargaining session – represents the accession to sovereignty as a natural state of rest.[33]

The *telos* of sovereignty, because it is construed as a "natural" end, becomes not only the realm of the utterable, but the realm of truth as well. The teleological orientation of both documentaries establishes a certain hegemony of meaning which, in Jocelyn Létourneau's words, "insinuates itself into the

---

32 The White Paper was a policy document which accompanied the 1980 referendum question, explaining the government's perspective on the proposal which was put forward to the people in the referendum.

33 Donald Brittain's *The Champions Part 3* also establishes a teleological orientation of its own, namely, that Canadian federalism is already a final state of rest – something which the sovereignty movement disrupts. However, the notion of sovereignty also remains within the realm of the utterable in *The Champions*; in the case of this documentary, the realm of the unutterable is personified, as noted in Chapter 2, by Pierre Bourgault, who portrays the sovereignty movement as a centuries-long and ongoing cold war between the English- and French-language communities within Canada.

discourse of knowledge, supplying it with the themes and categories used to apprehend reality, historical and otherwise" (Létourneau 1989: 91). Ultimately, both treat the path to sovereignty as the inevitable result of enlightenment, the product of true knowledge. At the same time, however, the teleological orientation of both *Confort* and *Le Mouton noir* works in a paradoxical manner. Charland notes that narrative teleology establishes an illusion of agency, for it compels its collective subject to act in a manner which will ultimately fulfill the *telos* itself (Charland 1994: 220-1). But in this case, teleology also establishes the illusion of a lack of agency, for it draws attention to the fact that sovereignty is consistently, throughout memory and to the present day, denied – that obstacles constantly hinder the *peuple* from attaining its natural resting place. In other words, the omnipresent elusiveness of sovereignty is precisely what allows the imagined community to define itself as marginalized; this sense of marginalization, in turn, is also insinuated into the discourse of knowledge, attaining the status of truth.

Authoring Memory

While *Confort* and *Le Mouton noir* demonstrate similarities which have resonance in broader public discourse, they are nonetheless authored texts; indeed, they are texts which draw attention to the presence of their authors: *Confort* through the imposition of Machiavelli as narrator, allowing Denys Arcand to propose a very specific and pointed perspective on the 1980 referendum campaign; *Le Mouton Noir* through Godbout's own constant presence. The question of the documentarists' authority thus comes to the fore: while their films are infused with a discourse of knowledge, that discourse's

acceptance is also dependent, to some degree, upon the cultural authority of the documentarists themselves. In this vein, it is important to consider that, in *Le Mouton noir*, Godbout interviews Arcand on camera about *Le Confort et l'indifférence*. Arcand professes that the main theme of *Confort* is that men are cupidinous and lazy, and that their primary aim is to preserve their creature comforts; he also admits that he himself would be interested in having a chauffeur-driven car. Arcand's appearance creates a sense of continuity between the two films, and also creates heightened dramatization around those individuals in *Le Mouton noir* who testify to their conversion to sovereignty: thanks to Arcand's appearance, their conversion also implies that they are now willing to turn their backs on material comforts. But Godbout's conversation with Arcand also serves another purpose: to help entrench the authority of both in their roles as makers of cultural meaning. In her book *Covering the Body*, Barbie Zelizer examines how journalists used the story of the Kennedy assassination to fashion themselves into an authoritative community of cultural meaning-makers (Zelizer 1992). They did so, in part, by referring to one another's accounts in public discourse; similarly, for Godbout and Arcand to chat amicably onscreen aids in legitimizing the accounts they provide. As Zelizer notes, "Journalists are better equipped than others to offer a 'preferred' version of events because they themselves perpetuate the notion that their version of reality is a preferred one" (Zelizer 1992: 198). In conferring authority upon one another, Godbout and Arcand also confer authority upon their documentaries' portrayals. In fact, by interviewing Arcand about *Confort*, *Le Mouton noir* inscribes both Arcand and his film into collective memory, all the while conferring additional authority upon the knowledge they both circulate through their narratives.

Arcand's appearance in *Le Mouton Noir* also underlines the changes in the political landscape in Québec in the decade between the two films. Arcand's film,

at the time it was released, was very poorly received. In her column in the Saturday April 19, 1981 edition of *La Presse*, for example, Lysiane Gagnon characterized *Le Confort et l'indifférence* as "Le vengeance et le mépris" and chastized the film and its filmmaker for its heavy-handedness. But as the decade wore on, Arcand's interpretation of the 1980 referendum campaign quietly gained increasing legitimacy within popular discourse. Shortly after the release of Arcand's film, in 1982, the federal government patriated the Canadian Constitution without Québec's consent (Webber 1994: 159), which added credibility to Arcand's portrayal of federalism as cunningly Machiavellian. In his 1986 *Memoirs*, former Premier René Lévesque called the federalist campaign "an unqualifiable deluge of lies, threats and blackmail" (Lévesque 1986: 306). Though Lévesque's testimony is decidedly partisan, it also held a certain degree of authority by virtue of his own position within popular discourse as a political hero. Historian Jeremy Webber, though reluctant to comment on the federal government's referendum tactics, writes that the referendum victors "were determined to exploit their victory by patriating the constitution in a way that would subject Québec nationalism to a single-minded focus on Canada" (Webber 1994: 126). At one point in *Le Mouton noir*, Lucien Bouchard notes that "pour travailler à Ottawa, il faut faire comme Jean Chrétien" – a reference to Chrétien's role in the 1980 referendum, as the main figure in Lévesque's "deluge of lies". Arcand's appearance in Godbout's film, then, cements a shift of consensus around the meaning to be attributed to the 1980 referendum – a consensus which did not entirely vindicate Arcand's vengeful portrayal, but which conceded a certain authority to his interpretation.

Finally, both the documentarists and their films find themselves in positions of authority within the same institution, for both are productions of the National Film Board of Canada. The importance of the NFB in the development

and dissemination of nationalist collective memory is addressed in Chapter 1, but it is worth underlining again here. The NFB connection is significant for two reasons. First, there is the fact that the NFB is a federally-funded institution; the fact that these two films, both of which posit sovereignty as the natural *telos* of the *peuple québécois*, originate from this institution demonstrates a great deal of liberty in cultural expression. As Gary Evans notes in relation to *Le Confort et l'indifférence*, "That such a production could come from a federal agency was remarkable and a credit to freedom of expression" (Evans 1991: 266). Second – and this point mitigates Evans' claim – is the fact that French-language documentary at the NFB has always been separate and apart from its English-language productions, in part because the two are distributed to completely different audiences. One sees, through other works at the NFB, attempts at "internal balance" through the production of other films with different voices – *The Champions Part 3* being perhaps the most obvious example. Nevertheless, the NFB's history is fraught with controversy over freedom of expression for Québec filmmakers. In 1964, both Arcand and Godbout were part of a group of five filmmakers which contributed to an issue of the journal *parti pris* which strongly criticized the NFB for its policies (Clandfield 1987: 42); their participation also contributed to their authoritative stature, for it inscribes them both within the landscape of memory. It also inscribes them within the margins, just as the very structure of the NFB situates them within the margins of that particular institution. Once again, the *minoritaire-majoritaire* paradox raises its head: on the one hand, they find themselves in a minority situation, but on the other, they hold a considerable degree of authority – which they actively promote – within a specific majority.

The Quality of Amnesia

The fact that the dominant memory represents the *Québécois* to themselves as marginalized is important in its own right. Equally important is the fact that this representation in memory is dependent upon the notion that sovereignty is their natural end-point. These two characteristics of *québécois* identity operate in concert with one another, in a circular fashion, to effect the constant (re)production of meaning: we need sovereignty because we are a marginalized community; our lack of sovereignty is proof positive of our marginal status. Within this circle, memories of the past are invoked – the Conquest, Confederation, the patriation of the constitution, the Meech Lake Accord – to keep the wheel spinning, as it were.

Such a configuration of memory – infused throughout with a discourse of marginalization – appears to be a form of insurgent counter-memoration. Counter-memories are, as Simon says, "attempts to rub taken-for-granted history against the grain" (Simon 1994: 131); Québec nationalist memory would seem to qualify in this respect, for it rails against an established power and it demands autonomy. But in order to qualify as an instance of insurgency, it would have to have as its object the disruption of memory's spinning wheel, not its preservation; it would disturb established discourses of knowledge, rather than uphold them. Simply put, it would add to memory without subtracting; it would remember without forgetting. With *Le confort et l'indifférence* and *Le Mouton noir*, this is simply not the case. The marginal character of nationalist collective memory in Québec, once it has been insinuated into the discourse of knowledge and authority, loses its insurgent character. Where Homi Bhabha warned to resist totalization in memory (Bhabha 1990b: 311), these two films totalize resistance. In this context, what may once have been a true counter-commemoration now

becomes a commemorative practice in its own right. In other words, counter-commemorative practices become encrusted, to the point where they attempt not to make a critical intervention into memory, but to preserve their own configuration of memory.

The entrenchment of subversive commemoration requires that new and divergent events be continually interpreted in such a way as to ensure that memory's marginal character remains intact. In other words, it comes to enact an effort to forget, to deny competing memories and the meanings they inscribe. In so doing, they manage to preserve the link between past and future, at the expense of the present, for the present becomes nothing more than the reaffirmation of a memory in defense of a teleology. The effort to forget in Québec, as exemplified by both *Confort* and *Le Mouton Noir*, renders the imagined community static and immovable before new and unique situations, as well as familiar ones.

On the contemporary Canadian political scene, for example, events of national significance often serve as the rope in a tug-of-war between competing memories: both Canadian federalist and Québec nationalist communities rush to interpret any new event, to bring collective memory to bear down upon it and align it with memory's known lessons. From the Conquest, to Confederation, to the conscription riots, to the October crisis, the 1980 referendum, the repatriation of the Constitution, the Meech Lake Accord, and even an issue as obscure as riverboat gambling[34] – all are made to conform to memory. The present, in such

---

34 In a recent article in Montreal's *Hour* magazine titled "Solving the BQ Paradox" (April 10, 1997), Peter Scowen notes just how bizarre this situation has become. In the House of Commons, the Bloc Québécois took exception to the federal government's refusal to allow the provinces to license gambling on riverboats: the Bloc opposed the measure and offered it as further proof that federalism denies agency to the people of Québec. As Scowen points out, it is questionable whether or not a sovereign Québec would care to license riverboat gambling

circumstances, can never differ from the past. Because Québec nationalism imagines its own community as marginalized, and it insists upon finding marginalization at every new turn, individual, collective or constitutional rapprochement in Canada is rendered impossible: nationalist collective memory, with marginalization as its essence and sovereignty as its *telos*, effectively prohibits any mutual accommodation.

This conclusion is not meant to point a finger of blame at anyone for the nation's constitutional impasse. But it is meant to demonstrate the current lack of vitality inherent to nationalist collective memory in Québec. Note that this criticism is based not upon omissions, exclusions or falsehoods perpetrated by the effort to forget, but upon the way in which it hinders a community's ability to re-imagine and re-vitalize itself. Forgetting is always concomitant with remembering; without it, the imagined community would cease to exist. However, the imagined community itself is not at stake in this criticism; rather, what is at stake is Anderson's "style" in which the community is imagined. The effort to forget in Québec ensures that all new events take on the same meaning as old events. When this happens, the community loses its ability to discriminate between old and new, to recognize opportunities, to lament losses. According to Hobsbawm:

> You've got to recognize what is new in a situation and what is, therefore, unprecedented and to what extent old ways of handling it are inadequate or not ... these things require historical perspective and that is essentially the capacity to see how society changes and when things are different and when they are the same. (quoted in Simon 1994: 132)

Memory does not hinder the recognition of the old in the new; forgetting does, for it renders memory rigid and immovable, and thus robs the present of its

---

itself; but in the frantic race to inscribe meaning to each new event, such considerations are moot.

specificity. The effort to forget in Québec renders the present black and white; it denies the newness of the present. Normally, one would think that it is the haunting persistence of memory, the constant reliving of the past, which prevents people from living in the present. But with Québec nationalism, it is the unending effort to forget which hinders an entire community from seizing the day.

Understanding Forgetting

The above conclusions regarding memory and forgetting in Québec also make an important contribution to the study of collective memory on a broader scale – particularly for analyses of memory which deal primarily with minority identities and discourses. As Andreas Huyssen observes, "struggles for minority rights are increasingly organized around questions of cultural memory, its exclusions and taboo zones" (Huyssen 1995: 5). In such situations, the competing counter-memories of minority groups are often romanticized as important critical interventions in the national memory; the amnesias of dominant memory, on the other hand, are considered hegemonic tools of marginalization. The effort to remember, in this context, helps create new spaces for the inclusion of others. But if a minority community imagines itself as inherently or intrinsically marginalized, as is the case in Québec, then the shoe is on the other foot – for the marginalization, while it may originate from outside the community, is reaffirmed within it.

The key to this problem, it seems to me, lies in the recognition of the fact that each different imagined community has collective memories which are intrinsic to the community itself – or, to put it less positively, memory is blind to

all but the group it binds. Consequently, one must understand both memory and forgetting as acts which originate from within a particular community, in order to preserve the cohesiveness of that community. In Chapter 1, I insisted that forgetting served other, less dramatic functions than the mere erasure of difference. Indeed, the common threads between *Le Confort et l'indifférence* and *Le Mouton noir* suggest that it is forgetting which, at least in part, preserves the sense of difference rather than erases it. The effort to forget is also essential for securing a sense of continuity across time; without forgetting, memory would be akin to a chronicle, a miles-long list of events so diverse that no meaning could ever be drawn from them. Forgetting also provides a sense of origin, for as Renan makes clear, "there is no pure race and... to make politics surrender to an ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera" (Renan 1990: 14). The delineation of who is part of a particular imagined community and who is not is the first illusion of the imagined community, and it necessitates forgetting in order to bring itself into being. And even in minority communities disregarded by dominant memory, an effort to forget is in order to fulfill these functions; this is one of the key lessons learned from the examination of nationalist memory in Québec.

How, then, are we to make sense of minority discourses which lament the amnesias of dominant memory as the origins of exclusion, marginalization, and disenfranchisement? With respect to the issue of exclusion, such discourses are absolutely correct – forgetting establishes a fictitious sense of origin which helps any community differentiate itself from another. But with respect to the other issues, those which deal with how dominant memory effectively positions itself to interact with competing memories, the mere existence of the effort to forget cannot be held to blame. Rather, we must turn to Anderson's question of style, of how the effort to forget orients one community towards others. This, in turn,

necessitates some attempt at intersubjectivity, an attempt to situate oneself within a memory that is not one's own. When examining a particular collective memory from outside the community in which it originates, forgetting is easily understood as a tool of exclusion and marginalization. But if you examine a particular configuration of memory from within a community, then the tables are turned: forgetting is the faculty which preserves a sense of origin and continuity, while remembering has the potential to create a sense of rootlessness and to foster dissent. From within an imagined community, the effort to remember is a far more harrowing prospect the effort to forget. To push the envelope of memory, at the same time that it creates additional spaces, breaks down a previously cohesive structure. Dominant memory's effort to forget, then, must be evaluated according to its lack of rigidity, and its willingness and ability to reimagine, redefine and rearticulate itself in the face of the present.

Furthermore, marginalized groups themselves have their own memory and, by extension, their own amnesia; consequently, they are subject to the same criteria. Even a collective memory which imagines its community as marginalized finds its cohesiveness, and reaffirms its marginalization, through its own effort to forget. In a community which considers itself inherently marginalized, the perspectives from within and without collapse upon one another: the community finds its origins and its continuity through its marginalization and disenfranchisement. Put another way, its memory becomes characterized primarily by its own lack of agency over its own memory. In such a case, the effort to forget can become particularly rigid: memory becomes highly and overtly politicized. In the process, it draws particular attention to matters of difference, marginalization and oppression, and insists upon them not just as matters of the past, but as characteristics of identity itself. As John Tosh notes,

"the problem here is that a view of the past which serves to raise consciousness may be less helpful as a guide to action" (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 121).

In "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness," bell hooks argues for a "politicization of memory" which allows people to reclaim their pasts and make them their own. At the same time, she writes, "One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting" (hooks 1989: 19). Her optimism stands in stark contrast to Renan's insistence upon the necessity of forgetting; one wonders whether it is possible to have it both ways, as hooks suggests. Memory demands forgetting, for it entails the construction of a singular and unique collective self which differentiates itself from – and thus, to some degree, denies any fraternity with – the innumerable others which populate the rest of the planet. Marginal resistance, when it becomes integral to memory itself, goes beyond the struggle of memory against forgetting. It becomes instead a struggle to stand collective memory on its head, not merely to remember what the dominant other insists upon forgetting, but also to forget that other's remembrances.

A collective memory steeped in marginal resistance has, as part of its essence, a tradition of opposition and resistance towards another collective memory. Just as dominant memories attempt to obscure their political dimension, marginal memories can attempt to naturalize their polticization, to make their politicization an inherent part of collective memory. In this situation, the possibility for political or social change is reduced to one of two options: either the competing identities formulate and enact their vision of social change in isolation, in which case memories and origins remain intact; or a joint vision is formulated – but any such joint vision would inevitably rely upon a necessary watering-down of the effort to forget, a betrayal of the imagined community. In

simple terms, in order to create a more tolerant human community, you end up having to "sell out." hooks' politicization of memory does not necessarily result in a boundariless, radically open new world order. As *Le Confort et l'indifférence* and *Le Mouton noir* have demonstrated, the politicization of memory can also contribute to the establishment of rigid boundaries. Indeed, the politicization of memory does not necessarily supplement one memory with another. Instead, it often pits the amnesia of one community against the amnesia of another.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Films

Arcand, Denys (1981). *Le Confort et l'indifférence.* Montreal: National Film Board of Canada.

Brittain, Donald (1983). *The Champions Part 3: The Final Battle.* Montreal: National Film Board of Canada.

Falardeau, Pierre (1995). *Octobre.* Montreal: Bernadette Payeur, Marc Daigle, and the National Film Board of Canada.

Godbout, Jacques (1992). *Le Mouton noir.* Montreal: National Film Board of Canada.

Redford, Robert (1993). *Quiz Show.* Los Angeles: Hollywood Pictures.

Stone, Oliver (1991). *JFK.* Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Books and articles

Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Bauch, Hubert (1996). "One Year Later." *The Gazette* (Montreal, October 26, 1996): B1.

Bennett, Paul W. and Cornelius J. Jaenen (1986). *Emerging Identities: Selected Problems and Interpretations in Canadian History.* Toronto: Prentice-Hall.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1990a). "Introduction: Narrating the Nation." In *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1-7.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1990b). "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation." In *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 291 -322.

Blair, Carole, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. (1994). "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype." In *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*, ed. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland. New York: St. Martin's Press, 350-382.

Bothwell, Robert (1995). *Canada and Quebec: One Country, Two Histories*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Burnett, Ron (1985). "Developments in Cultural Identity Through Film: The Documentary Film, The National Film Board, and Québec Nationalism." *Australian - New Zealand Journal for Canadian Studies* 2, 1-19.

Charland, Maurice (1994). "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois." In *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and the Media*, ed. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, an Gary A. Copeland. New York: St. Martin's Press, 211-232.

Clandfield, David (1987). *Canadian Film*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Conlogue, Ray (1992), "Four hours of wool pulling?" *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, September 19 1992): C14.

Dickie, D. J., Helen Palk, and E. C. Woodley (1941). *My Country's Story*. Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons.

Dorland, Michael (1987). "Beyond Shame & Glory: Preface to a Critical Dialogue in Canadian/Québécois Cinema." In *Dialogue: Canadian and Québec Cinema*, ed. Pierre Véronneau, Michael Dorland, and Seth Feldman. Montréal: Médiatexte.

Evans, Gary (1991). *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ferretti, Andrée and Gaston Miron, ed. (1992). *Les Grands textes indépendantistes*. Montreal: L'Hexagone.

Finlay, J. L. and D. N. Sprague (1984). *The Structure of Canadian History*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall.

Gagnon, Lysiane (1981). "La vengeance et le mépris." *La Presse* (Montreal, April 19 1981): B3.

Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gouvernement du Québec (1995). *Projet de loi sur l'avenir du Québec*. Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec.

Halbwachs, Maurice (1990). *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart (1982). "The Rediscovery of Ideology: The Return of the Repressed in Media Studies." In *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. James Curran. London: Methuen, 56-89.

Hampl, Patricia (1996). "Memory's Movies." In *Beyond Document: Essays in Nonfiction Film* , ed. Charles Warren. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 51-77.

Hobsbawm, Eric (1993). "The Opiate Ethnicity." *Alphabet City* (March 1993): 8-11.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, ed. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. London: Cambridge University Press.

hooks, bell (1989). "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *Framework* 36: 15-23.

Huyssen, Andreas (1995). *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. London: Routledge.

Ignatieff, Michael (1997). "Articles of Faith." *Harper's* (March 1997): 15-18.

Jordan, Glenn and Chris Weedon, ed. (1995). *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Knapp, Steven (1989). "Collective Memory and the Actual Past." *Representations* 26 (1989): 123-149.

Larose, Jean (1994). *La Souveraineté rampante*. Montréal: Boréal.

Létourneau, Jocelyn (1989). "The Unthinkable History of Québec." *Oral History Review* 17/1 (Spring 1989): 89-115.

Lévesque, René (1986). *Memoirs*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Loiselle, André and Brian McIlroy, ed. (1995). *Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. (1993). "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning." In *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov. New York: Routledge, 90-107.

Mostern, Kenneth (1994). "Decolonization and Learning: Practice and Pedagogy in Frantz Fanon's Revolutionary Narrative." In *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren. New York: Routledge, 253-272.

Nerone, John (1989). "Professional History and Social Memory." *Communication* 11 (1989): 89-104.

Nichols, Bill (1988). "The Voice of Documentary." In *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 48-63.

Nichols, Bill (1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1976). *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin.

Nora, Pierre (1989). "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25.

Popular Memory Group (1982). "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method." In *Making Histories: Studies in History – Writing and Politics*. Richmond, Australia: Hutchinson & Co.

Renan, Ernest (1990). "What is a Nation?" In Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 8-22.

Renov, Michael (1993). "The Truth About Non-Fiction." In *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov. New York: Routledge, 1-11.

Rosaldo, Renato (1989). *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rosen, Philip (1993). "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts." In *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov. New York: Routledge, 58-90.

Rosenthal, Alan (1988). "Introduction to Part One." In *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 11-20.

Schudson, Michael (1989). "The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present." *Communication* 11 (1989): 105-113.

Scowen, Peter (1997). "Solving the BQ Paradox." *Hour* (Montreal, April 10 1997): 6.

Simon, Roger I. (1994). "Forms of Insurgency in the Production of Popular Memories: The Columbus Quincentenary and the Pedagogy of Counter-Commemoration." In *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren. New York: Routledge, 127-143.

Smith, Donald (1995). *Jacques Godbout du roman au cinéma: voyage dans l'imaginaire québécois*. Montreal: Québec/Amérique.

Taylor, Charles (1993). *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Trend, David W. (1994). "Nationalities, Pedagogies, and Media." In *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren. New York: Routledge, 225-241.

Visser, Margaret (1994). "It's snowing what to say." *Saturday Night* (February 1994): 30.

Webber, Jeremy (1994). *Reimagining Canada: Language, Culture, Community, and the Canadian Constitution*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

White, Hayden (1984). "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory." *History and Theory* 23/1 (1984): 1-33.

White, Hayden (1987). *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wilden, Tony (1980). *The Imaginary Canadian: An Examination for Discovery*. Vancouver: The Pulp Press.

Wood, Nancy (1994). "Memory's Remains: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *History and Memory* 6/1 (spring/summer 1994): 123-149.

Zelizer, Barbie (1992). *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.