A Melodramatic Imagined Nation:

The Unruly Subject of Canadian Cinemas

by

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ABSTRACT

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Canadian cinema comprises a corpus of work that is not easily unified by a recognizable national style or a singular mode of production. The unruliness in the identity of Canadian cinema, including the imprecise distinction between popular and art cinema, has contributed to the ongoing difficulty of attaching critical definitions to it. This dissertation argues that the films made between 1972 and 1992, during the burgeoning discourse on Canada as a multicultural nation, represent narratives of difference. In the cinema of this period, anxieties around sexuality, immigrant identity and cultural imperialism are highlighted. A selection of films emblematic of the conflict between multiculturalism and popular culture in Canada have been selected for analysis in this thesis. The critical tensions in these films are examined by using melodrama as an analytic method. As a mode of expression in film, literature, stage productions and television, melodrama is a discourse of cultural conflict and contradiction. It also straddles the distinction between popular and art cinema. As a film and cultural theory, and as a critical method of analysis, therefore, melodrama illuminates Canadian cinema and exposes it as an exemplary site for constructing national subjectivity. Melodrama functions as an intervention into the various models of Canadian subjectivity that have been produced in film spectatorship and theorized in film criticism.

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Introduction

this is the true eventual story of billy the kid. it is not the story as he told it for he did not tell it to me. he told it to others who wrote it down, but not correctly. there is no true eventual story but this one. had he told it to me i would have written a different one. i could not write the true one had he told it to me.

excerpt "The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid"
B.P. Nichol (1977, 165)

This dissertation is an historical, critical and theoretical exploration of Canadian cinema in a period I am retroactively calling the 'post-golden years': 1972-1992. This is a time immediately following the first wave of cinéma direct/direct cinema films. It coincides with a surge in the nationalist discourses of bilingualism and multiculturalism; The Official Languages Act (1969) made French and English equal under the law, and although The Multiculturalism Act didn't come into being until 1988, according to Robert F. Harney, "since 1973 there has been a multiculturalism directorate within the Dept. of the Secretary of State with an operating budget for grants to assist scholars, the arts and community organizations"(as quoted, Langer 220).

This is the true eventual story of Canadian cinema insofar as the historical elements of bilingualism and multiculturalism provide an appropriate context for the aesthetic aspect of the films I have chosen to highlight: the melodramatic. Melodrama as aesthetic mode and analytical method will be explained in more detail in the following chapter. For now, suffice it to say that deploying melodrama as a critical approach to a historically specific national culture is not new. Several theorists of

melodrama have already done so with literary texts.[1] And, while much has been written about the significance of melodrama to Hollywood films and American network television, no in-depth cinematic study has been undertaken that takes this approach beyond the U.S. border.[2] Melodrama is a category that is a highly malleable, yet it allows one to say specific things about film texts. I argue that the complexity of issues of nationalism are made legible only when filtered through melodrama.

My use of the term melodrama does not exclude realism, nor for that matter, the fantastic, the comedic or the ironic. In the recent past, much has been made of the "realist imperative" as a mode of analysis that has hijacked Canadian film studies and deeply affected the Canadian cinema canon.[3] For the purposes of my dissertation, I am interested in neither the canon nor the vilification of a film style. It is, however, important to acknowledge that all methods of analysis are susceptible to ideological and cultural conditions and that there are always limitations implicit or explicit in choosing one approach over another. This much is inevitable.

While melodrama always has been adaptive to changing historical and cultural moments, in its most recent or postmodern incarnation it has become particularly difficult to classify as a genre. Indeed, one might argue, as

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[1] The most famous of these is Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess.* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1976). See Bibliography for further examples.

[2] See, Brenda Longfellow, "The Melodramatic Imagination in Quebec and Canadian Women's Feature Films." *CineAction!* (28) 1992, pp. 48-56, and André Loiselle, "Despair as Empowerment: Melodrama and Counter-Cinema in Anne-Claire Poirier's *Mourir a tue-tête*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (8:2) 1999, pp. 21-43. I refer to both these analyses in Chapter Three.

[3] See, for example, Peter Morris' article, "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3:1 (1994), pp. 27-44. Also, see Thomas Waugh's challenge to the act of canonization vis à vis queer national cinema in "Cinemas, Nations, Masculinities: the Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture (1998)." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (8:1) Spring 1999, pp. 8-44.

I at times do, that melodrama operates variously within different aesthetic and cultural circumstances. It is sometimes a genre and at other times a tonal element capable of inflecting another genre or functioning critically as displaced generic quotation. It is fitting, therefore, that melodrama does go a long way in attending to the overall unruly and rather messy nature of contemporary aesthetic experience. For example, one way the films in this dissertation might be categorized is by the fact that they lie somewhere in between popular and art cinema. Both categories are receptive to a melodramatic treatment. Some of the films I deal with bear a fleeting relationship to genre cinema and might even be considered popular by Canadian standards, depending on how you measure popularity. In the case of the films discussed here, none were blockbusters, but they have all enjoyed some level of popular and critical recognition.[4] Neither do the films fit neatly within the "art cinema" tradition; their narratives follow a roughly causal logic, but they are full of unconventional and experimental elements as well.

It is in these ways that the films analysed in this dissertation are perhaps both ordinary and exemplary of Canadian cinema; whether identified as popular or art cinema, many films made in Canada do not fit into a straightforward corpus of work unified by a recognizable style or a singular mode of production, and this contributes to "problems" of definition. These so-called problems have prompted me to look outside Canadian cultural paradigms as well as outside of film studies per se. It is probably not surprising that the globalization of culture should invite us to look elsewhere in order to unravel some of the discourses of a national cinema. Yet, given the already tentative nature of what could be called a Canadian national

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[4] For example, *Forbidden Love* (Fernie/Weissman, 1992) was from 1992- 1997 the most requested film for rental/screening at the NFB (NFB database).

cinema, I was reluctant to pursue this path. As There is an ongoing tension between the global and the national — as well as the national and the local — which every country in the world can describe differently. Because melodrama is concerned with extreme oscillations in levels of comfort and discomfort, proximity and distance, home and away, it finally became a valuable tool for dealing with the complexities of Canadian cinema. It is the intention of this dissertation to explore nine individual examples from Canadian cinema that speak to a moment in which its unruly character, though difficult to categorize, does suggest a certain aesthetic and cultural continuity. And while this argument might be tentative at best, within the analysis of this small grouping is also the suggestion that such an approach might extend beyond those films I discuss here.

Defining Canadian Cinema

Attempting to define Canadian cinema has frequently overshadowed other discussions in the course of its relatively brief history, a situation exacerbated by the fact that critics have tended to mark its "true beginning" with government-assisted film production in the late 1960s and not with any other moment in the history of Canadian film production, subsidized or otherwise.[5] The promise held out by the policy that put into place the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) was based on the logic that with a little bit of help, a Canadian film industry might become a reality. Defining Canadian cinema was thus a project that occurred as it was coming into being; a prescription for what it could and should be, as well as an

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[5] Two other inaugural moments to 'cinema in Canada' include the first film screening in Montreal in 1896 or the Act of Parliament that set into motion the establishment of a National Film Board of Canada (The Film Act) in 1939. Thus, depending on how one defines these "moments" determines the answer to the 'origin' of Canadian cinema.

ongoing struggle to grapple with what was actually there.[6] The Canadian film industry was being encouraged in very particular ways by the government, popular critics and academics. These often competing notions of what constitutes a national cinema meant that at the same time several styles of filmmaking could be promoted as ideally Canadian. For example, the model provided by the award-winning films of the NFB could be favoured as examples of "prestige" Canadian cinema as easily as other contemporary cinematic ideals, notably those from the European new wave and auteur cinema. American style genre films under the Capital Cost Allowance Program also received their share of promotion. This situation helped to develop a confused critical discourse in which, perhaps in order to instill some sense of consensus or continuity, Canadian cinema became associated with "duty." Although tutored on the spectacular Hollywood product, Canadian audiences were implicitly invited to prefer the sobriety of Canadian cinema. This was an invitation that most Canadians declined. Yet as much of the film criticism proves, this sentiment persisted and is arguably still alive and well; going to see Canadian movies has permeated what many "good citizens" still consider their civic duty.

As Jim Leach (1984, 1998) has argued, film scholars have sometimes identified Canadian cinema as either two cinemas, the Canadian and the Québécois, or as a realist cinema. The realist argument has often suggested that, notwithstanding linguistic divisions, both cinemas are indebted to the parallel traditions of cinéma direct/direct cinema nurtured at the ONF/NFB. The criticism has often meant that realist-driven analyses have been linked to

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[6]See, for example, "The Cinema We Need," R. Bruce Elder, in Douglas Fetherling, ed. *Documents in Canadian Film* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1988), pp. 260-271, and Sandra Gathercole, "The Best Damn Film Policy This Country Never Had," in Seth Feldman, ed. *Take Two* (Toronto: Irwin, 1984), pp. 36-46.

the Griersonian tradition of liberal humanist politics and realist/documentary aesthetics, which were first described in the National Film Board's mandate "to interpret Canada to Canadians." Such analysis comprises unique terms for defining the Canadianness of a film, independent of its genre or mode of production. Leach has identified this phenomenon as Grierson's ability to "use documentary techniques to project an 'image' grounded in details selected from everyday reality" (1984 101). Christine Ramsay (1993), in addition, describes this tradition as "the typical aesthetic markers of a film's 'Canadianness' (i.e., stark, if not 'depressing' social realism; documentary flavour; eccentric and off-beat characterizations; contemplative treatment of the landscape)..." (34). Leach and Ramsay are responding to past attempts to codify Canadian cinema that have *not* accounted for the variety of conditions within which the films are produced or received. These conditions go well beyond the limited though important production history in which realism and documentary practices were often connected.

Blurry boundaries of genre, however, can be traced throughout the history of cinema in Canada, since the modes of documentary and fiction film production have also developed in concert. Perhaps, as Grierson's liberal humanist ideal of consensus has pervaded discussions of filmmaking, it has become implicitly linked, over time, to ideas of the good citizen. Being a good Canadian, therefore, has sometimes not only meant searching out Canadian films, but liking them, and agreeing on what they are about.[7] Such

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[7] Peter Harcourt, "Introduction," in Seth Feldman, and Joyce Nelson, eds. *Canadian Film Reader*. (Toronto/ Montréal: Peter Martin Associates/Take One, 1977), pp. 370-376. Harcourt presents this as "if we could be persuaded to watch our own television programmes..." and "if we were allowed to see more of our own movies" (374). This sounds like a corrective that links being a loyal subject with going to the movies. See also, Harcourt's "The Years of Hope." *Ibid.* "If we care about our own country, it is no longer a matter of whether we like Canadian films or don't like them. It is a question of whether we are for or against them. As far as I am concerned, I am for them" (143).

"consensual imperative" can stunt critical and cultural debates. The result, according to Peter Morris (1994), is that these ideas have become an integral part of the formation of the film canon and its normative evaluation of Canadian cinema.

Tom Waugh (1999) argues for a similar rethinking of the Canadian cinema through male sexuality. Waugh claims sexuality has contributed greatly to the canon whether acknowledged or not. He does not argue so much for a corrective that would include those previously dismissed elements of sexuality in the form of an alternate queer canon, however, although he does provide a tentative list of possible films. Rather, Waugh places queerness alongside other marginalized discourses as a means to redress their centrality to the formation of national identity as it has been depicted on screen, and thus to expand its theorization. His focus on sexuality allows him to investigate a diverse range of films as examples of "the complex circulation of desire and denial, attraction and repulsion, through which sexuality finds its social expression" (19).

Although Waugh does not discuss style, per se,[8] nor Morris sexuality, once these discourses are exposed, it is evident that melodrama can be a powerful critical tool for unravelling the "discursive friction" between competing notions of Canada, including its bilingualism and multiculturalism, as well as the postmodern aesthetics of globalization. At the centre of this debate, however, is another conflict between perception and cultural assumption. Defining Canadian cinema as realist (and pace Waugh, straight) also associates it closely with middle-class forms of entertainment

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[8] Waugh (1999) identifies certain narrative tendencies that can be analysed for their potential in addressing the complexity of male sexuality. His narrative/thematic taxonomy includes: homosocial bonding narratives; narratives of the traffic in women/exchange of women; iconographies of the male body; spatial iconographies; violence narratives; stories of male-male socialization; discourses of the Anglo discovery of ethnic and other alterities. (38-9)

and the serious subjects of high culture. Distinct from lowbrow entertainment or "popular culture," Canadian cinema gains legitimacy. But legitimacy is highly overrated, as both Waugh's assessment of the "queer canon" and Morris's challenge to realism make clear. If you forgo legitimacy, and its reassuring illusion of order and what's "natural," or the imperative of being middle class, white and heterosexual, it is easier to identify the marginalised discourses embedded in Canadian films. Under these conditions, however, the viability of a coherent and stable subject position becomes doubtful. Melodrama provides us with a means for reading the competing signs of representing the nation.

Television critic David Thorburn (2000) argues that melodrama is not just a genre, but an aesthetic mode which functions in the present day and also serves to define it. So why has melodrama been ignored as a critical approach for answering questions about Canadian cinema? Perhaps, melodrama stands in opposition to documentary-based realism that, as a discourse of sobriety, emphasizes scientific knowledge attained through observation. In the melodrama, by contrast, we often *suspect* rather than *know* something. In the melodramatic convention, ideas are often expressed indirectly, sometimes through vocal inflection. Tensions are suggested by meaningful glances and underscored by music. Significance is attached to the formal properties of the mise-en-scène including the body and its costuming. And the close-up offers the spectator a privileged view of a character's state of mind. Through these techniques, melodrama articulates and questions discourses about socio-political repression and the absence of social agency, or cultural, national, and gender identity. Melodrama helps reveal the structure of normative national identity and permits analysis of both dominant and subordinate cultures. Because these films query the nation, they foreground

the impossibility of identity formations, highlighting them as performances of conflict. This is exemplary of the melodramatic mode, as well as what Homi Bhabha (1990) calls "the complex strategies of cultural identification" (292).

Brenda Longfellow (1996) claims that globalization, which poses a threat to cultural sovereignty through new information and communication technologies, is another complicating fact of Canadian cultural identity and identification. She suggests that rethinking the conditions under which Canadian cinema can be analysed as non-unitary and heterogeneous is an activity directly affected by the entry of "theoretical paradigms and cultural socio-economic developments" (3) which are not contained by national borders. As Longfellow observes, globalization is "transforming the relationship between the concrete territorial space of the nation and the boundarilessness of global image systems" (4). Changes in discursive regimes and national boundaries redefine what Stuart Hall (1988) refers to as "identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process" (68). These issues surface in Canadian cinemas in a perhaps convoluted, allegorical and metaphorical manner, suggesting that the roles played onscreen have a great deal to do with those subjectivities performed offscreen. To the extent that registering the means of cultural persuasion implies blurring the distinction between outside and inside, to be "in between" cultures (Bhabha 1998) permits these films to redraw borders and boundaries around the nation, as well as the "aesthetic" social categories they ostensibly fit into, refining and redefining it as they go. What Longfellow makes clear in her argument about globalization, is that for Canada, it is hardly new "given the long history of American domination of our theatres and television screens and the even longer history of colonial ownership and control of our major economic

resources" yet issues of national identity persist (4). In considering the different issues of culture and identity referred to by all of the aforementioned critics, we might follow their implicit suggestion that it is more fruitful to rethink how films respond to discursive tensions, as well as the realities of globalization, diverse film styles and subject positions. Important to this task is devising a mode of analysis that can help us to pose these "vexed questions" of identity in the fraught context of Canadian cinema. I argue that melodrama allows us to see Canadianness in all its complexity.

Theoretical tropes and interventions

When you apply a theory to texts it implies that you're putting some sort of grid over them, and this may be quite reductive and limiting. I prefer to think in terms of an interference of two systems, where you start from two different places, one in the...text, the other in theoretical considerations, and try to see what their merger looks like, and what happens when they start to contaminate one another, as you create a sort of effect of superimposition of one on the other (and vice versa)....

Peter Brooks (1994a)

Rather than imposing a grid, the two systems of interference that I am placing side by side, are in the broadest discursive sense melodrama and textual analysis. I am by historical context and theoretical design an unruly spectator-critic immersed in postmodernist subjectivities and cultures. I am unwittingly and sometimes unwillingly positioned as a Canadian cultural subject who has been trained to take smug pleasure in some of the "gaps and fissures" of dominant discourses, particularly when I know what is expected of me, yet also paradoxically to rail against this expectation or resent the imposition of cultures from "elsewhere" (Dorland, 1988). That is, to be an ironic poseur; to recognize and to value the tradition of Canadian culture as opaque, positioned vaguely David-like against the Goliath to the south.

Searching for often inaccessible histories, I have passing glimpses of what Michael Dorland (1988) calls "a thoroughly hidden country." In a certain sense, I am merely trying to cast some light on the discourses of nationalism that have contributed to my own reading of the films while I attempt to situate myself as a critic. As I have already suggested, notwithstanding these subjective and theoretical digressions, there are a number of "moments" in these films that do not seem to me to fit into a clear notion of a national cinema (much less one based in a realist tradition or a cinema of duty), but which are nonetheless about Canadian/nationalist subjectivity. In another sense, however, I am willfully isolating the melodrama of these films as a way of analysing their inconsistencies and incoherency as national texts. I am on steadier theoretical ground for *this* academic project, but I think it would be a mistake to ignore the imposition of one "grid" even as I highlight another. Melodrama is, after all, about affect; it unveils personality and undoes social constraints while it unravels the subject.

In keeping with the critical position I develop in this chapter concerning the academic discourse on Canadian cinema, canon-formation, and the interdisciplinary nature of film studies, I am entering into what Barbara Klinger (1994) calls a "willfully 're-motivated' reading" (31) of Canadian cinema. Melodrama, as a critical tool, allows me the most theoretical latitude while enforcing some fidelity to the film text itself. Klinger's study focusses on the centrality of Douglas Sirk to the ongoing interest in melodrama. She attempts to account for his (re)canonization within the "intertextual network of publication and pedagogy" whereby Sirk is "a figure who continues to prove the worth and significance of the genre" (32). This thesis does not represent my attempt to reify certain films as the metatexts of a new Canadian canon, but if anything, to queer our relationship

to the act of canonization, to dredge up or re-salvage the melodramatic elements of the nation as they relate to its film culture, to rethink both the civility and the excess of its becoming "Canadian cinema," as well as to suggest the usefulness of melodrama as a culturally specific critical methodology. Canadian cinema history is an invention that responds to new theoretical frames as they enter into film studies discourse, yet as the boundaries between academic disciplinary formations become more porous, they make possible new kinds of film-culture analyses, new viewing positions. These interventions also make visible the politics of interpretation and open up new subject positionings.

The explicit aim of this dissertation is to intervene into Canadian film studies; that is, the relationship between Canadian culture and film specifically, as well as implicitly to rethink what filmmaking and film studies in Canada has been and what it might become in the manner provoked by Morris and Waugh. I am not interested in settling the ideological status of these films as progressive or retrograde; their interest lies in the fact that (for me, at least) their meanings cannot be fixed, they do not submit to the disciplinary gaze of film theory or official Canadian culture. I am beginning with relatively simple questions: How are these films to be understood? As Canadian popular culture? How do they come into understanding in this theoretical time and cultural place? By what cultural and theoretical processes do I attach meaning to these films and consider them to be part of a larger cultural discourse, and by engaging in this activity of making meaning, how do I consider myself to be part of a larger cultural community? What is it that I am and that these films are 'subjected to' in order that "we" are made meaningful? And, when we approach films in *this* way and not *that* way,

what do we gain or lose? What ideological work do we do by design or default?

In the last twenty-five years or so film theories have been largely influenced by post-structuralism and postmodernism. New approaches to the study of film have been generated within the sometimes overlapping theoretical realms of Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. These theoretical formations have been diversely deployed by, for example, auteur critics, narrative analysts, feminist theorists, students of national cinemas. In the case of this thesis, I am linking my analyses to several of these theoretical discourses from within and outside film studies in order to come up with an approach to Canadian cinema that usefully links the shifting aesthetics of realism and melodrama to a politics of framing the nation. These are the conditions under which this thesis is written: to foreground the theoretical and actual (practical?) ambivalent positions of the subjects of Canadian cinemas, which, as it turns out in my treatment of the films I have selected, is highly melodramatic. The idea of the ambivalent subject can be fruitfully put to use in replaying or re-viewing a national cinema; to "traumatize" the subject through chronic attempts to recast and redefine national culture is to try to make sense of the problems of subjectivity, a subject that refuses to die. As Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued, this notion of the traumatic has a specifically postmodernist and postnationalist dimension: the problem of the relationship between subjectivity and history. It presents the threat of the end of history while reposing and re-turning (repositioning?) the terms of the individual nation's past, which does not exist except in myth. Bhabha sees this as a spatial as well as a temporal disjuncture of the subject at the site of the nation:

It is within this cleavage, or division, of national identification, articulated in the staggered, interstitial temporalities that exist between the disjunct moment of the present and the fictitious space of the future, that we must try to understand our contemporary reality, recalled in the echoes of the past. (202)

Subjects pass through a social and cultural space, constructing and defining that space by the action that occurs within it over time. These socio-cultural spaces are entered, or occupied like texts in order, as Toby Miller (1993) has suggested, for the subject to "self-complete." Fredric Jameson (1983) claims that to do otherwise reveals the lack of an agreed-upon language, which in turn, produces schizophrenic subjects. He defines schizophrenia in its culturally diagnostic terms as the breakdown of the relationship between the signifier and signified which creates a syntactical problem: the inability to maintain the proper order of things. Those things that occur over time result in a failure of signifiers to link coherently, to create a causal narrative into which the subject can be inserted. This is a major identifying feature and paradox of late capitalist consumer culture; identity depends on a sense of the self over time, however, in postmodernity the barrage of "languages" forces the subject to be continuously reconstituted. Thus the terms of subjectivity must shift; the coherency of the subject is either eliminated altogether or the subject is somehow reformulated to accommodate its immersion in the ever-present. In addition, the social is fragmented as a result of lacking an a priori language of consent.[9] Following Jameson, one might argue that Canadian film history has become a problem of style; the nation has depended on a

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[9] In fact, I would argue that "consensus" and social identity are attained merely through a shift in classic humanist ideologies. Increasingly, individual identity—especially in postmodernity—is built on a paradox and produced through consuming goods that mark one as unique at the same time as belonging to a recognizable group. A recent example of this paradox (similarity and difference) is the series of GAP ads (1999) in which beautiful young men and women represent a multicultural diversity with the tag line "Everybody in Khakis."

language and "order" that have contained its history into a consumable if predictable classic realist fiction. However, the ongoing historical event of identity politics both within and outside this nation have shattered the illusion that everyone can and should agree upon how the story of the nation is told. We must then ask ourselves: to which cultural objects, representations and events do values accrue? Melodrama as an aesthetic mode relies on affect to immerse us in a fixed spatio-temporal experience akin to the schizophrenic Jameson discusses, but in doing so often we must deal with the disjuncture. The present isn't merely "the present" nor is the past "history." Rather than flattening and equalizing experience in an undifferentiated present, the present has presence; it is "tense." Bhabha (1998) describes this in terms of the function of multiculturalism; the "'floating signifier' whose enigma lies less in itself than in the discursive uses of it to mark social processes where differentiation and condensation seem to happen almost synchronically" (31). As spectators and social subjects, melodrama invites us to redeem our cultural myths by attending to ideological conflicts over the meaning of things.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One attempts to set the stage for my close analysis of the films in Chapters Two to Five. Chapter One addresses melodrama as a critical method for textual analysis. I argue that the melodramatic mode is an ideal manner by which to discuss discursive struggles involving the articulation and disavowal of subject positions. This chapter also provides a methodological/theoretical framework for analysing the films in subsequent chapters. In it I refer to the 1979 official national anthem film, *O Canada*, and

the Charles Bronfman Foundation *Canadian Heritage Minutes* to introduce the pervasiveness of melodrama to the act of going to the movies in Canada.

In Chapters Two to Five, and briefly in the Conclusion, I will be doing close readings of nine films, connecting the socio-political context of multiculturalism, American genre cinema, feminist, immigrant, aboriginal and queer filmmaking to the aesthetics of postmodern melodrama. In Chapter Two I discuss the relationship between masculinity and nationhood in *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero*. I argue that the overdetermined and anxious replaying of male genres of the caper and Western films, respectively, represents a refusal to repress or ignore the ghosts of American cultural imperialism and is a willful attempt to articulate the means by which the "minority/marginal discourse" of "Canada" is constructed. My reading of these films suggest that masculinity, like the nation, is bound to relations of power; it is always conditional or relational. These films spell out the regional, class, and ethnically situated construction of masculinity against which the "ideal" of masculinity is posed. According to Christine Ramsay (1993), "[l]ike nation, masculinity is about the drawing up of borders and the myth of complete independence from others, while asserting complete rights, sovereignty and freedom for itself in dominating and mastering others" (46). In both films, masculinity and nationhood are indeed inseparable, suggesting that Canadians regularly imagine them in terms of American heroes, icons of generic masculinity: the gangster, the surfer, the cowboy, the outlaw. And, if the ideals of masculinity outlined by Ramsay above are to be attained with great difficulty vis à vis the myths of the United States, transposing them onto the Canadian context of the prairies and the nickel belt, hockey and skateboarding, suggests that achieving the ideal is impossible. Striving to do so usually results in death.

In Chapter Three, I explore the homoerotic subtext/lesbian text of *La Vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* which is only hinted at in my treatment of masculinity in Chapter Three. Lesbianism in both films becomes the signifier by which dissatisfaction with the discourse linking male and national subjectivity is articulated. Language and representation are the central issues of the films. By what means can the inter/intra national female subject be represented? The films grapple with this question in the context of bilingualism, biculturalism, migration and feminine identity in Québec. The conflicts arise primarily between gender and national subjectivity. The claim that the subject imagined is always/already male is interrogated by both films, linking a new language and subject position that are mobilised by "difference." The films deal with a discursive by-product of multiculturalism, or what Martin Allor (1993) calls "identity in difference" (70). Following Sherry Simon, et al. (1991), Allor claims that identity in difference is a structuring discourse rather than a narration of the nation. In my analysis, multiculturalism-biculturalism form part of a complex structuring discourse that attempts to manage difference: the sexual difference of the female subject.

Chapter Four deals with the Canadian family melodrama of *Next of Kin* and *Léolo*. My reading of these films emphasises the fact that the mobility of the Canadian subject as a multicultural/bicultural subject is delimited by class, region, and language. These are subjects on the brink. Both films depict adolescents driven by their own fantasies of origin. These "family romance" fantasies, which are linked to nationalism and sexuality, are imagined in melodramatic terms.

In Chapter Five nationhood and sexuality are placed together and rent apart. This chapter reflects my attempt to deal with the possibility of the queer nation or the queer post-nation by reconfiguring the terms of national

subjectivity by analysing unruly, desiring, diasporic subjects. Rather than simply initiating melodramatic moments, in *Forbidden Love* and *Perfectly Normal*, melodrama comes out of the closet. The exaggeration of the melodramatic is responsible for constructing a hybrid style of representation that links the films in some interesting ways to those of Chapter Two and Three (*Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero*, and *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*) as well as for creating a playfully critical discourse on aesthetic and personal boundaries.

In the Conclusion I revisit some of the central questions of national cinema and melodrama's usefulness as a critical method. In order to test the limits of this theory, I briefly analyse *Atanarjuat: the Fast Runner*.

My reading of these films overall makes the argument that the style in which the nation imagines itself is multiple yet implicitly melodramatic; it is both inside and outside the boundaries of genre, nationality, sexuality, ethnicity. Thus there is no true eventual story of Canadian cinema any more than there is a metanarrative that accounts for all stories. To impose one would imply that there is a clear cut, self-contained culture to which "we" have ready access, "uncontaminated" by the all myths of nationhood.

Chapter One

A Melodramatic Imagined Nation:
Towards a New Critical Methodology for Canadian Cinema

In 1978, Stephen Heath, speaking at the first Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture for the Film Studies Association of Canada, argued that the pastime of going to the cinema is a complex social and political act (1991). The demonstrative value of this act is heightened when nation and cinema intersect. Heath's argument, at its heart, gives us new terms and a new direction for understanding "national cinema." The institution of cinema, he argues, contributes to a ciné-reality, which subsumes the perceived reality for the spectator and turns him or her into a screen subject; the "cinema eye" having displaced the eye of the viewer in the process of subjectification. Heath's spectator, then, is a ciné-subject who negotiates between the implied coherency of "the nation" and the subject positions offered by the films. As an apparatus of the state, nationalism is part of the cultural technology through which subject and nation are related. Nationalist discourse and the definition of subjectivity are "conditions of existence," or ideologically and technologically articulated apparatuses that offer what Heath claims are sites of discursive contradiction and struggle (180).

Jill Delaney (1992) calls such cultural sites ritual spaces. Delaney argues that Canadian subjectivity is practiced at official sites of Canadian culture. In discussing the processes by which visitors consume the Canadian Museum of Civilization History Hall, Delaney argues that they acquire an authorized version of Canadian subjecthood by tracing a highly selective history as they "wander" through the narrativized space of the museum. As with any rite of passage, cultural sites often include ritual events. In Canadian movie

theatres, a now defunct ritual event was the screening of the NFB-produced, one minute national anthem film, *O Canada* (1979, 1980) which were played once per day at movie theatres, usually before the early evening's feature presentation.[10] This helped to suggest a relationship between going to the movies and being Canadian, a ritual that is repeated with some differences at hockey games and other sports and cultural events.[11] Rather than simply playing the aural version of the national anthem over the broadcast system, which has also been a feature of going to the movies in Canada, the Canadian anthem film enhanced the association between movie-going and Canadianness by providing an indexical link to life outside the movie theatre. In many ways, this film could more aptly be described as a music video. Replete with saturated colours, swooping camera movements and breathtaking landscapes — including the Rocky Mountains, a wheat field being harvested, and in the 1979 version a close-up on a smiling, tow-haired girl hugging a baby — the visually sumptuous anthem film purports to highlight the "best" of Canada. (The 1979 and 1980 films include a moment from the 1976 Olympics).[12] It thus contributed to the diorama of Canadian nationalist desire which exists at other ritual events/sites. The images in the

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[10] There have been several versions of these anthem films released by the NFB. They seem to have produced one every few years, starting in 1952 and the most recent one I have seen is from 1997. The versions I am referring are the 1979 and 1980 versions. Both were directed and edited by Ted Remerowski, produced by Dorothy Courtois, and executive produced by Adam Symansky of the Canadian Unity Information Office, with music from the 1976 Olympics version of "O Canada." (*The NFB Film Guide: The Productions of the National Film Board of Canada from 1939 to 1989*. Donald W. Bidd, Editor in Chief. (Montréal: Published by the National Film Board of Canada, et al., 1991 (English vol.)).

[11] In these venues, a recorded aural version of "O Canada" is played, sometimes with a digitized version of the Canadian flag on the Jumbotron™ or a close up of the clock at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. During special sports events, such as playoff games or international competitions, a live performer will sing the national anthem.

[12] Track and field star Gregory Joy is depicted successfully completing a 7-3 3/4 high jump. Joy won a silver medal for his efforts, Canada's only medal in track and field at the 1976 Olympics in Montréal.

anthem were obviously selected from among many possible alternatives, but I find it ironic that this film is so contrary to the style of most other Canadian films. Intentionally or (more likely) not, these images supplement and compensate for the rather "disappointing" realism of Canadian cinema and the equally disappointing "reality" that Canadian audiences were/are not enamoured of Canadian films.

In the last several years, the anthem film has disappeared from Canadian movie screens and this act of ritualized nationalism is now perhaps best exemplified by the Charles Bronfman Foundation (CRB) produced *Canadian Heritage Minutes (CHM)*. These short films, which are often confused as Multiculturalism and Heritage Canada productions, sporadically precede the feature presentation in Cineplex-Odeon movie theatres and have frequently aired on television since their inception in 1991.[13] Their function, in part, is to remind Canadian audiences, as the anthem film has done in the past, of their ideal subject positioning *as* Canadians.[14] These *Heritage Minutes* share in common the depiction of a moment from Canada's past in which someone acted heroically in the unselfish service of others, retroactively reminding us of the righteousness of our Canadian historical subjecthood through the viewing position we occupy in the present day. When screened in movie theatres, however, these short films have the "misfortune" of being placed in a chronology amidst ads for cars, soft drinks, and coming attractions, and are likewise distinguished from the feature presentation.[15] This perhaps contributes to my reading them as classic

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[13] See, for example, Nicole Nolan, "Memo to Sheila Copps: Forget Those Flags," *This Magazine* (30:3), Nov./Dec. 1996, pp. 22-25.

[14] For examples of *Canadian Heritage Minutes*, see www.histori.ca. These short films have been screened in movie theatres and on television since 1991. As of February 2002, over 60 of them have been produced. Several parodies, by the troupes of *Air Farce* and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, have been made in response to these CRB shorts.

[15] They also appear on CBC television from time to time during the commercial breaks.

advertisements and, not unlike the anthem film, they negotiate a treacherous path between information and persuasion, documentary and melodrama that underscores their status as awkward, nationalistic examples of cultural consumerism.[16] It may be also what makes them susceptible to criticism as the seams in their liberal ideological selectiveness becomes legible as a discourse of disavowal. In choosing *this* historical moment and not *that* one, the films contribute to recreating a version of Canadianness that "appeals" to white, middle to upper class English or French-Canadian viewers, in large part because this is the point of view from which the stories emanate and these are the only people we see in close-up in any of the films. These social actors are usually well-placed socially or ideologically within the liberal discourse of the films as virtuous subjects willing to right wrongs and sacrifice self for the greater good. When ethnic, racial or social others are depicted, they are often in medium or medium long shot; which is usually sufficient to identify them as others without distinct identities and serving no real purpose other than to provide a catalyst for our heroes to act.

As Homi Bhabha (1994) claims, the past is negotiated through disavowal, and the violence of repression (202-204). The style and brevity of these films introduce many gaps into the experience of watching them that remind viewers not only that these images are "a part of our heritage"— as the tag line for the *Heritage Minutes* tells us at the end of every short — but also of the difficulty of consuming such a small fragment of history.[17] Besides

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[16] See, for example, Malcolm Barnard's discussion of the relationship between information and persuasion that characterizes advertising throughout its history, "Advertising: the Rhetorical Imperative," in Chris Jenks, ed. Visual Culture (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 26-41.

[17] As Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dicken McInnis (1995) note, however, "[m]any are told with self deprecatory humour. 'Marconi,' 'Basketball,' 'Superman,' 'Nellie McClung,' 'Jennie Trout,' and 'Steele of the Mounties' are, well, funny. 'The Naming of Canada.' is presented as a joke in one *Minute,* the discoverer Nicollet as an idiot in another. The episode on Frontenac is a broad burlesque and, perhaps most outrageously, Victoria's granting of Responsible Government parodies Red Rose Tea ads" (14).

the fact that they are worthy of much greater attention than I can give them here, the *CHM* films are central to my thesis of reading Canadian cinema as melodrama. These films, like the anthem films of the past, provide an acute paradigm for the "violence of repression" that characterizes melodrama. There is something viscerally disquieting about the style of the *CHM*. Deploying the language of realist-sensational 'documentaries' (mini docudramas, reenactments) they are nonetheless marked by melodrama; the films suggest that the immanence of history is fraught with an aura of both catastrophe and irony that constantly threatens to break the illusion of containing "our" history along with the suspension of disbelief. The films reinvent this past by re-staging it, and in the not surprising terms of the politically correct present, they reassure "us" by offering an entrance or passage to a non-existent tradition while undercutting the history lesson by collapsing it into a very short (60 second) film.

By necessity, perhaps, the rapid dramatization threatens to overtake the chronicle, creating a potentially contradictory viewing position for the spectator, a situation reflecting the subject's increasing fragmentation that is provoked in part by the uncanny 'return of history.' This is a past that does not really exist, but is constituted in the present by a series of fragmented images, images that both repress and state disavowal by creating a melodrama of nationalism. The ciné-subject is arguably both spatially and temporally dislocated by the films' style and must negotiate a rather treacherous path between the implied coherency of "the nation" and the unstable subject positions offered by the films. Like the symptom of schizophrenia that Fredric Jameson (1983) claims to describe as our postmodern condition, the spectator-subjects of *Heritage Minutes* are positioned as both incapable of experiencing time passing, as well as invited to disregard the films' collapsing of time. We

thus experience a schizophrenic version of history as a "signifier that has lost its signified [and] has thereby been transformed into an image" (120). In the deliberate ellipsis of time and space that these films depict, they also indirectly foreground the problem of representing history; by signalling yet another invention of tradition (or of time passing) they, perhaps ironically, suppress history in favour of discourse.

The project of my dissertation is to mine the discursive effects of melodrama as a critical method for understanding another fragment of Canadian cinematic history. In addition to my brief analysis of the above Canadian cinematic examples, I can also refer to recent international studies of melodrama that suggest its unique capacity to "manage" time and space; in particular, it is in times of great anxiety that melodramas have traditionally been most popular. Numerous critics have discussed melodrama's cultural function of smoothing the transitions between eras and epochs. Thomas Elsaesser (1985), for example, claims that the melodrama becomes more or less fashionable depending on the ideological state of the nation. During periods of social and political crises, he argues, melodramas peak in popularity. America in the post-war era is Elsaesser's example; Peter Brooks similarly discusses the French Revolution (1976, 1994b). Both periods are marked by anxieties over the definition of the nation particularly as regards issues of class and gender. Excesses uncontainable by the political and social upheavals of the day "spill over" into other forms of signification, especially the fictional text.

Yet melodrama is much more than simply a management genre that produces excess signification. Melodrama as a critical method can also be deployed as a mode for analysing the subject's experience of competing discourses, or what Michael Renov (1991) identifies as a double bind. Double

bind theory was originally put forth by Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John H. Weakland in their 1956 essay, "Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia."[18] They proposed the double bind as a theory to disentangle the psychopathologies of everyday life, and the contradictions whose nexus is the family wherein "the child is forced to respond to messages which generate paradox" (228). Renov tracks down evidence of the double bind in the contradictory representations of the post-war woman in the popular "fictional forms" of film noir and pervasive government advertising. In this period of heightened anxiety about gender and sexuality, conflicting messages about work, reproduction and femininity often placed women in a double bind. The 'post-war woman' provides an historical and gendered frame for analysing the manner in which subjects are placed in no-win situations vis à vis the interests of political nationalism.

Official bilingualism and the Multiculturalism Act can be analysed as evidence of an already existing social and ideological crisis about nationalism in Canada. Whether read as merely articulating an existent "problem" or inaugurating a whole host of issues, the years following the enactment of these official policies can be read as a critical period in Canadian political and cultural history concerning competing ideals of nationalism.[19] By placing Canadian citizens in a contradictory position in relation to the two mutually exclusive definitions of national identity, these nationalisms might operate not only hegemonically, but in a manner similar to the double bind. The double bind of national subjectivity suggests that citizens must heed the

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[18] As cited in Renov. Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John H. Weakland, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," *Double Bind: The Foundation of the Communicational Approach to the Family* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1976), pp. 3-22.

[19] Other time periods could also be usefully analysed for the manner in which melodrama is deployed. It perhaps would be a valuable exercise to determine whether this theory holds across other arts besides theatre, literature, film and television.

imperative mode of the doubly bound nation to see itself as both bilingual and multicultural. In this case, the double bind statement might be described as one in which double negatives about meaning and being Canadian amount to the alienation of the subject. Indeed, Smaro Kamboureli's (1998) discussion of the incommensurability of language as translation suggests a double bind. Kamboureli analyses the fundamental paradox of the parallel texts which comprise The Canadian Multiculturalism Act: they are translations of each other. Kamboureli argues that an officially bilingual country requires no translations, yet translations are a necessity in order to suggest the equality of the two official languages. The contested — even paradoxical — meanings of nationalism that are later discussed by Kamboureli thus exist in the very text upon which the idea of Canada is ideally described. Kamboureli argues that the ironies of the Multiculturalism Act provide a discursive gap which then inaugurates other syntaxes of culture that disrupt official statuses. The Act sets into motion a potential disruption of sexuality (law and marriage, hetero and homo), ethnicity (non-ethnic, French/English), and the nation (non-nation) (212).

So, where do the disruptions, excesses and new syntaxes go once inaugurated? Melodrama, or at least the melodramatic, becomes one of the means by which the material conditions of living with the double bind are organised into an aesthetic as well as symptomatic practice. According to Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (1996):

Melodrama ... [is] a process-like genre, that is, a genre that does not come to rest in fulfillment but, rather, presents a continually renewed realization....an interplay of intersecting cultural and ideological horizons.... (x-xi)

Peter Brooks (1976) suggests that melodrama can be both historically and structurally linked to a resistant politics of class and gender. Moreover, Brooks considers melodrama to be essentially subversive; attempts to circumvent specific limitations of theatrical conventions and the repressive context of censorship are part of its tradition (Hays and Nikolopoulou, 1996 vii). In their discussion of 19th century melodrama, Hays and Nikolopoulou call it "a peculiarly modern form" that played a major role in the cultural dynamics of that century (vii), but unlike Brooks they do not consider it to be inherently subversive. Rather, Hays and Nikolopoulou argue that melodrama has undergone several transformations, and each example must be considered individually. They argue that melodrama is an aesthetic mode and enterprise that not only continues to function in the present day but serves to define it (viii).

Excess is one of the ongoing and "unruly" features of the melodrama that prompts Brooks (1976) to identify it as subversive, and for Hays and Nikolopoulou to call it a process-like genre. Both approaches suggest that not everything can be contained within the constraints of the genre. It is often tempting for critics to read this excess as a carnivalesque element of the genre, analogous to a temporary disruption of the prevailing social order and a loosening of its strictures. According to the tried and true conventions of melodrama, excessive emotion and artifice, as well as excessive adherence to social convention, prompt strong reactions from the reader/spectator of the melodrama. Her or his sense of "balance" and justice are violated by the disproportionately severe punishment meted out against a sympathetic protagonist. Excess is, however, also a central element of contemporary *post*modern/consumer culture, even inasmuch as excess signification is fundamental to the process of commodification. This most blatant example of

excess is probably advertising; it permits meanings to multiply in relation to product codification in the form of surplus value and differentiation (Williamson, 1978) while certain meanings are emphasized and others suppressed in a floating chain of signifiers (Barthes, 1977). Excess is thus not simply a disruptive strategy that can be deployed for strictly progressive purposes, it can occur within a context that recuperates its subversive potential. Determining the subversiveness of a contemporary melodrama is made more difficult, and perhaps is really only a matter of degree, by its (even closer) relationship to consumer culture. In this context it could be argued, for example, that *constraint* is in fact more revolutionary than excess. It is the rapid movement between these modes, however, that creates the strong emotional affect of melodrama. Affect is perhaps exaggerated further by the speed of postmodernist culture and yet may also be a key to unlocking its critical potential. Each example must be examined on a case by case basis, and analysed within the specific cultural conditions in which it occurs.

Melodrama as Cultural Critique

The melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and articulate the moral occult.
(Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination*)

The examples of Canadian cinema I am discussing in this thesis are postmodern and melodramatic to the extent that their tone or style oscillates between excess and constraint, emotionality and stoicism, unruliness and civility. The juxtaposition of these extreme or opposing modes of address is arguably what determines much of melodrama's dizzying emotional and visceral affect, but also even what we may currently take for the differences

between melodrama and realism. Tom Gunning (1994) suggests that melodrama "might be best seen as a dialectical interaction between moral significance and an excess aimed precisely at non-cognitive affects, thrills, sensations, and strong affective attractions" (51). Gunning also argues that the specific historical context and nature of the affect must be dealt with. It is in this way of considering melodrama's critical potential that theorists have reassessed its historicity and extended the political dimensions of its aesthetic techniques. I will focus on what happens in the movement or oscillation between melodrama's registers or modes, arguing that the discursive, dialectical structure of my examples are more unsettling than reassuring.

Fredric Jameson (1983) argues that postmodernism tends to restructure modernism so that aspects previously considered subordinate are now dominant or vice versa (121). Although my main interest is the postmodernist elements of melodrama, I would include pre-modernism and classic realism into the mix of postmodernism's capacity for stylistic and cultural reference. Genres generally, and melodramas in particular, given their long standing, are aesthetic "technologies" of social practice and thus rely on not only the immediate but more distant past for their cultural force. As Linda Williams (1991) puts it: "Genres thrive, after all, on the persistence of the problems they address; but genres thrive also in their ability to recast the nature of these problems" (12). Postmodernism is noteworthy for its tendency to efface or erase differences in historical periods, styles, and cultural hierarchies. I would argue that in the case of postmodern melodrama, following Hays' and Nikolpoulou's claim that the melodramatic mode defines contemporary culture, the aesthetics of melodrama and postmodernism conspire to subsume or at least redirect the realist elements of the films. As with other relationships between modernism and

postmodernism, these aspects are a matter of degree, not invention. Thus, if postmodernist cultural artifacts tend to underscore already existing elements of modernism, then postmodernist melodramas can heighten particular effects of modernist aesthetics. Techniques, such as intertextuality or the more volatile trope of irony, can presumably make legible generic conventions since they invite reader/spectators to look beyond the text, perhaps to those cultural conditions of production that were formerly hidden. The result is likely to be either pastiche or parody; both are systems of generic or cultural reference that in the former case has lost its original, as well as, according to Jameson, its sense of humour (120). Excess in conjunction with parody permits the point of reference to retain some of its originality, stability and humour.[20]

Excess, as a form of exaggeration or parody, arguably has also been recuperated by contemporary consumer culture, but in keeping with a politics of melodrama, it is one of the elements that also permits inequitable social conditions to be registered. Thus the repetitive nature of melodrama is not a matter of simple mimicry. The revelations provided by pastiche and parody can be both playful and serious in tone; likewise, extreme shifts in the storyline sometimes suggest changes in affiliations, or modify the reader/spectator's depth of attachment to the plight of the characters within

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[20] This is only one possible way of analysing melodrama as contemporary cultural critique. Melodrama, in the early twentieth century, was adapted from theatre and literature for the silent screen and reached its zenith in 1950s Hollywood cinema. But it did not suddenly disappear. Many critics argue that a melodramatic mode of address merely replaced the genre as such in the 1960s and 70s, and migrated to television. The melodramatic mode has always been — and continues to be — vital to all cinema. This is arguably a matter of degree, reading context, and effect. It is in large part due to the emotional/psychic involvement of the spectator that the stories told in a melodramatic manner can be so affecting. The inclusion of other genres, combined modes of address, or intermedial relationships only make this involvement more complex. They do not provide a reason to suggest that melodramatic techniques *cannot* be attached to cultural criticisms.

them. Moreover, by prompting us to alter perspective, there is also an implied invitation to be open to the possibility that our expectations concerning the progression of the story may be thwarted, and that new, unforeseen and possibly redemptive meanings can be attached to these structural or narrative gestures. As Christine Gledhill (2000) argues:

> So if melodramatic modality aims to render everyday life morally legible and its democratic morality is locked into an aesthetic of justice, it must, in order to command recognition, acknowledge the contested and changing signs of cultural verisimilitude, bringing radical as well as conservative voices into play. (236)

Gledhill's analysis acknowledges the contested political terrain of melodrama; its potential to poke fun at a variety of social, textual, and generic conventions as well as to uphold them. This suggests that melodramatic techniques can be deployed as critical strategies linking politics to aesthetics for progressive or retrograde purposes, an issue that is perhaps especially fraught in the context of postmodernism. For example, as I will discuss in more detail later, in *Forbidden Love* (Fernie/Weissmann, 1992) the emotional and sexual "temperatures" of the film fluctuate along with its hybrid documentary and melodramatic style. In this case, the film fits implicitly with melodrama as a critical strategy of historical and national reflection or revision. Yet the melodramatic cultural antecedents of a queer cinema in Canada also depend on other non-Canadian queer social referents as well as an aesthetic context of "straight" popular culture, a system of signification against which *Forbidden Love* is posed that goes well beyond the "constraints" of the nation, or a clear idea of national cinema.[21] Indeed,

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[21] See my articles on *Forbidden Love* and *La vie rêvée* (1996, 1999, 2002) in which I discuss the melodramatic mix with documentary and counter-cinema that produces the intense affect usually associated with melodrama on its own. I argue that it is the juxtaposition of the sobriety and the excess of each style that produces its political aesthetic.

André Loiselle (1999) discusses a similar aesthetic tension in *Mourir à tue-tête* (Poirier, 1979). Loiselle outlines the generic conventions associated with melodrama and counter-cinema and analyses their structured relationship in the film that produces a politics of despair (22-3).

The politics of affect is an idea that may have appealed to film critics in the 1970s who began in earnest to study melodrama as a popular art form. Like the preceding and contemporaneous analytical strategy, *les politiques des auteurs*, critics of melodrama were attempting to deal with Hollywood cinema on its own formulaic terms while acknowledging the possibility that "generic" films could nonetheless articulate significant ideological issues. Thomas Elsaesser's (1985), "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," written in 1972, is a seminal article in this respect. In it, Elsaesser suggests that melodrama's high affectivity is an implicit challenge to coherent subjectivity, and this in combination with distanciation devices in the hands of directors like Douglas Sirk, Vincente Minnelli and Max Ophuls place the spectator in a uniquely critical position. Elsaesser's analysis also suggests that the genre is structurally malleable as well as culturally porous. Thus questions that arose out of melodrama's mode of address — its reconfiguration of the tension between proximity and distance to the screen subject — offered a new site within the contemporary critical context for expanding ideological film analysis.

Could affect be deployed to critique social conventions and economic conditions? Could the aestheticization of suffering that characterizes melodrama, for example, be retroactively interpreted as a complaint about the repressive ideology of the 1950s, especially as it referred to the white, middle-class American family? In other words, what had begun as a technological or industrial determinist assumption that as mass-mediated cultural artifacts all

melodramas were complicit with a dominant repressive ideology had been radically altered to the perception that many of them also exhibited progressive if not subversive tendencies. Barbara Klinger (1994) argues that once the melodrama was revalued, however, it was almost uncritically celebrated. This resulted in analyses in which reading any regressive moments in the films was tacitly avoided. It furthermore helped construct a somewhat uncritical milieu for film analysis to the degree that, according to Klinger, any evidence that challenged the new found progressiveness of melodrama was largely suppressed in favour of canonizing the politicized Hollywood auteur (1-35).

When feminist film critics began to shift the focus away from auteurist approaches to Hollywood and other melodramas, the notion that melodrama could be a highly "conflicted" mode of expression capable of complicity as well as contestation really took off. For example, according to some critics in the 1980s (Modleski, 1982; Gledhill, 1987; Doane, 1987) the emotional excessiveness of the melodrama could be read against the grain as a critical strategy that foregrounded the plight of women in patriarchy especially given the constancy of the genre across media, its subject matter and address. The so-called "private" problems women experience in romance, the family, and motherhood — familiar subjects from the woman's film of the 1940s — were in the post-war period expanded to include the more "public" social, family and "male" melodramas of the 1950s. This phenomenon suggests the adaptability of the genre of melodrama, its capacity to accommodate shifts within it, but also its ubiquity as an aesthetic mode. Thus melodrama was again revalued as an aesthetic form while the films and other media became the documents of a larger cultural predilection for the melodramatic. The extent of its excessiveness or spill over into other genres and media suggests

that melodrama, as a genre as well as a tonal element, functioned as an aesthetic and cultural mediator capable of articulating and managing the social tensions that erupt between subjectivity and desire. As a result of its combined immediacy of subject matter, popularity, and excessive affect, the melodrama provided the critical evidence for further analysis of the power dynamics involved in gender, race and class positionings (Mulvey, 1977-78; Doane, 1987; Heung, 1987; Haralovich 1989).

A Theory of the Anxious/Melodramatic/National Subject

According to Benedict Anderson (1991), nations are often differentiated from one another by the terms of the "style in which they are imagined" (6). Anderson discusses the difference between official languages and those vernaculars that are developed for imagined communication. John Cawelti (1991) cites the melodrama as one such imaginary place where resolving social tensions between the old and the new order have traditionally been played out. It is a place where change is recognized and managed, and where its potentially radical impact must be downplayed. Often signalling a positive shift in power for formerly subordinate people, the melodrama becomes a cultural representation of social and moral regeneration that has resulted from this change (43). Conventionally, the style in which the melodrama deals with the differences in power between subjects is through affect; that is, by deploying intense identification techniques to invite the spectator, independent of gender, race or class status to occupy alternately subordinate and dominant positions within the dynamic of the narrative. This strategy of doubling offers the possibility of making legible the relations of power and one's position within them, providing a forum for what Homi Bhabha's (1993) calls "the disjunctive doubleness" of national identity (212). According

to Bhabha, the disavowal of the other, as well as its undoing, is expressed simultaneously, placing the subject in an ambivalent position (213), a position that is, in fact, negotiated through disavowal: "'I know difference exists, mais quand même...'" (204).

Both Bhabha (1993) and Brooks (1994b) isolate the significance of the body as *the* site of difference upon which the process of negotiating past and present subjectivity is staged. According to Brooks,

> It is in the context of melodrama's constant recourse to acting out, to the body as the most important signifier of meanings, that we can understand the genre's frequent recourse to moments of pantomime, which are not simply decorative, which in fact often convey crucial messages. (19)

Brooks argues that it was important for melodrama in the period of the French Revolution, for example, to depict a stoic, civilized body in the face of its very real vulnerability and disposability (12). The idea of the individual, an embodied subject accountable under a new and efficient Law, was also an important representation of the lessons of new "civility" during the Reign of Terror. Such transitional historical moments are what Bhabha describes as paradigmatic representations of the anxious subject, a subject who is on the threshold of identity and whose body has to "pass through" the often newly-invented traditions of the past in order to become a subject among subjects in a new order (205). The fundamental disavowal to which Bhabha refers is the death of the old subject. Continuity is all. The difference between the old and the new subject/regime is ameliorated by the disjunctive doubleness of the discourse of tradition woven into that of progress as an ongoing effect of civilization; the subject is a discursive effect as well as an embodied example of social improvement.

Like Cawelti, Brooks (1976) implies that the melodrama in critical periods operates something like a salvage operation for the terms of social change. The old is salvaged while the new world order is introduced at an official level as well as being acted out in familiar cultural contexts and social practices. These changes in a postmodern world could very well describe the period in which bilingualism[22] and multiculturalism were enacted in Canada.[23] According to David Bennett (1998), "[m]ulticulturalism in its various guises clearly signals a crisis in the definition of 'nation'"(2). In this case, the very term 'multiculturalism' is a specifically Canadian product of a 1965 Royal Commission[24] on the subject of cultural difference; it is a sign of uncertainty if not anxiety, what Bennett identifies as a potentially decentring project for "reinventing the nation" or a statement on the nation's "limits of tolerance" for difference (2). Anxiety, according to Bhabha (1993), is a "'sign' of danger ... of identity, in between its claims to coherence and its fear of dissolution, between identity and non-identity, internal and external" (207).

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[22] "The first Official Languages Act was adopted by the Parliament of Canada in 1969. The new Act came into force on September 15, 1988. Its primary aim is to consolidate the equality of status of English and French in federal institutions and thereby insure respect for the language rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (Synopsis of the Official Languages Act, 1988. www.ocoi-cio.qc.ca/5e_8a.htm, p.1).

[23] Although Bill C-93, The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, was passed into law on July 21, 1988, "since 1973 there has been a multiculturalism directorate within the Dept. of the Secretary of State" with an operating budget for grants to assist scholars, the arts and community organizations (Robert F. Harney, "'So Great a Heritage as Ours': Immigration and the Survival of Canadian Polity," *Daedalus* 117.4, Fall 1988, p. 72). As cited in Langer, 1998, p. 220).

[24] "The term 'multiculturalism' has a short history. According to the *Longer Oxford English Dictionary* (which, of course, provides merely the word's English genealogy and gives us a nominal history only), 'multiculturalism' developed from 'multicultural', a term that came into general usage only in the late 1950s in Canada. The *OED* cites a sentence from the Montreal *Times* in June 1959 which describes Montreal as 'this multi-cultural, multi-lingual society'....the first use of multiculturalism was in a Canadian government report, the Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, published in 1965" (J. Stratton and I. Ang, in Bennett, ed., p.138). This is based on the 1963-1970 appointment of the Royal Commission under the direction of Dunton and Laurendeau and the Official Languages Bill that resulted from it in 1968/9. (www.canadahistory.com/ trudeau-official_languages _act.htm).

Anxiety resulting from changes in official policy (reflecting the changing values of pan-Canadianism, biculturalism and multiculturalism) requires management on all sides: the democratic management provided by a "nervous state" (a structure of reassurance/coercion such as the continuity provided by official policy making) plus the demonstration of good cultural citizenship (compliance) on the part of subjects. This is community building, a way of imagining the nation, if you like, and everyone is invited to play a role in the ritual of acting out the new ideal subject upon which the nation is to be founded. Dispelling anxiety is an important part of quelling the threat of the new order, which is likewise important to assuring its successful integration into the social and political life of the subject, to help manage if not merge the relationship between the inside and outside, in this case, multicultural/bilingual states. This "state", according to Bhabha (Bennett and Bhabha 1998), is emblematic of the "double injunction of survival: cessation and continuance" (46).

Body and Gesture

Brooks' assessment of the melodramatic mode makes room for a double discourse and a revolutionary subject, in part because of the way the body registers and acts out its dissatisfaction with the status quo:

> ...its actions, gestures, its sites of irritation and excitation ... represent meanings that might otherwise be unavailable to representation because they are somehow under the bar of repression. Melodrama refuses repression, or rather, repeatedly strives towards moments where repression is broken through...
>
> (Brooks 1994b, 19)

Often, in these melodramatic moments of staged dissatisfaction, the dialogue is saying one thing while the body conveys another meaning altogether. This

is a coded refusal of repression, a half repression in which we are invited to read between speech and gesture. The doubling of the melodramatic performing body in each of the films I have analysed for this dissertation is representative of a subject coming into being, they are bodies upon which struggles with past and present identities are writ large. Gesture, like the more generalized term of excess, is a central feature of melodramas past and present. What began as a historical necessity by constraint, grew into a complex non-verbal communication system. Brooks (1994b) argues that as a language it is both internationalist in scope and somehow "purer." The body acts as a conduit for information, intention, and feelings that are not otherwise readily accessible. Gesture is the body's language, it is a subterranean idiom that attempts to subvert social impositions, and the limitations of writing or speaking. Where characterizations may seem clearly delineated and notoriously unsubtle in the melodrama, the body provides access to another, alternative or complementary, sign system. Melodramatic gestures are highly codified and yet capable of yielding to the demands of the narrative context in which they are expressed. Whether virtuous or villainous, the body is encoded and designed to be decoded and read as a text, and like Brecht's social gest (*gestus*) it is a dialectical element both connected and disconnected from the performer who is displaying it.

Subjects positioned within a Canadian cultural context are invited to read such codes of convention and inflection, and expected to understand them in order to participate in the fantasy of the nation. Our alacrity as national readers is rewarded: if "we" recognize "us/them" as ironic subjects, it implies that "we" are adept at the rhetorical strategies of irony. "We" get "it." Aren't we clever (wink wink, nudge nudge)? Our cleverness, which is also at stake in decoding the melodramatic techniques outlined above, depends on

an additional, culturally specific doubling of information that says one thing overtly while suggesting another. In other words, in both cases we read the strategies of a mobile subject/positioning, and in so doing we also iterate a subjective body/language that has been (perhaps by historical necessity) articulated through the trope of irony or "speaking with a forked tongue" (Hutcheon 1990, 10). This may be a dialect, or what Anderson (1991) calls a vernacular, with hybridizing poetic potential. It is also an instance of the formation of a new interpretive community capable of unsettling the official language and its readings. This unsettling occurs by doubling linguistic capacity for meaning by placing two languages side by side, possibly engaging the trope of irony as a resistant strategy within already existing cultural modes of representation. The doubling strategies of irony are not unidirectional nor can their politics be guaranteed. Thus irony can be deployed for subversion, as well as for duplicity.

In all cases, I will argue that this doubling is a central point of contestation around which the films "work" issues of gender and sexuality, and the meaning of family and the nation. Each film deploys irony to draw in the spectator through flattery, if only to punish us later through more conventional melodramatic tactics for our intellectual distance or cultural smugness. This subject positioning is very much implicated in the discourse of multiculturalism and its management of the personal and social elements of identity. Multiculturalism is what Bennett (1998) calls a "pseudo-dialectic of consensus" (5) that camouflages dissent. Communities are conventionally defined by the myth of consensus and against the divisiveness caused by relations of power, privilege and inequality. Sufficient dissension (recognition of difference) means that a new community must be formed, a small recognition concerning the non-coincidence of community and

identity. Recognizing difference (mais quand même) also implies that the original identity was a fiction, and thus that all identities are fictions. Group cohesion is in turn temporary at best if not non-existent: if difference exists between communities, then it exists within them, comprised (as they are) of individual (different) members who agree — typically because it is politically expedient and economically advantageous to do so — to act as though they are similar to one another.

Bennett claims that multiculturalism developed as an ideal long before it was an official policy in Canada (or Australia) as a means of managing dissent (by eliminating real differences under the sign of "difference") in the post-WWII period. Following Beryl Langer (1998), Bennett claims that immigration from countries formerly at war with one another had to be, "reconstituted in terms of harmonious narratives of cultural diversity....immigrants had to put contested histories and potentially disruptive imaginaries of nation behind them" in order to "embrace the convenient fiction of 'ethnicity'" (17). Langer argues that this situation tends to repeat itself with subsequent waves of immigration (165). Langer discusses Salvadoran refugee migration to Canada and Australia in the 1980s as a case that "calls into question assumptions about cultural integrity and stability embedded in the idea of multicultural formations in which 'ethnic' and 'dominant' cultures are clearly specifiable and incommensurably 'different'" (163). Langer argues that notions of 'difference' and 'similarity' rest upon the twin ideals of multicultural diversity and global unity that are at odds with "what [Arjun] Appadurai (1990) has called the 'complex, overlapping, disjunctive order' of the 'new global cultural economy'" (164). According to Langer, El Salvador's complex and divisive history means that its relationship to ethnicity is problematic at best. As Langer puts it, in a

multicultural state ethnicity replaces history, smoothes over its divisive

relationships to race, class, language and politics:

> Migrants are expected to leave their history at the door, and while the reality of life in the schoolyard and the factory might give lie to the fiction that 'we are one but many', it is arguably a *useful* fiction which minimises conflict in the public sphere by delegitimising its expression. (165)

A multicultural state is in large part concerned with (the fantasy of)

integration. All of the characters in the films I discuss are under considerable

social and familial pressure to undergo a process of unburdening themselves

of their differences in favour of becoming "different," part of a community

whose "aim" is integrating these "selves" into a fictitious whole (American,

Canadian, Québécois, woman, man, ethnic, and even queer). However

"useful" the fiction of community is to multiculturalism/ethnicity in

managing dissent, its delegitimising discourse is undercut within the films by

the fact that in each case the "goal" of integration is never realized or at least

is not depicted onscreen. Rather, it is the double bind of identity and its

performance that is the main focus of these films.

In keeping with the significance of the morality of the melodramatic

characterization (Brooks 1994b, Klinger), and as process-oriented genres (Hays

and Nikolopoulou), the films spend considerable time unravelling the

processes of becoming a national subject. According to Cawelti, the meaning

of virtue and "God's will" in melodrama changes to reflect the most pressing

current social issues (44). In a postmodernist modification of the genre, the

process of subjectification is connected to the construction of the virtuous

character, a character who sometimes must die because s/he will not conform

or self-complete as an ideal Canadian subject. The virtuous body is the body

upon whom struggles about the meaning of morality is staged. Generally

speaking, these bodies are heroic and fragile at the same time; bodies are (heroic) markers of the overall (fragile) state of the moral order. Typically this means that the doubly-bound character is subjected to a number of tests of endurance; the virtuous body is obsessively displayed for public and private scrutiny and often ridiculed. Ironically, it is in the process of becoming "civilized" that the body is subjected to such horrors. The body is perceived as a site of unruliness or incivility, an excess that must be managed for the public and private good, for the (hetero) normativity of gender identity and ethnicity, as well as for the foundation of the family and the nation.

Fantasy/ Subjectivity

In the films I will discuss in greater detail in subsequent chapters, the characters represent, in part, anxious subjects at the threshold of the nation who take refuge in social and cultural conventions that often humiliate or place the body at risk. Subjects are formed from such events where an invented history of civility and a process of civilization butts up against irrepressible personal needs and desires; they are the detritus-effects, a repository for the bad management of anxieties that the films often suggest are petty social conventions and perversions of the self. These are subjects deliberately out of time and place, iconoclastic characters who are often in the wrong place at the wrong time in order to draw attention to the perverse scenario in which they are embroiled. But time is also the great "elsewhere," and being late or out of synch is the great tragedy that befalls many of the protagonists. Postmodern consumer culture promises a temporary, ambivalent solace from time and space. Some of the characters, like Peter in *Next of Kin*, can afford the time/space shift offered initially through the video tape reality of an alternate family. However, for others, like Léo Lozeau

(*Léolo*), real time and space cannot be overcome. As a poor francophone from the east end of Montréal, an alternative time and space are luxuries he cannot afford, and in the end, even his fertile imagination fails to provide this escape.

Time and space are the mundane and quotidian facts of the world at large, as well as the depths of anxiety waiting to be defined/filled. In *Paperback Hero*, for example, the main character, Rick (the Marshall) Dillon, swaggers his way around small town Saskatchewan in a parody of American western heroes of the cinema and television screens. In *La vie rêvée* Isabel and Virginie "play" at becoming romantic leads, negotiating their parts in the lifestyle images that the posters they pin up on their walls depict. And again, in *Next of Kin* and *Léolo*, performance of ethnicity is crucial to sanity, so that the cultural communities of Armenia and Italy, respectively, are preferable to those offered by the blandness of the unnamed elsewhere from which Peter has come or the violence of east end Montréal that Léo cannot leave. In *Forbidden Love* and *Perfectly Normal*, the past is an important historical and cultural artifact, a signifying system from which new hybrid genres and subjectivities can and must be constructed.

In each of these films, the virtuous body of the protagonist is a fragile vessel that carries the impossible and burdensome role of a clearly defined identity. These characters exist at so many crossroads typical of the melodrama, where as Gledhill (2000) claims, "[d]esire is generated at the boundaries, stimulating border crossings as well as provoking cultural anxieties. This is particularly the case where social identities—gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality—are shifting" (237). The body is the site of an encounter at the boundary where the self and the other meet, struggle and perhaps negotiate a détente, or blur; it is where a well-learned performance involving

the sovereignty of the individual is played out as a border skirmish between civility and chaos, and the finely drawn line between freedom and (self)surveillance.

Linda Williams (1991) argues that fantastic genres such as horror, pornography, and the melodrama have in common the ecstatic/excessive affect of the body out of control, "the body 'beside itself' with sexual pleasure, fear and terror, or overpowering sadness" (4). Williams argues that fantasy plays a major role in these genres which "lack...proper aesthetic distance" and instead offer "a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion" (5). They are not, she points out, "wish-fulfilling narratives of mastery and control leading to closure and the attainment of desire. They are marked, rather, by the prolongation of desire, and by the lack of fixed position with respect to the objects and events fantasized" (10). Following Laplanche and Pontalis, Williams (1991) argues what I consider to be the central point about fantasy's role in unravelling the melodramatic terms of multicultural subjectivity. What part does fantasy play in setting the stage for desire in a multicultural nation? Williams states that "[f]antasy is the place where 'desubjectified' subjectivities oscillate between self and other occupying no fixed place in the scenario" (10).

This describes well an anxious subject located in the "in between," always in between its fictitious point of origin and unknown destination. As with Bhabha's (1993) notion of the subject immersed in the double disjunctiveness of time, the subject of fantasy tries "to uncover the discrepancy between two moments in time ....The discrepancy exists, in other words, between the actual existence of the lost object and the sign which evokes both this existence and its absence" (Williams, 10). In this case, the sign is multiculturalism and its central signifier is ethnicity, but ethnicity is

often deployed as a rather vague cultural signifier with diverse and often contentious associations. "Ethnic" is above all the umbrella term for the containment of difference, as well as for testing the hegemonic limits for the tolerance of national differences. In other words, as with all signs more or less, it engages the relative meanings of things. In this instance, however, the generative effects are difficult to delimit because signification occurs within a particularly contradictory or ironic sign system. Ethnicity is at the centre of multiculturalist ideology and so embraces the relations of power and subject positioning that is multiculturalism's currency. It can include Canadian as ethnic vis à vis American, québecois(e) as English Canada's ethnic other, as well as all First Nations "others" and all immigrants and subsequent waves of migration. The Canadian multiculturalist subject is a "desubjectified" subject *par excellence* where fantasizing about myths of origin is a way of life. This subject oscillates between a desire for access to the irrecoverable real event (origins and identity) and the totally imaginary one that substitutes for it (ethnic difference).[25] Nationalism is a fantasy of disavowal. It is a fantasy about the past, but it is also about the subject's desire to be located or projected into some ideal future. Williams argues that the "'event' whose temporal and spatial existence can never be fixed is thus ultimately ... that of the 'origin of the subject'—an origin which psychoanalysts tell us cannot be separated from the discovery of sexual difference" (10).

The gestural component of the body in melodrama includes its sometimes deliberate muteness, an attempt to refuse the signs that are written upon it. It is another half repression, posed against the body's

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[25] As Smaro Kamboureli (1998) puts it: "An immigrant is an outsider whose difference is defined by his or her origins, whereas the ethnic subject's difference (however visible or pronounced the traces of that differences might be) is defined by the surrounding culture" (in Bennett, ed., p. 214).

inarticulateness, of among other things sexual difference, and represents the desire to return to original plenitude before the gap in time/space between ideal origins and the one constructed as a sign-fetish. The subject is thus inaugurated by desire. In all but two of the films I discuss,[26] the characters have great difficulty taking up their "proper place" in the social-sexual order. Taking up this position means becoming an adult and having to take responsibility for adult actions, however they are defined within the films and in the larger contemporary social context. In short, none of the characters really wants to grow up. As Linda Williams argues,

> In these fantasies the quest to return to and discover the origin of the self is manifest in the form of the child's fantasy of possessing ideal parents in the Freudian family romance, in the paternal fantasy of possessing the child in the paternal or maternal melodrama; and possibly, and even in the lover's fantasy of possessing one another in romantic weepies. (11)

Q. What time is it?
A. Too late?

Conclusion: The (New) Timeliness of (Postmodern) Melodrama

Postmodern melodrama, in the Canadian cultural context I have highlighted here, is an aesthetic mode that authorizes certain transgressive moments. Its critical discourse depends on a number of features which are themselves contingent upon the political interventions of past melodramas as well as the opportunity provided by the postmodernist context for rereading the past. In my examples, the aesthetic strategies of melodrama that are of particular interest and usefulness include affect and irony, especially when they are employed for expressly political purposes in order to "break the line between the unrepresented and the unrepresentable" (Hutcheon 1990,

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[26] The exceptions are *Forbidden Love* and *Perfectly Normal*, but even these films obviously raise the problem of sexual difference.

38). The discourse of 'multiculturalism and the nation' represents a tension that fits well within the purview of melodrama's contested history as both a radical and conservative art form. Multiculturalism, like melodrama, is capable of both articulating and managing the "problems" of difference and disavowal as they relate to the processes of subjectivity, allowing subjects to survive what Bhabha calls the discontinuity of time (1998 46), or the trauma of the breach. These processes are especially significant to my study of Canadian cinema between 1972-1992, for the horizons of identity whose formations both precede multiculturalism and are a by-product of it. The break between these "times," and the changes inherent in these different moments of subjectivity are filled in by the "cement" of multiculturalism, a socio-ideological effect of consensus building. The discursive ripples created by the context of contested identities operating within unequal power relationships nonetheless suggest that issues of representation are never straightforward.

Linda Hutcheon (1990) suggests that in postmodern irony a parodic moment occurs in which deconstruction gives way to reconstruction (25). The negative or deconstructive moment of irony is a critical stance "that works to distance, undermine, unmask, relativize, destabilize..." (25). The constructiveness of irony works to assert difference as a positive, generative value and does so through double-talking or doubled discourses which are usually self-reflexive. They are what Hutcheon refers to as "...that sort of ironic paradox that pushes our notions of the accepted and the acceptable into new, liminal spaces, the spaces between meanings" (27). Although getting the irony is often the same here as knowing what its effects are, Hutcheon is careful not to program irony, but only to suggest some categories, and to provide a few examples. According to Hutcheon (1992), what has changed, in

considering the dimensions of contemporary postmodernist culture, is that irony has shifted away from the limited rhetorical trope of classical oratory and the comprehensive vision of life associated with German romanticism. Irony, she claims, now operates as a general discursive strategy within specific cultural contexts aimed at critiquing from the inside (13).

Linda Williams (1991) and Franco Moretti (1983) both discuss the aesthetics and politics of melodramatic affect in terms of its temporality and implicit irony. Affect relies heavily on the desire for an impossible (by the standards of melodramatic convention) (re)solution to the event. The central event could satisfy the quest to return to origins (and thus save the virtuous protagonist), but is agonizingly delayed and comes "too late." Williams claims that a powerful affect is produced by the fact that "the quest for connection is always tinged with the melancholy of loss. Origins are already lost, the encounters always take place too late...." (11). The timeliness of affect and its physical response (conventionally tears) to loss, are according to Williams, both a release of tension and an homage to a lost happiness (11). And, although pathos might signal the inevitability of the real world, Moretti reminds us that without pathos our surrender to it would go unnoticed (179). Tears, according to Moretti, "are always the product of powerlessness" (162), but in marking the moment of futility, they also suggest that things could be otherwise. As Williams puts it, "Moretti thus stresses a subversive, utopian component in what has often been considered a form of passive powerlessness" (11-12).

But as the song goes, tears are not enough. Are the "final recognitions" of melodrama sufficient to provoke action on the part of the spectator? Do they, as Brooks (976, 53) suggests, locate and articulate a moral occult that can no longer be suppressed? Could it be that "different temporal structures

constitute a different utopian component of problem-solving" consistent with "melodrama's pathos of 'too late'" (Williams 11)? Is this strategy of affect equivalent to a political praxis? Or, alternatively, do spectators enjoy this powerlessness, the temporary respite from responsibilities of the world outside the cinema, and so welcome the experience of vicarious loss of power for the duration of the film in part because they can return to their fictitious yet fully constituted selves at the end? These theoretical elements and aesthetic strategies of postmodernism and melodrama, as I have already suggested in this chapter's opening, must be dealt with on a case by case basis. While it is important to keep in mind the many genre elements that comprise the melodramatic — some of which I have highlighted here — what I am aiming at in this dissertation is the more generalized mode of the melodramatic as a critical approach to cinema. Arguably all films can be discussed as melodramas more or less. In the case of the films I am discussing, what I propose is that while they may indeed be characterized by specific melodramatic techniques, that is, strategies that align the films with the genre of melodrama and its effects, to simply state this and provide a few examples would be to limit the promise of this approach. While I am interested in discussing the films' possible relationship to the genre of melodrama, I am attempting to link this perhaps obvious cinematic element to the specific context of the anxious and unruly subject of Canadian cinemas.

In the end, it may be that for the films I discuss, the "imaginary" invoked by Linda Williams has many things in common with the "imagination" suggested by Peter Brooks (1976, 1994a 1994b). Both refer to the illusory nature of identity as defined by the unruly subjects of psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and the melodrama, on the other. These ways of defining the imaginary are also in keeping with another imagination: Benedict

Anderson's imagined community offers us a way to rethink the relationship between official and unofficial cultures. By deploying the term "vernacular," Anderson acknowledges the subject's attempt to make the world meaningful and significant; these are modes of reading and representation that are crucial to melodrama's moral imperative. Anderson's idea of the vernacular places emphasis on popular and folk culture to create alternative discourses of the nation. That is, he suggests that subjects are also agents whose formulation of these "unofficial languages" or vernaculars are eloquent proof of an alternate reality poised against the official texts of the church and state. The imagined community created by the dissemination of vernacular information suggests a different use of the means of information delivery, whether print or other communications media.

The revelation of the moral occult also suggests an alternative usage of the representations that are "supposed to" define us. These ideas work well for an analysis of the underlying irony of the melodramatic mode: its tendency to say two things at once. As Stephen Heath argues, the relationship between the nation and its cinemas is not as straightforward as one might assume. Their meanings are struggled over, contested, fraught. Much effort goes into promoting one version of national cinema over another, as well as what meanings we can attach to individual examples. As my perfunctory readings of *O Canada* and the *Canadian Heritage Minutes* films would suggest the rituals of official citizenship can produce their own ideological gaps. The sober, breathlessly contrived moments of national celebration, which the *CHM* and *O Canada* represent, produces an awkward moment that makes them susceptible to a melodramatic reading. The films of my dissertation proper are treated as examples of the vernacular "postmodern melodrama" and are aimed at unravelling official articulations of citizenship and

subjectivity. Melodrama becomes a means to "talk back" to the nation, to elucidate some of the terms and conditions that living with the complexities of the modern nation require. The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to that task.

Chapter Two

Nationalism, Masculinity, and Generic Revis(itat)ion:
Paperback Hero and *Between Friends*

Introduction

> And the seasons, they go round and round
> and the painted ponies go up and down.
> We're captured on a carousel of time
> We can't return we can only look
> behind from where we came,
> and go round and round and round
> in the circle game.
>
> <div align="right">Joni Mitchell
"The Circle Game," 1970[27]</div>

Paperback Hero (P. Pearson, 1972) and *Between Friends* (D. Shebib, 1973) are and are not genre films. Their ironic treatment of the genres they "represent" effectively circles and revisits the terms and conditions under which the Western and the caper film, respectively, might generate meaning in a Canadian context. The films were released at an historically significant and culturally specific juncture within English-Canadian cinema clearly marking them as responses to American genre production. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, this period was preceded by the establishment of a number of official and unofficial government policies in Canada that were aimed at helping to define the country under the new terms of bilingualism and multiculturalism. Also important was the CFDC's inauguration in 1967 and its investment in feature film production in the early 1970s. The laws and agencies that came into being to support the representation of an ideal new

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[27] *Ladies of the Canyon*, (Reprise Records, 1970), written, composed and arranged by Joni Mitchell.

Canada included "pedagogy and publication." Thus, film studies programs in Canada were established alongside a new wave of Canadian film production and criticism. While these developments suggest that a stake in a cinema culture had become relevant, the discourses of national identity as reflected in the arts in Canada went well beyond the cinema. Margaret Atwood (1972), for example, considered it timely for a critical assessment of that institutional designation "Can. Lit." Like many of the stories Atwood discusses, English-Canadian cinema was not without concern for "survival;" survival is the subject matter of many of the films produced in this period, as well as an apt description of the fears surrounding the viability of a self-contained, Canadian film industry.

Both directors whose films are the focus of this chapter, Peter Pearson and Don Shebib, discuss their ambivalence about filmmaking in Canada. In a *Cinema Canada* interview, "Fellini's Not Bad, Bergman's Okay, but how about me?," Pearson foregrounds the collaborative effort of making films, especially in Canada. He criticizes the overvaluing of the Hollywood star system and the auteurist slant of European cinema, both of which favour a single artistic vision. He suggests that these are the cinemas against which Canadian films and directors are always implicitly measured and found wanting (Kiss/Koller, Moses: 1973/4, 46). He claims that

[I]n Canada there's a kind of gloomy inferiority complex protected by a veneer of arrogance which is really a self-destructive thing. We're continually threatened...but there's still a lot of reverence for any third rate cub director who drifts into this country because he has done an orange juice commercial in Nevada. And none of us will stand up and say, 'Get the hell out. We're not doing orange juice commercials here.' (Kiss/Koller, in Moses: 1973/4, 46)

In an interview with Sandra Gathercole (1973/74), Shebib complains about the reception that his and other films receive,

especially the insideousness of the "loser complex" as somehow emblematic of Canadian cinema. In a (perhaps) veiled reference to Atwood herself, Shebib sees the problem as a mere fabrication by critics who seem desperate to quantify and codify Canadian culture.[28] Atwood's discussion of Shebib's first feature, *Goin' Down the Road* (1970), identifies it as a pan-Canadian film in which "[t]he heroes survive, but just barely; they are born losers" (34).

Gathercole: What do you feel about the prevalent theory that all Canadian films are about losers?

Shebib: The fact is that if so many films appear to be down—that is the temper of the times! How many American films are escapist now? Wow! I don't see where all Canadian films are about losers.

Gathercole: Your films are.

Shebib: That's me! I don't like the idea of suddenly being used as a model for Canada or something. Why take me—whatever my feelings are—and blame them on the Canadian people? What's that got to do with it? What about all those crazy sex films in Montreal? I think all those theories are intellectual masturbation. Are you trying to tell me that if I suddenly went to the United States I'd make happy films? I'll bet if all Canadian films were happy, those same people would turn around and say, 'Canada makes films that are happy, but hollow happiness.' So they're still trying to turn it into losers.

The above interview segments speak to the extreme tensions between artistic intent and the apparent "willfulness" of spectators and critics. Both sides of this tug-of-war suggest that defining the new Canadian cinema in the

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[28] See Robert Fothergill, "Coward, Bully or Clown: The Dream-Life of a Younger Brother," (1973) in Feldman, Seth, and Joyce Nelson, eds. *Canadian Film Reader*. Toronto/ Montréal: Peter Martin Associates/Take One, 1977, pp. 234-250. Also, see Christine Ramsay, "Canadian Narrative Cinema from the Margins: 'The Nation' and Masculinity in *Goin' Down the Road*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, (Vol. 2, Nos. 2-3, 1993), pp. 27-49, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

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early seventies was extremely difficult, and that expectations over what that cinema was or might become had a great impact on how the images were received. If considered under the terms conventionally associated with European, auteur-driven art films or formulaic, American genre cinema, *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero* neither fit the mode of production nor the cultural context. The manipulation of these categories, however, has a great deal to do with the "confusion" over what the films might be about and suggest the uniquely anxious position that films made in Canada occupy as a national cinema. The relationship between art and genre cinemas, as well as the culturally-specific terms of spectatorship, prompt both Pearson's and Shebib's incisive commentary. Yet while their films can fruitfully be situated between Europe and America as a way of analysing certain influences and interests, neither Shebib nor Pearson seem to support the notion that as spectators, Canadians may also engage in a kind of "in between" national subject positioning.

Shebib's and Pearson's films *are* "gloomy" in the sense of foreboding that they set up. As spectators we are cued from the beginning that a positive narrative outcome is unlikely. As the narratives progress, this negative attitude cannot be wholly "blamed" on the loser characters depicted within the films, nor in the end can it be explained as a clichéd dismissal of a cultural product which is disappointingly close, but not quite up to the European or American standard. Our reading of the sense of gloominess and apprehension the films arouse can partially be enhanced by considering them in relation to the genre expectations of the gangster or heist/caper film and the Western. Popular Hollywood cinema — what Darrell Davis (1996) has called "the royal code of moving pictures" (21) — if it helps to inform the films' viewing contexts must then also be the language around which other

cinematic vernaculars develop. To approach some of these contextual and textual elements melodramatically might help us more fully appreciate the "loser" characterizations specifically, as they work with and against representations of masculinity that typify the critical stage or phase of 1970s male genre films.

Several film critics — as well as Shebib's comments above — indicate that genre films had become less escapist and more critical in the 1970s, especially the Western and the Gangster of which the caper film is a subgenre. Barbara Klinger (1994), for example, discusses the critical tendency of these genres in terms of an awareness of generic conventions and familiarity with media culture generally that enabled critical commentary in the films of the New American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. She cites *Bonnie and Clyde* (A. Penn, 1967) and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (R. Altman, 1971) as exemplary of the "reworked versions of original genres, escalating the violence and self-conscious historical importance of the gang in the gangster film or the questioning of the myth of the potent, capable hero in the western" (138). Both *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* fit more readily within this cultural project, but are also generically and culturally "other." On the one hand, they are compelling for the familiarity with which they cite Hollywood Western and heist genres through direct references to the iconography and narrative trajectories associated with them. On the other, both films insist on their distinctiveness from these genres, often taking an ironic or some other cultural distance from the references they make to the myths of American popular culture. My focus in this chapter will be to employ "genre" as an analytic strategy. While I will look at these films in relation to the genres they tentatively occupy, I will also be linking the idea of genre to the stylistic elements of melodrama that operate as additional critical components within

the specific films that help us read issues of nationhood — in particular the problems of disavowal — according to class, gender, and ethnicity.

A Brief Synopsis of the Films

Paperback Hero (P. Pearson, 1972) is a parody of a Western. The story revolves around the escapades of Rick (the Marshall) Dillon, played by Keir Dullea. He struts around playing the outlaw-hero of the American West, even though he lives in small town Deslisle, Saskatchewan. He is often seen with his best friend and fellow hockey player, Polkinov (John Beck). He tries to get a better job (he works as a clerk in the general store), but is nonchalantly shocked with an electric cattle prod by his boss, McCleod (Ted Follows), when he becomes too insistent. Rick is in constant search of women and beer; he looks for ways to improve his odds at getting both without working very hard.

Rick has three women on the go at once: Julie (Linda Sorenson), who, after refusing Rick's sexual advances, is pushed down a flight of stairs. She threatens to press charges, but Rick eventually sweet-talks her out of that and into bed. Joanne (Dayle Haddon), McCleod's daughter, occasionally comes home from university for the weekend when she and Rick get together. She ultimately rejects Rick. Her resistance, and the fact that she is the boss' daughter, naturally make Joanne the girl of his dreams. Loretta (Elizabeth Ashley) is Rick's "girl;" someone he can count on and who "knows the score." Rick won't likely marry her — which is what we are lead to believe she wants — and he sees other women, but she loves him nonetheless, and stands by her man to the tragic end. The film ends in a classic Western shoot-out between Rick and Burdock (George Robertson), the RCMP chief (with backup provided by other RCMP officers) in which Rick is shot dead.

Between Friends (D. Shebib, 1973) is a film that loosely belongs to the caper genre. It begins with Toby (Michael Parks) acting as a driver for a heist of stolen goods. After the heist, Toby goes to Malibu, contemplates the surf, and calls his old friend Chino (Chuck Shamata), who lives in Toronto with his girlfriend, Ellie (Bonnie Bedelia). Chino invites him to visit, and Toby arrives at the same time as Ellie's father, Will (Henry Beckman), is released from prison, an event which we are lead to believe is not uncommon. Will and his best friend, Coker (Hugh Webster), have been planning a "job" — stealing the payroll from a nickel plant in Coniston, Ontario — and they need Toby's and Chino's help. Toby reluctantly gives it because he wants to remain in Toronto until the heat dies down from the California hijacking, and because of his increasing attraction to Ellie.

After they check out the site of the robbery and before they steal the payroll, Coker dies (he's got a bad heart), which affects Will quite deeply. Toby and Ellie end up having an affair, and after Coker's burial, Ellie tells Chino about it in front of Toby and Will. Chino reacts angrily, but they go ahead with the heist, anyway. In a moment of jealousy, Chino distracts the robbery team and one of the payroll accountants shoots Will (who dies soon after). This sets off the alarm and Chino is shot by a guard as they exit the gates of the refinery. A short while later, Ellie and Toby are left standing on a deserted stretch of snow swept highway. Meanwhile, Chino momentarily regains consciousness and unsuccessfully attempts to shoot them and drive off with the money. He dies before he succeeds in either task.

Canadian Cinema and Genre Theory

Christine Ramsay (1993) argues that the metaphors invoked by critics like Margaret Atwood, Robert Fothergill, and John Hofsess in order to deal

with the myths of Canadian culture only go so far in unravelling the discourses of nationhood and masculinity in Canadian cinema. By imposing a "loser mentality" on Canadian culture, Ramsay suggests that they have also uncritically imposed a centrist, pan-Canadian and masculinist point of view on the films that delimits their potential as critical texts. As the few speaking for the many, Atwood, et al. are effectively stating the terms under which the Canadian cinema canon is constructed and upheld. According to Ramsay, a film like *Goin' Down the Road* (Shebib, 1970), is loaded with comparisons between regions of Canada in which socio-economic conditions of privilege and poverty are directly linked to power and masculinity. She suggests that a metonymic approach to the subjects of masculinity and nationalism might permit us to appreciate the critical strategies at play within these texts. Furthermore, we might see the interconnectedness, as well as specific contradictions, between the centre and the margin in other films made in Canada (39).

Ramsay suggests that *Goin' Down the Road* makes visible the very real discrepancies between the economic conditions of centre and margin: in this case the centre (Toronto) relies on cheap migrant labour provided by the margin (Cape Breton) (40). Ramsay argues that critics such as Atwood, Fothergill and Hofsess re-duplicate this centre/margin dichotomy in their analysis of this film and others. I would also argue that they are complicit in maintaining the *critical* boundaries between centre and margin when they ignore the regional, economic, social, and gender differences which operate hegemonically as a cultural critique of Canadian cinema. In other words, to limit these films to a "pan-Canadianist" reading contributes to all kinds of "gate-keeping" that goes well beyond constructing and maintaining the Canadian cinema canon; these critics implicitly restrict the circulation of

discourses of nationhood to a select few, privileging a nationalist recipe "we" can all agree on, and in which losers or victims — typically those occupying marginal positions of class, gender, race, and sexuality — are fresh ingredients "adjusted" like seasoning according to the "good taste" of the critic.

Melodrama also helps us to address these issues by providing an aesthetic paradigm for critically examining the often ignored differences in access to power that social subjects experience. The pan-Canadianist model of cultural analysis assumes that all subjects have equal access to power, supported in part, I would argue, by the context of social programs of the 1960s. These programs and policies later included not only the ideals of multiculturalism and bilingualism, but at least superficially, provided Canadian citizens with equal access to education and health care, and with them the sense that the only differences between Canadians were their individual desires to take full advantage of a progressive system. However, these liberal assumptions do mask the very real differences between class, region, gender and ethnicity that *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* sometimes only subtly address. Because the central characters in both films are white men, we may be inclined to ignore ethnic divisions that underscore their class differences, which melodrama's aesthetic of suffering provides access to. Thus we may otherwise dismiss the long-standing hierarchy that places the Irish (Dillon) or Ukrainian (Polkinov) of Saskatchewan near the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. We may also forget, for example, the fact that the Canadian dream is more readily realized in Toronto, Ontario than practically anywhere else, certainly more easily achieved there than say, in a one-industry nickel town such as Coniston where the majority of *Between Friends* takes place. So while changes to social programs and policies in the 1960s and 1970s, which ushered in such things as inexpensive post-

secondary education as well as official multiculturalism/bilingualism, are to some extent progressive, these initiatives reflected a relatively high standard of living for many but not all Canadians, certainly not those depicted in either *Between Friends* or *Paperback Hero*.

How then, when everything "seems" to be so progressive and optimistic on the surface, do complaints and criticisms about the status quo become legible? The answers do not appear to be as straightforward as many of the critics of the time suggest. For even if we attribute loser qualities to a vague malaise, which according to many critics seems to have struck all the literature and cinema of the country simultaneously, we cannot do so without also acknowledging that people occupying different relationships to social power will define that malaise differently. We cannot, then for example, assume that the thematic concern about survival isn't about putting food on the table or being a woman walking down the street at night, or that a predisposition for pondering the landscape doesn't include smokestacks, slag heaps and housing projects equally as often as mountains, wheat fields, forests and streams. In *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* we get all this and more, but in the manner of the melodrama. Through rapidly shifting emotional temperatures, through the mise-en-scène, music, and the close-up we get these so-called "individual," "domestic" and "personal" issues delivered in a not-so-neat generic container.

Generic categories come with many of the same assumptions as Canadian national cinema studies that I dealt with in Chapter One. Two central assumptions are: first, the terms for defining "nation" and "genre" are fixed and appear ahistorical; and second, the categories are airtight and coherent. Peter Morris (1994) has argued that once the assumption of nationalism was made, the critical debate "about how a 'national cinema'

might be defined" was seriously curtailed (32). Atwood's thematic criticism, which focussed on the prevalence of the landscape, survival and victims/losers in Canadian literature, contributed to a critical context for seeing Canadian cinema in the same light. Conversely, Rick Altman (1999) has recently argued that genre analysis involves long-standing problems going back as far as Aristotle. We can, for example, detect problems with the whole issue of genre categories and generic containment in reconsidering Aristotle's "modes of observation" approach to Horace's almost scientistic taxonomies, both of which reproduced assumptions about the existence and coherence of genre.

This is an especially vexed issue for melodrama, since, as I have already suggested, it has been variously described as a genre, a mode of expression within genres, and a category so large that it affects all cultural representation to varying degrees. Since *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* so overtly adopt the conceits of genre cinema, it might be useful to lay out some of the issues concerning a genre analysis here in order to discuss their relationship to national cinema, and then to see whether melodrama offers us anything else more illuminating.

According to Altman, the basic "error" that genres are airtight categories has lead to a fundamental avoidance of the historically unstable status of genres. There is no acknowledgment that the definition and style of a given genre is receptive to the same kinds of societal shifts that any other notion of aesthetics has faced, and thus that the whole way of considering genre itself has undergone radical changes over time.[29] According to Morris,

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[29] Genre, according to Altman, has undergone several transformations, from difference in definition of the notion of genre to the actual composition of a specific genre's elements. Discussions have veered away from the descriptive impulse of Aristotle's "mimetic attitude" of genre and towards Horace's prescriptive model of literary techniques and back again. From the neo-classical conundrum posed by the example of the tragicomic genre as a grotesque hybrid,

a nation's cinema shares many similar instabilities. Both genre and national cinema analyses and definitions are thus susceptible to social and historical context, but national cinemas like genres are represented in often curiously ahistorical ways. Altman suggests that overlooking changes in genre, and subsequently any theory of its historical specificity, has caused critics to re-duplicate many of genre's methodological shortcomings time and again. The main problem, as Altman sees it, is the tendency for theorists to consider genre in a temporal vacuum. Altman argues that it might be worth examining the fallout of Horace's treatment of genre more closely for its relevance to contemporary theory and genre analysis, as well as to provide a useful theoretical basis for re-examining historical genres.

Altman describes Horace's litany schematically, as an idea in which "generic imitation [emerges] as a major form of cultural indoctrination" (3).[30] Popular genre cinema has suffered from this cultural perspective. The idea that genres are almost always seen as tutoring the audience in the prevailing conservative ideology is long-standing, and may help to account for the negative attitude towards popular culture cited by Pam Cook (1985) and shared by modernist (Frankfurt School) theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972). Notwithstanding that *theories* of genre cinema have circulated with more seriousness in recent decades, as I suggested in the preceding chapter, the idea of "the generic" or popular has been consistently linked with the worst of mass culture: unrestrained capitalism and mind-numbing, undifferentiated cultural products consumed unreflectively. And although many theorists of popular culture have challenged a number of

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to the romantic ideal that genres are often impossible to differentiate from one another, genres have over time occupied a greater or lesser position of cultural importance and aesthetic clarity.

[30] See Altman, *Film/Genre*, pp. 1-12.

these ideas, the cleavage between popular culture and national cinema persists. For as much as nationalist and genre approaches to cinema actually share in their basic orientation, national cinemas do not conventionally suffer from the same (mis)perception. Quite the opposite. National cinemas are often perceived as prestige cinemas distinct from Hollywood schlock; one of their implicit functions is to deflect the "corrupting" elements of genre cinema as mass (American) culture.

But what of genre cinema in Canada in the period that *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero* were made in; a time *preceding* the official genre film tax shelters and when few Canadian films ever made it to the "big screen"? What might genre mean in this context? What could it have to do with helping to define or undermine a sense of national cinema? If one of the purposes of posing national cinemas against Hollywood's "generic" cinema is to distinguish them while simultaneously ensuring national cinema's superior cultural value, then in the case of Canadian cinema, specifically the examples of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*, it would appear to have failed miserably at both tasks. As neither clearly copycat American genre films nor works emulating the Euro art house, they are difficult to categorize. And Altman pays scant attention to what new terms and conditions melodrama may provide to the question of the relationship between genre and cinema. The separation of genre and national cinemas is perhaps a distinctly postmodern problem that melodrama may help us to address if not resolve. *Paperback Hero* does not distinguish itself as Canadian cinema without getting its hands dirty by "always-already" occupying the Western genre. It does so in order to comment critically upon the genre as well as to address its own implications for a national cinema directly.

As a critical approach that moved away from both literary and auteur analyses, the systematic study of film genre that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s seems aimed at just such a target. In the early 1970s, the British journal *Screen* published a number of articles on genre, and several book length studies followed. All of these studies were at least in part indebted to Northrop Frye's (1957) and Claude Levi-Strauss' (1963) ideas about the function of myth in culture. The in-depth analyses of the Western and the gangster/crime film, which inaugurated these genre studies, were also explicitly placed within the domain of nationalism.[31] Genre theories focused on the manner in which the production and marketing of films could reveal culturally-embedded codes particular to a given society (Buscombe 1970, McArthur 1972, Ryall in Cook, 1985); Neale (1980). As Colin McArthur (1972) puts it, "the western and the gangster film have a special relationship with American society. Both deal with critical phases of American history. It could be said that they represent America talking to itself..." (18).

Genre films, given their highly codified nature, also present an opportunity to consider a variety of models for the tacit agreements between the spectator, as a stand-in for the (American) subject, and the cinema, as representative of American cultural industries at large. Arguably, genre films participate in community building by providing a forum in which like-minded viewers can rehearse their social and ideological similarities through the act of watching films. To look at *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* as critical examples of cinematic genres invites us to re-evaluate some theoretical models of spectatorship as they relate to genre, something that

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[31] It is certainly noteworthy that the Western and the crime genres were not only the first representative genres to be dealt with by critics in the early 1970s, they were among the first Hollywood films ever made. Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), is a film that contains elements of both the Western and the heist film.

many genre films provoked in the 1970s. Their re-evaluation could include what Pam Cook (1985) refers to as the implicitly pejorative attitude about genre cinema as mass culture wherein "second-hand meanings and stereotypes associated with mass production" were seen as problematic because they "militated both against the personal expression of the artist and the authentic portrayal of reality" (58).

Theoretically, the "contract" between spectator and film is a highly conventionalized feature of genre cinema; it links together many of the genre's other formal elements in part through textual codification, a tacit agreement formalized by repetition. For example, the western and the caper film rely heavily on plot and location. Thus deviations from standard narrative structures or settings might be ways of disrupting other conventions and ideas. It could be argued that in this case melodrama is integral to generic revision and helps to highlight the "givens" of convention to make them appear strange. However, in order for generic analysis that focuses on melodrama to "work" as formal criticism applied to **revisionist** genre films, its terms must change accordingly. That is, the examples in question should not be expected to "rise above" their location in popular culture so much as transcend the limitations of the generally non-critical context in which it circulates. The promise of melodrama's critical aesthetic practice lies in the possibility that it will shed light on so-called invisible cultural myths embedded in the genre as exemplary of mass culture, and that this will in turn provide analytic space in which to reevaluate specific cultural issues.

The implications for national cinema that a turn towards the melodramatic might indicate have to do with the way in which the self-conscious construction of both the nation and the revisionist generic

"container" of the films help to manage, by analogy, the expectations and meanings of social and cultural experiences. These would include the most pressing issues of the day as they are read into the film's narrative. This notion has particular significance for many of the films made in Canada for three aesthetically and historically important reasons. First, as I discussed in the opening chapter, it has never been an easy task to define Canadian cinema as either art cinema or popular cinema. Second, it is uncertain whether nationalism is a trope or a strategy deployed by these films and, indeed, whether it is intended to be taken straight or ironically. Third, it allows us to pose the thorny question of whether Canadian cinema, or any other national cinema, can be considered a sub-genre of Hollywood, represented by exemplary films with conventions that have stood in for a so-called national consciousness. Indeed, all three issues come together in Jim Leach's (1995) claim that Canadian genre cinema of the 1970s seems to be looking for "meaningful boundaries" — ones that could be extended beyond the geographic to the personal as well as generic. Leach refers to later genre films (especially early 1990s road movies) that demystify "the mythic power of American popular culture" (490) as significant to such a project.

There is one striking way in which a genre approach might seem like an unusual way to procede with an analysis of Canadian cinema, however. Genre cinema conventionally implies a specific industrial context which, as I suggested earlier, is largely missing from the production of *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero*. It is not until **after** *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero* were released that the spate of tax credit-induced bona fide genre films were made under the Capital Cost Allowance program (Clandfield 1987, 109-110). Thus, Shebib's and Pearson's films are distinct from even this pseudo-Hollywood industrial model of filmmaking. Yet there is much to be gained

from analysing them as exemplary hybrid genre films that were able to self-consciously comment on the terms of cultural persuasion under which all (Canadian) films are inevitably made, even with the only clearly established language for doing so being the revisionist American genre film of the 1960s and 70s. Arguably, *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero* are able to anticipate cinematic irony in Canada which had yet to reach a critical mass sufficient to call it a convention. Canadian cinema history to this point had not been concerned with popular genre films as a motivating force for production. Yet Canadian cultural distance from and proximity to Hollywood provides a context, which in this instance, invites a reading of the films as ironic genres that engage in critical points of intertextuality and that push the already troubled terms of genre cinema from this period even further. Pearson parodies the Western by engaging in excessive intertextuality and linking it with hockey, and Shebib mixes the caper film (a sub-genre of the Gangster film) with elements of cinéma direct, but in all cases melodrama provides the rhetorical centre for doing so.

Paperback Hero and *Between Friends* may challenge the conventional boundaries of generic classification, but it is in the ideological movement away from Hollywood cinema that the cultural critiques deployed by the films become legible. Specifically, the ironic and melodramatic treatment of the genres permit such readings. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Peter Brooks (1976, 1994b) and John Cawelti (1991) claim that the techniques of melodrama take up a uniquely critical position on the prevailing discourses of power. The melodrama provides the language for articulating inequities and facilitating social transitions at the cultural level. Three central discourses of identity: class, gender and nation are foregrounded by manipulating the genres and blending them with melodrama. Both films highlight the positive

and negative performative elements of identity; what might be "performed" as the forced repetition of the terms of (generic, American) identity, but also the liberatory opportunity to re-enact the self at any time. These elements are allegories for a national cinema; they highlight the agonistic terms of identity which are issues that become visible, in part, because the films are situated at so many crossroads. By existing "somewhere" as well as "in between" places—genres, nations and cultural histories—the films are both aesthetically *generic* and culturally specific.

In the case of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends,* the issues raised by the formal contestation of the genre on its own terms and the possibilities for culturally-specific national cinemas are inexorably linked. Both films can be viewed in relation to American genre films, but for genres so firmly rooted to setting, when they are located in the Canadian context they take on a critical dimension they might not otherwise attain. Here setting and context merge; they function extrinsically and spatially; displacing the films by literally relocating the genre to Canada. The western and the gangster film both deal with the meaning of law and order which are modified by social conventions based on the not-so-distant agrarian past, the complexity of the present, and the sometimes frightening uncertainty of the future. It might be argued, then, that the context created by the dislocation of the mythical time of the genre also indicates a shift away from its intrinsic, historically American orientation, as well. Thus, although *Paperback Hero* may quite easily be viewed as a Western, it is also emphatically a contemporary Canadian Western, a self-reflexive or mock Western; it is also a hockey film. *Between Friends* is a heist/caper film that makes reference to the surfer culture of California, but is located primarily in industrialized centres of

Ontario. By blending these other literally dislocated generic elements with cinéma direct the film comments on its uneasy relationship with "reality."

Generic blending or bending begins with the manipulation of the fundamental elements of cinema: fleeting images that exist in space and time. The temporal disjuncture of the western genre evoked by *Paperback Hero* grounds it in the early 1970s, but also recalls a much earlier time of the "real" West to which direct access is impossible; the spatial disjuncture of *Between Friends* locates it "in between" small town Coniston, Ontario, Toronto, and "California." These changes to the genres' temporal-spatial locations help contribute to the films' cultural specificity. As examples of genre cinema, they thus occupy both a specifically Canadian and contestatory position vis à vis the cultural "totality" of the American Other. The films can, in this context, be read as openly critical of the generic and other cultural antecedents that participate in the construction of a mythical male hero. These myths, in which masculinity is implicated, are tied to the processes of nation-building or dismantling, the staples of the male-centred universes of the western and the gangster genres.

By placing the films within an unruly national cinema and revisionist generic framework, as I have suggested above, they are spatially and temporally dislocated from the classic Hollywood paradigm as well as from conventional nationalist readings of Canadian cinema, and are thus doubly positioned as critical texts. These films are thus more than aesthetically self-reflexive, they are socially and culturally reflexive. Like the genres they seemingly represent, they are "outlaw texts," unruly examples of either art cinema or genre cinema, located neither geographically nor aesthetically in Europe or Hollywood. The films are like thieves who stealthily plunder elements from Hollywood genres, and occasionally those associated with

European art cinema. This helps situate them in-between very different established notions of genre or national cinemas, a strategy of doubleness that disturbs what Stephen Greenblatt (1996) calls the "new-old" from the sediment of film language (as quoted in Bhabha 200).

As I have previously suggested, location is often a highly codified and conventionalized element of genre cinema, particularly the two under discussion. For the Western, the very genre depends on locating it "in the West," an idea that is historically related perhaps even as far back as to the pleasures of the early cinema of attractions and travelogues, in which the spectator is "transported" to a mythical yet domestic locale. According to Ed Buscombe (1998), the specific location of the Western genre in the western part of the United States is indebted to the history of American landscape painting and photography which had, by the 1860s, become exclusively associated with the depiction of "mountains in general and the Rockies in particular" (116). Buscombe underscores the relationship between location and genre when he states that, "[f]rom the earliest Westerns located in the Rockies of Colorado to the classics of the 1950s and 1960s, mountain scenery has been used to authenticate 'Westernness'" (118). In *Paperback Hero*, there are no mountains. The prairies represent another kind of westernness, an alterity signalled by its dislocation from the iconographic "Western" scenic conventions associated with places such as Monument Valley, as much as through the film's generic "dislocation." As spectators, we may recognize the central character as a parody of the Western hero, but in terms of setting we may ask, what kind of a western is this anyway? There are no mountains to scale or imposing physical obstacles to overcome other than the nagging daily fear of fertile soil threatening to turn into dust. In the flatness of everyday life, human figures both dwarf and are overwhelmed by the sheer spaciousness,

the absence of modulation, of the landscape. Yet the characters are presented in tension with the landscape as both central and insignificant elements of the mise-en-scène. We do not see them tirelessly toiling against the awesome combination of canyon, mountain, and desert as they are often portrayed in the high angle long shots of classic Hollywood westerns. Instead, we get a number of close-ups and straight on medium shots as though we were accompanying them in their daily rituals. The effect is to encourage recognition rather than to submit their troubles to the distancing effects of myth when the issues they face start to become overwhelming. This strategy is certainly more in keeping with the melodrama than the classic western.[32] Part of what keeps the hero heroic is distance, and the sense that, while human, he is clearly distinct from us, superior in his ability to thrive in the semi-tamed West. What the characters in *Paperback Hero* rail against are mundane things like unemployment, a hockey rink that won't freeze properly, and uppity women who don't know their places and want something the men can't or won't give them. These characters are not up to the challenges they face.

The dislocation of *Paperback Hero* also foregrounds the relational elements of "the west." West of where? Proximity and distance are relative concepts, after all. The west, it implicitly suggests, is not a pre-given and fixed space. The film's setting in Deslisle, Saskatchewan locates it in a real place, and indicates that what happens occurs here and now with real consequences, not *there* and *then*, something the deluded central character Rick Dillon may glimpse but cannot face head-on. If the idea of the nation is, as Buscombe (1998) suggests, encapsulated in representations of the West, including the

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[32] I would argue that melodrama is never completely absent from any genre. My argument here is more about the strategies that are often associated with melodrama as they are deployed in this western.

Western film, *Paperback Hero* holds no such promise for Canada. The Hollywood western is implicated in deflecting attention from North-South tensions (following the Civil War), and thus participates in consolidating a nationalist agenda; the "United States" is an ideal that is first and foremost ideological, a geopolitical homogenizing moment revealing the hegemony of nationhood.

The idea of dislocation that both films exploit is also indicated by the fact that by the early 1970s male genre films, such as the Western and the gangster films, had undergone such a degree of generic revision that many of the typical markers of classic Hollywood genre cinema are debatable anyway.[33] As Shebib notes, it's the temper of the times; even American films weren't particularly escapist in 1973. Indeed, Altman might see films like Shebib's and Pearson's as signalling the last throes of genre cinema's classical paradigm in part because the narrative conventions which constitute them are no longer stable, the genre categories are leaky, and thus the fundamental suspension of disbelief for the spectator is virtually impossible to sustain. Reconsidering the status of these Canadian films as concrete, critical examples of the American genres they ostensibly represent thus offers a corrective to the prominently held notion that genres have always been limited and self-contained, an idea that has much larger implications for salvaging a myth of nationhood, as I have already suggested.

Part of the critique offered by *Between Friends* and *Paperback Hero* occurs with the foregrounding of salvaging operations at work historically

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[33]See Catherine Russell, *Narrative Morality: Death, Closure, and New Wave Cinemas*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995) for a more in depth discussion of Western and gangster films from this period such as *The Wild Bunch* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Russell argues that the death of the main characters indicates that the genres have undergone a fundamental reorientation (173-208).

within the western and the heist or caper film, a possible primary effect of the repetition-variation nature of genre. By re-staging conventions in the newly de-stabilized context of genre cinema of the period in conjunction suggest the impossibility of the films' to simply rehearse their generic codes unquestioningly. If repositioning these genres by relocating them in Canada is a form of cultural and aesthetic dislocation, it also acknowledges the cultural currency of elsewhere; a historical and geographical proximity that is "uncanny;" at once too close and too far away. The operation of salvaging through excessive generic repetition of convention and intertextuality, and moreover when this process is invoked from a disjointed cultural perspective, functions not to reinforce and reify cultural traditions but to make them visible, and thus more susceptible to critique. For example, rather than celebrating the unbridled individualism of our so-called heroes in keeping with the conventions of the western and the caper film, the overall effect is to examine the central element of the "tradition of masculinity" within the films and to question what feeds their mythical status and nationalistic assumptions, a point that is underscored by the fact that both films end with the altogether unheroic even meaningless deaths of the central protagonists.

What might require our attention, then, are the processes of subjectivity that are enacted within cultural texts like genre films that affect the conditions under which gender and nationhood are constructed and construed. A pre-condition of any salvage operation suggests that, from the outset, the thing to be salvaged is in danger of disappearing. Reclamation can be a redemptive move, as well as a reactionary one. In both films, masculinity is linked with death and as this is unheroically depicted, the spectator is not invited to engage in nostalgic longing for it. Rather, this is the tragedy that

befalls the main characters: their inability to get past their own heroic, mythic constructions of masculinity. As Les Rose and Barry Pearson note in the introduction to the script of *Paperback Hero*, "[t]he essence of the film concerns itself with Rick's personal struggle against his impending obsolescence..." (as quoted in *Cinema Canada*, Oct-Jan. 1973/4, 43). If we take the issue of obsolescence as not merely what Rick or Chino deal with, but as metaphor for the Canadian film industry at the time, the films can be seen as both signalling the very beginning of a surge in Canadian cinema as well as anticipating its end. In this case, deploying irony becomes a way to hedge one's bets; independent of whether disaster strikes, irony assists in forestalling it. Irony, like other salvage operations, reluctantly offers a little hope while at the same time suggesting a lack of faith; it signals a preparedness to survive in the face of emergency. The further irony, however, is that, like masculinity, Canadian cinemas do not in fact "disappear" or die, their elements simply re-appear as a pastiche. Exhausted of meaning, these archetypes are sometimes channeled through Hollywood genre cinema or some other familiar cultural referent, and perhaps as a result of the heightened anxiety produced by cultural and geographic proximity, these elements often resurface as self-parody.[34]

Towards a closer analysis: melodrama and genre

As I have so far been arguing, *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* make inconsistent references to the western and the heist/caper film. Generic references are introduced immediately in the films' opening sequences, however, in both films these first images are dark and their narrative "purpose" is somewhat confusing. As spectators, we are introduced to the

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[34] See, for example, my discussion of *Perfectly Normal* (Y. Simoneau, 1991) in Chapter Five.

rather unclear action of the films that, in both cases, occurs at night and early the next morning. The openings combine dreamlike imagery with more classically realist depictions, situating us uncomfortably in the narrative by suggesting two possible ways of engaging with the films: as the fantasy-mindscape of the central protagonists or as a genre films. These are the positions we are invited to alternate between throughout the films. Rather than introduce us to a narrative enigma as such, which conventionally would assure us of its inevitable resolution, both films focus on the tonal elements and textures of the cinematic, thus emphasizing what might be called an *aesthetic* enigma. This sets up a tentative, dialectical relationship with melodrama that foregrounds mood and style over narrative action. Narrative consequence, at least initially, is side-stepped. The films do not depend on stating the problem to be solved, for the opening sequence of each film offers no investment in creating suspense or establishing a problem. Rather, the openings are banal and add a curiously inert element to the films, which in conjunction with the melodramatic, initiates an unsettling relationship with the films; in other words, the style does not fit the genre.

In *Paperback Hero*, the first image is a silhouetted figure dressed in Western attire. He is presented in slow motion moving through a minimalist landscape as barely a slash of blue and black with a small wedge of white on the left side of the screen. This image is accompanied by the eerie sound of wind whistling; you can almost expect to hear the jangling of spurs as the figure walks from screen right to left, but the wind completely overwhelms any other potential elements of the soundtrack. The image changes from the highly aestheticized, optical printing to "normal" imagery and speed. Now the man in Western costuming takes target practice on what were in the 1970s

recognizable as Canadian beer bottles, short (by comparison to American) bottles affectionately known as "stubbies."

A number of comments can be made here about the kind of reading this opening sets up. By introducing two forms of cinematic address, as suggested above, *Paperback Hero* builds on the division suggested by the genre-mindscape split, indicating immediately that the image — whether overtly manipulated or not — is foremost an image, a construction of ideas using the cultural (cinematic, generic) materials at hand. The shifting image is an unstable reference point that effectively foregrounds its own mythical status. Rather than seamlessly presenting the ideas that are conventionally conjured up by the Western genre, the image is burdened by the responsibility of its own construction. In particular, the image is iconographically associated with the cowboy and selected from the syntagm of the Western hero; a highly sexualized, male gendered body. This costume includes: a Stetson, bandanna, chambray shirt, leather or suede vest and chaps, jeans and a six-shooter holstered to a firm thigh and swaggering hips. The Western genre works in conjunction with the melodramatic impulses of the film, which tend to emphasize that the body is encoded and designed to be read like text. In the case of *Paperback Hero*, this body will carry the greatest burden of meaning of all the film's visual and aural elements. The combined effects of this image and the soundtrack introduce the ghost-like "presence" that is referred to visually in the opening and in the lyrics of the theme song. It also places this overtly genre-encoded moment within a cultural history by transforming the image into a bridge between the past and the present.

Conventionally, the male and female bodies in the Western are sites over which several gender-specific contests are staged. So too with the melodrama and perhaps it is only a matter of degree and context. In the

Western, physical strength and endurance are coded as masculine, and burdened with the weight of representing individuality, freedom and the promise associated with the frontier. The classical western hero is usually successful in his attempts to change the social conditions in which he and others live; he is often able to balance the freedom offered by the west with the restrictive conventions of life in the east. The Western is utopian in its vision of male social mobility. The melodrama contrasts with the orientation of the Western in this manner. According to Peter Brooks (1994b), the melodrama treats the body as a site of social change, but before it can represent the potential for progress it undergoes a process of overt signification. First it must be recognized as oppressed, then given visual presence, and finally encoded as a sign of virtuousness. It is more often the case that the melodramatic body silently registers dissatisfaction with the status quo by refusing to be ignored. As spectators, we are invited to read between speech and gesture via the body's ability to draw attention to the disparity between acting and appearing. This, in combination with dialogue and other elements of the soundtrack, often multiplies meanings in the melodrama. These sometimes competing tonal elements create an alternate or supplementary body discourse that works against the limitations of the genre.

In the opening of *Paperback Hero*, the body is central to the film's entrance into a debate between fantasy and reality, as well as posing playfulness against violence, and passivity against action. The opening sequence flirts with providing access to an idealized male body. However, by presenting the body as an index, or an embodied syntagm of western conventions, it foregrounds the body as a performative site of visual pleasure encoded with several meanings; it is a spectacular mobile object, as well as a passive, phantasmagoric body. This body acts as a gratifying trace to the real

body, meanwhile reminding us that it is layered with meanings including generic elements already heavy with cultural significance. Yet this is somehow also a very fragile body, the sense of foreboding introduced in the opening images permeate the film. The image of the gunslinger conveys a complex relationship with mortality as it relates to the myth of the (anti)heroic body; as image, as sign, it offers the promise of both life and death. It is both fleeting and ephemeral, and stubbornly substantial. The foreshadowing of violence and death that is suggested is not displaced by the second image of Rick Dillon's goofy portrayal of the outlaw. Rather, the tone of the sequence rests uneasily between artifice (fantasy, appearance) and foreboding (reality, mortality), a position that is in fact more central to the melodrama.

Although the melodramatic performing body often competes with the elements of the plot's trajectory to indicate another way of conveying meaning, this is not a strict rule that overrides the narrative/genre context, but works as a supplementary system of signification. Obviously, there are numerous examples where the techniques of genre, narrative and melodramatic tone work together. In *Paperback Hero*, this combination is perhaps best emphasized by the medium shots and medium close-ups of Rick where the details of his costume are more readily accessible. In one sequence, for example, Rick's eyes appear to be rimmed in kohl. This can be accounted for by the film's location in the dusty prairie, which would emphasize the "realism" of the image. An alternative reading — one that does not negate, but modifies the realist position — might associate this detail of costuming, not so strictly with the other elements of the mise-en-scène, but with a larger cultural reference: the phantasm of the silent (Western) film star. This reading is underscored by the theme song in which the lyrics refer to the

ghost-like image of the unseen hero. These double registers introduce the notion of haunting in another way; haunting exists as a reflexive device in keeping with the title's acknowledgment of the film's intended artifice (a *paperback* hero). As a strategy, it multiplies the positions offered by the film, unsettling the spectator's relationship to the film's discourse on gender, class and nation, which is always lurking below the surface of the narrative, as an anxiety and apprehension that never really leave the film.

These reflexive gestures account for some of the film's social critiques; the fact that the terms of address are never clearly realist is directly connected to the unrelenting "reality" of life in the small prairie town and the impossibility of escape even through fantasy. These are what Homi Bhabha (1996) might identify as "uncanny cultural moments;" in this case, a subtle anachronism effectively pauses the generic discourse and invites us to take stock of its implications. These reflexive strategies are clearly linked to the "moral regeneration" or redemption offered by the postmodern melodrama. The conscious manipulation of both temporal and cultural proximity to and distance from the genre are consistent with the ways in which we may encounter what Bhabha calls the "projective-past" of the nation. Historically, many critical aesthetic elements of the melodrama have been associated with facilitating a change in the prevailing social order. Re-framed and re-presented, these moments modify our relationship with the genre by providing "time" for critical analysis. They are moments, in which, as he puts it "our contemporary historical moment requires to be read, and framed, in temporalities that articulate transition, or the uncanny moments in a process of social transformation" (200). Rick clings to his status as an ideal image of masculinity of the American West throughout the film, insisting over and over again that he is "the Marshall of this town." This occurs even while his

authority is slipping away, and his potency is challenged by both male and female characters, with the notable exception of Loretta who knowingly and wilfully participates in his fantasy. Rick Dillon plays his part; he re-enacts the terms of a hybrid national/genre identity within strictly gendered terms when he reaches into the past for a script as to how he might perform the self in terms of the Western hero, but Rick is also a hockey player with more clearly Canadian defined referents.[35] This is a self-other (per)formed by delusion and creative resistance oscillating between self-imprisonment and self-creation. As a western hero, Rick is literally out of time, stuck with an image he cannot project into the future. As a hockey hero, he is out of place, stuck playing for a third-rate team with bad coaching, irate fans and an ice surface that won't freeze properly. By pausing these moments for critical reflection, the film thus reminds us, in the manner suggested by Bhabha, that there are consequences associated with resisting or playing out cultural myths.

Between Friends also introduces us to an uncertain time-space with the only anchor to location an intertitle that reads: California. The film begins at night at the end of a heist with one of the central characters, Toby, "riding shotgun" for the hijacking of a truck loaded with goods. The next morning Toby goes to his ex-wife's house, gives her a large sum of money (presumably from the heist), looks in on his son asleep in bed, and tells her he is going away for awhile. The next image is a seascape consisting of rocks, sand and ocean. This classic "view" might logically presumed to be from Toby's perspective because he has mentioned leaving and has asked his ex-wife in passing whether she ever takes their son surfing. The status of the image

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[35] It is worth noting, however, that Rick bears a striking resemblance to Guy Lafleur, who played for the Montreal Canadiens between 1971 and 1985, and thus would have been contemporary with the film. Furthermore, the Deslisle hockey team takes the Habs colours and logo for their own.

within the sequence is uncertain, however. It might at first be considered an insert shot that originates from "nowhere" since it is only much later in this long take that the point of view is visually confirmed as Toby's through a classic shot- reverse shot strategy.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the long shot/long take is that, as a framing strategy that begins and ends the film, it creates an uncanny spatial-temporal relationship with the spectator; it is both too long and too far away. Although stylistically different, it is also a diegetic, dialectical element indicating a "presence," and an authority similar to the opening of *Paperback Hero*. It is a discursive strategy within the film that is not otherwise overtly commented on, but remains a form of aesthetic haunting which momentarily pauses the narrative. This occurs at the very beginning and at significant moments throughout the film to set up the spectatorial conditions of possibility for considering the relationship among generic and cultural references that *Between Friends* makes.

To further underscore the mythical or uncertain origin of this image, while Toby is looking out at the surf, a young male surfer comes by and asks him, "Are you Toby?" Toby looks up and replies, "Yeah." The surfer continues, "You used to surf, right? You were really good." Toby grunts an acknowledgment. As the young man walks away, he says, "Well, see ya around, eh?" The effect of the long take, which does not immediately establish the point of view as Toby's, taken together with the exchange between Toby and the surfer, highlight the possibility that the moment was a product of Toby's imagination. It is unclear whether the conversation between them actually took place, or even whether a similar conversation occurred at another place and time. We do not know whether it is Toby's wishful mindscreen, or wistful reverie. Is he thinking back to the halcyon

days when he and Chino surfed together? The answer is unclear but suggestive since the sequence ends in a long shot of the ocean, and Toby calls Chino immediately in the next sequence in order to make plans to visit him.

The technique of the long shot/long take, which occurs twice in the opening, has often been employed as a cinematic technique that indicates a respect for "real" time-space relationships. It has sometimes even been employed as a choice to make an overtly political statement about the relationship between realism and material reality at the hands of directors like Jean Renoir, the Italian neo-realists, and in keeping with the film's own release date, with the interventions of direct cinema filmmakers. But in this context it is used quite differently. Rather than confirming the mimetic effect of the image by assuring the spectator of its direct relationship to physical reality, the sequence instead introduces doubt about the image. In this context the long take becomes a rhetorical strategy that questions the relationship between the image and reality. Also, the telephoto lens tends to foreground the constructedness of the image by "flattening" it as well as making us aware that there is someone who is looking. The combination of the long take and the long shot in conjunction with the location and the uncertain point of view thus poses the question to the viewer, "where does this image come from?" and "who is responsible for it?" It is a cinematic example of the cultural "double take" that is implied in Bhabha's notion of the projective-past. In this instance, space rather than time is more overtly manipulated. Its effect is similar to the opening of *Paperback Hero*, however, in the sense that it offers "space" for a critical analysis of the image by confronting the spectator with a spatial dislocation. These kinds of obstacles are cultural moments that, according to Bhabha, provide an opportunity for renewal through "dislocation, translation and re-situation" (1996, 200).

The uncertain spatial-temporal location of the early sequences in *Between Friends* is further emphasized by the fact that they seem to take place "nowhere." The opening intertitle has identified the original location as California, a highly allusive reference point that, in addition to the Hollywood dream machine, has often been associated with a particularly "free" state of mind. In both cases, the relevance of place is diminished in favour of "head space." It is not until Toby calls Chino, Chino asks him where he is, and Toby holds up the phone to the open air and says, "Malibu; 8 foot and glassy," that the location is re-confirmed. However, in the sequence that precedes this, the surfer uses the distinctly English-Canadian colloquialism, "eh?" at the end of his sentence, which also signals the end of the conversation. This introduces another level of doubt as to the status of the time and place in which this ocean sequence occurs. In retrospect, when we later hear Toby and Chino reminisce about the good old days of surfing, and Chino's still current dream of the good life in California, we might also assume that the "eh" simply reminded Toby of Chino (another Canadian caught up in living out the surfer mythology), and that his decision to visit him in Toronto was sparked by the chance association in his mind prompted by either memory or the encounter with the ex-patriate surfer. In any case, the colloquial "eh" sets up at metonymic link between Canada and Chino. It does underscore the overall notion that the film's "plot" is a product of destiny: controlled by chance and the whim (or fate and ineptness) of the characters.

Later in the film, this same long shot/long take technique is used to establish distance with the narrative action taking place. This occurs notably at Coker's funeral, and in the penultimate and closing sequences of the film when Will and Chino are killed. The long shot/long take combination literally disrupts time and space within the film so that the viewer is

"distanced" from the events, and provided a moment of imposed contemplation. Curiously, although the camera's distance from objects in the mise-en-scène is conventionally deployed as a strategy to approximate physical distance and to convey emotional detachment from the narrative action, in these sequences the effect is quite different. While the long shot in the funeral sequence does denote privacy, keeping the spectator "away from" the grieving friends, it apparently does not do so in order to refrain from spectacle altogether. Rather, the funeral bier takes centre stage; the framing is in keeping with the proscenium of early cinema and emphasizes the performance elements of the scene. When Will begins to sing "Shall We Gather by the River" over the buried remains of his friend, the film's invocation of melodrama via American popular culture becomes clearest. This reference to John Ford's westerns, generally and specifically the funeral scene in *The Searchers* (1956), is not tragedy but melodrama, and in keeping with one of their differences, the effect is not strictly pathos but irony. The stylistic techniques are aimed at critiquing the references rather than reifying them.

Such moments, in fact, occur in both films and are indicative of events wherein the spectator is addressed in the manner suggested by Thomas Elsaesser (1987): as two spectators. In the New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Elsaesser argues that the spectator is "always being addressed simultaneously as a naive and ironic one, an innocent and a knowing one" (166). In the Canadian context, the 'wilful' placement of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* within the framework of genre cinema might be seen as both a naive and ironic desire on the part of the films' directors to make sense of these very familiar modes of address while still maintaining a critical, cultural distance from them. In both films, however,

the dislocating aspects of style compete with the films' more reassuring elements. Thus, these films also address us as two spectators and this oscillating mode of address is attributable to melodrama. In *Between Friends* the already loose sub-generic boundaries and conventions of the gangster/crime/heist/caper film referred to are modified by the surfer culture context. These "genres" (as with the Western) typically include a self-interested, or self-motivated, central male character who has an ambivalent relationship to a central male authority figure, represented by the law or another "outlaw." These characters often display a strangely indifferent attitude towards an endless supply of sexual stimulation that conventionally takes the form of money and women. And, if as the Western suggests, the search for the frontier is never-ending, the crime/gangster film can be seen as a kind of self-satisfied response to the physical limitations imposed by an urban milieu. Surfing as a metaphor for skimming a liminal space (the shoreline) provides a useful opportunity for rethinking complex discourses of nature and culture as they are depicted in both films. The surfer conquers a fluid spatiality; the western hero, the undefined west. The surfer takes himself and his surfboard out into the ocean if only in order to ride the wave back to shore. The Western hero tames and defends a new frontier in order to escape the tameness of the urban space. Through their temporal and spatial dislocation of genres both films comment on the ironies of representing of masculinity in contemporary Canadian culture.

Double-Talk or Ironic Nationalism

The idea of the double and the identification of parody as a mode of contestation is implicit in the playful-painful approach to story-telling evident in the examples provided by *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*.

Those "twisted" theories of Canadian irony (Hutcheon 1988) that I discussed briefly in Chapter One, and its "double," ressentiment, (Dorland 1988) are especially relevant to my analysis of the films. Both *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* deal with the myths of American culture in a self-conscious way by manipulating the conventions of popular genre films. They extend their critique of American culture to a self-reflexive level that also takes aim at the second-hand or one-step removed character of Canadian culture suggested by the appropriation of classic American genre films. In both films the ironic mode offers several tones or registers including satire and melancholy. In both Dorland's and Hutcheon's arguments, the subjectivity of the speaker and those immediately addressed — namely the Canadian subject — are at stake. This subjectivity forms a tenuous link to the fractured identities newly generated within the interpretative community of the genre, and positions the imagined nation as essentially, ironically masculine. But Linda Hutcheon (1990) argues that irony is a way of "speaking with a forked tongue," an idea that she claims historically has comprised much of Canadian rhetoric. She insists that to be ironic is not necessarily to engage in fence-sitting (although it could be) since it involves taking a position, however open to divergent interpretations that position might be. Rather, Hutcheon claims that the power of irony "depends on the twin conditions of context and community of belief" (10).

The metaphor of the forked tongue that Hutcheon employs is a self-conscious irony aimed at highlighting what could be an almost endless regress of "doubleness/duplicity" located in a specifically Canadian post/colonial context. As a clichéd expression, likely drawn from the American Western (novel and film), the metaphor is resurrected here as the "once removed" recollection of the history of a settler nation, a

representation that, in this updated version, *knowingly* speaks for the native population of North America. This metaphor recalls the familiar (mythical) line, "white man speak with forked tongue," but its ironic stance locates it in a number of different crossroads inside and outside the discourses of racism and colonization. It permits the speaker to oscillate between criticism and complicity, something that the appropriation of American film genres also offers to *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*. In what might seem like a contradiction in terms — or at least an uncomfortable suspension between visibility and invisibility — *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* are positioned as cultural texts that are overtly marked by the experience of American culture and haunted by it. The examples of nationalism and masculinity within the film are always modified by these generic ghosts; they function as historical and aesthetic antecedents that hover just above, suspended behind or beyond it making them seem uncanny or strange. The central critique of these films arises from the apparition that follows them around like a spectre from the grave disturbing the sanctity of the assumptions about programmatic nationalism and masculinity.

Do these films simply parody the Hollywood traditions of genre cinema, merely playing out what some critics have identified as a "natural" cycle of genre regeneration?[36] Linda Hutcheon (1992) has also pointed out that parody is a volatile trope that can easily misfire. However well-aimed the critique may be — or how well-intentioned the new cinema culture of the period may have been — the twin concerns of Canadian and masculine identity in the early 1970s form part of a larger social context of constraint and contestation. In many of the films of the period, parody becomes one of the ways of dealing with the dominance of Hollywood cinema, as well as

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[36] See Tom Ryall's discussion of genre development in Pam Cook (1985).

responding to various political issues such as the second wave of feminism, and the Quiet Revolution. Parody is like Hutcheon's "in-joke" (1988), it is a form of double-talk that permits the speaker to register a complaint without offending anyone. On the contrary, getting the irony of the reference suggests the cleverness of both the speaker and the listener; its aim is always doubly flattering. Moreover, the idea is that the real target of the critique will not understand the critical innuendo of the "commentary" offered within the parodic form.

In the case of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends,* to instigate a "revival" of the Western hero or the gangster anti-hero, and the Hollywood genre(s) that begot him for the explicit purposes of watching them both die is, to say the least, ironic. Following John Caughie (1990), Brenda Longfellow (1996) discusses *I Love a Man in Uniform* (Wellington, 1994) in relation to similar ironies of performance, which she argues are part of a parodic repetition of American popular culture. She cites Caughie's notion of "playing at being American," as a reception strategy aimed at deflecting the dominance of American culture away from marginal (or any non-American) cultures. Playing at being American suggests a double consciousness; a way for subjects to play along with the tropes and clichés that define much of popular culture in an effort to negotiate the interpellative effects of American cultural imperialism. Irony facilitates the denial of cultural hegemony (11). Such a self-conscious re-staging of myth also suggests the potentially subversive nature of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* while pointing out the imbrication of the issues of masculinity and nationhood within them. Parody functions by implicating itself in its own tropes whether to deflect or invite self-criticism. Thus, male genre cinema is revealed as an exercise in nostalgia whether for revelling in or for mounting a critique. In the case of the films

under discussion, neither position is wholly refused or embraced. *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* do not celebrate the "it is better to burn out than to just fade away" ritual that the characters seem incapable of avoiding. Rather, in these films, the fact that the heroes are "exposed" as losers, or simply as ordinary men who do a sloppy job performing their prescribed masculine/heroic roles, is directly related to the genre's inability to contain its own conventions. The effect is to invite us as spectators to consider what we typically don't see: those untidy elements such as affect which are conventionally managed and contained within the contours of a generic narrative structure. Films such as *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* thus "expose" certain affective aspects of the male genre film. These melodramatic elements help reveal a longing, perhaps not only for an unfettered masculinity, but perhaps also a less complicated, more believable narrative of nationhood.

These may not be questions that are limited to the Canadian context since many Hollywood and new wave filmmakers adopted similar strategies. Jim Leach (1998) has pointed out, following Thomas Elsaesser, that Hollywood is neither monolithic in its own production nor totally other in relation to other countries' national cinemas (6). As I have already suggested, genre revision is a central component of 1960s and 1970s Hollywood cinema.[37] Catherine Russell (1995), for example, has argued that "in the generic revision of the late 1960s and early 1970s...narrative mortality emerges as an allegory of the debased myths of American culture" (175). Thus, the questions and/or strategies that are raised by the revisionist genre may not

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[37] See, for example, John G. Cawelti, "Myths of Violence in American Popular Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 1:3, (March 1975), pp. 521-541, Noel Carroll, "The Future of Allusionism: Hollywood in the Seventies," *October* 20, (Spring 1982), pp. 51-81, and Thomas Elsaesser, "Chronicle of a Death Retold," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 54, (June 1987), pp. 164-167.

even be "sufficient" for seeing the films as generic subversions. As Stephen Neale (1980) has suggested, genre categories are always leaky. Likewise, Jean-Loup Bourget has argued that "wherever an art form is highly conventional, the opportunity for subtle irony or distanciation presents itself all the more readily" (in Grant, 1977 62). However, a central problematic that is evoked by the relevance of contextual elements is the cultural specificity of the male genre film; this is the relationship between national and masculine identity that *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* prise open. They suggest that masculinity, as well as the genre under investigation, form part of an accumulated tradition, a social practice that is highly codified and reinforced through repetition. That these conditions are under revision socially and generically in the early 1970s is not news. This is one of the ways in which these films have and might continue to contribute to a corpus of what I would tentatively call "Canadian cinemas" rather than simply "films made in Canada." More importantly for my purposes here is that what has been missing from this discussion and what is key to setting up the rest of my thesis is the centrality of melodrama to the analysis of these films. It is part of what locates them, literally, within a cultural debate, a debate that is shaped by its geographic and genre locations, but not limited to them. And, in effect, part of what permits a critical reading of *Between Friends* is dislocation: for example, the incongruity of the image of Canadians as surfer boys. There is no accumulated tradition within which the narrative premise might be conceived of as believable.

Beyond providing us with a fresh approach to examining film texts and contexts, which is valuable enough, the idea of a reading negotiated through melodrama invites us to re-examine theories of classical modes of spectatorship. These theories have tended to focus on the male gaze as

determining the narrative outcome, with the eruptions within the text managed and ultimately resolved through the union of the heterosexual couple. However, in *Paperback Hero*, rather than uniting Rick and Joanne McLeod (the boss' daughter and girl of his dreams), the couple is kept apart. The social and economic hierarchy is maintained and Rick's performance of the Western's "Marshall" does nothing to persuade anyone otherwise. Rick is kept in his place with the help of money and power. He has "to settle" for Loretta, and seems to do so at least briefly, but rather than taking up his place in the heterosocial patriarchy — and maybe even valuing the very difference his relationship with Loretta might signal to the status quo — he defies the system once too often and ends up dying for his trouble. Does Rick die because he refuses to become the man he was intended to be? Does he die because he wants to play his role as the Western hero-outlaw to the limit? Both and neither.

Rick must die because he doesn't realize that the demands of the melodrama will prevail one way or another, but its purpose is greater than simply to satisfy the conventions of the genre. He acts as though the western's conventions must be upheld when they are inconsequential to everyone except him. Rick can only force the terms of his relationship with the women and the economic status quo so far. In his version of the story, he must face his "rival" in a showdown, but this is in the western not the melodrama. In the melodrama, the boy is supposed to finally get together with the appropriate girl, the middle or upper class girl, who recognizes his virtue and agrees to marry him. They both become adults through this process and take up their proper places in the social schema in order to reproduce it. Obviously, this is not what happens. Likewise, in *Between Friends*, Toby and Ellie do not form the ideal couple at the film's end. Their coupling and the

narrative resolution are linked through Chino's and Will's deaths, and this fact heightens, rather than diminishes, the tensions that have surfaced throughout the film which cannot be dismissed or forgotten. These are negotiated endings. Neither open nor closed, they are the result of the homosocial and economic tensions displayed as bravado between the male characters in each film. The endings really have nothing to do with what the women do or don't do.

Darrell Davis (1996) has offered a possible way out of the double-bind that would necessitate reading any cultural product as either hopelessly imbricated within American culture or simply, by virtue of its very marginal existence, as subversive. He argues that national cinemas can also be codified according to their "form[s] of alterity" with "Hollywood" where "[t]he national, naturally, becomes a site of contestation...an articulated identity" (21-22). Thus, if genre films like the western or the gangster film are ideal sites for analysing the manner in which "America talks to itself," as Colin McArthur (1972) has suggested, then *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* can be discussed in terms of the other kinds of "conversations" they elicit from the nation such as those I have suggested earlier: masculinity, social and economic disparity, cultural policies, and so on. Because aesthetic and national borders are suggested to be quite porous in both films, these conversations would also include the manner in which Canadian cinema and society talks back to Hollywood, and by extension, America. Conversation can take many forms: complicity, argumentation, contestation, to name a few. So while any film can stand in for Canada talking to itself, it may be "necessarily" out of both sides of its mouth. These films engage in an extended double talk concerning their relationship with Hollywood genres. Simply put, a double discourse of genre/national identity becomes legible in

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Paperback Hero and *Between Friends* through the filter of melodrama. Thus the films we see can be understood in relation to the emergent (Other) one we do not.

Death but Not an Ending

> ...And I will never be set free
> As long as I'm a ghost you can't see.
>
> "If You Could Read My Mind," theme from *Paperback Hero*
> performed by Gordon Lightfoot

As with many of the other cinematic techniques employed by *Paperback Hero*, the strategy of generic doubling contributes to an overall questioning of the textual operations at work within the film. However, because there are more questions than answers provided by the text, the viewer is invited to look outside it, an idea that is made most explicit by the film's extra-textual references. *Paperback Hero* provides numerous examples of intertextuality. The simple fact that it recalls classical Hollywood genre cinema is only the most obvious way of creating an intertext, and quotation is an extended way of bridging specific generic examples. The closing sequence of *Paperback Hero* references *High Noon* (F. Zinnemann, 1952), especially the sense of "real time" that marks the gunfight, which begins as a reenactment of the classic Western. It begins as a parody of the gunfight that is almost identical to the one in this classic Western in terms of framing, editing and figure placement, but *Paperback Hero's* tragic conclusion lacks the redeeming heroism of the original where, as the original movie's tagline suggested, this was "the story of a man who was too proud to run."[38]

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[38] Tag line from poster for *High Noon* (F. Zinnemann, 1952).

In the midst of the showdown between the Chief of the RCMP detachment (Burdoch) and "Marshall" Dillon, a number of interruptions to the narrative occur that set it apart from the heroic classicism of *High Noon*. The scene cuts back and forth between the drama on the street and the Deslisle hockey team "trapped" in jail, then to bystanders on the street, Loretta (Rick's sometime girlfriend), and a farmer, who, oblivious to the events that are transpiring around him, drives his Massey-Harris tractor onto the main street and greets "the Marshall" with a cheery, "hi, Rick!" as he passes by. The parallel style of editing, which returns again and again to the faces of the townsfolk, reminds viewers of the interplay between social and cultural references in which we, like the bystanders, are implicated. They, like us, participate in the construction of the film's intertextuality, underscoring the point that although we, as both metaphorical and actual spectators, agree to participate in Rick's fantasy, that fantasy comes with a price. The closing sequence suggests that we are complicit in "aiding and abetting" the construction of this fantasy, even in as much as it is a temporary diversion from the "flatness" of everyday life in a small prairie town. Moreover, like the hockey game that precedes the closing sequence, and the brawl that ultimately eclipses the boundaries between spectators and players, the film suggests that through myth making — even on this small scale — we are also, in part, responsible for its tragic final outcome. The ending functions in a manner similar to Longfellow's assessment of *I Love a Man In Uniform* as a cautionary tale. *Paperback Hero* also offers a slim margin of "critique and critical distance" wherein "the dissolution of the Canadian 'real' into American simulacra alerts us to the danger of permanent cultural assimilation" (11-12).

Throughout *Paperback Hero*, Rick Dillon struts around town, at once Marshall and outlaw, also a grotesque imitation of Matt Dillon, the main character from the 1950s American television series, *Gunsmoke*. Rick's constant bragging to everyone that he is "the Marshall of this town" ultimately backfires; rather than relishing this fact, it becomes a role he is saddled with and seemingly less and less capable of performing. In *Between Friends*, Chino's hetero-masculinity is so overdetermined that it becomes a burden he carries around with him like the unwieldy ancient surfboard he plans to refurbish. His disdain for women is projected onto Ellie while Chino also hero-worships Toby, his erstwhile surfing coach. He is nostalgic about their past relationship and plans for a future that includes a surfer culture which is unrealistic given their age, economic situation, and location in Canada.

Chino, like Rick Dillon, may be a loser or even a victim, but "the way he fails" (Morris 1994 38) displays both an admiration for and resistance to things "from elsewhere," in part because elsewhere represents an unspecified malaise. This is a critical point for the viewer that gains much of its impact from the fact that the characters do not fully recognize their folly. It sounds very much like Dorland's (140) notion of ressentiment; a brooding cynicism and suspicion of things that do not originate from within that is created by a postmodernist aesthetic in conjunction with globalization to blur the boundaries between here, there, and elsewhere. It is a critical strategy offered to the viewer that differs from the resentment experienced by the characters. Ressentiment is thus ultimately a projection or fantasy, an ironic déjà vu that provides an opportunity to rethink the past. According to Dorland, Canadian ressentiment is a critical position counterposed against nostalgia for a past/country that never really existed. It functions as a corrective to a vision

hampered by bitterness (resentment) and selective memory (sentimentality). Chino's *resentment* — literally his nostalgic wish to "feel again" — is connected to the ongoing idealization of 1960s youth counterculture that is referred to among the men at several points throughout the film. These dreams of the good life, however, are inseparable from their nostalgia for the "big heist" and a life of easy if illicit living.

Identity, for Chino, is located within patriarchal masculinity. It revolves around his nostalgic reverie about surfer culture with Toby and through petty thievery with Ellie's father, Will. In his effort to assert his own masculinity, Chino puts down Ellie and glosses over differences in nationality between himself and Toby; he disavows their differences, and so sees Toby as an ideal reflection of himself in the past, with Will providing an ideal future based on money from the robbery at the nickel refinery plant. Chino represents an in between kind of subjectivity, destined to restage the terms of masculine identity over and over again. Early in the film, when Toby and Chino "play" outside, there is Beach Boys' music on the soundtrack. The only line that can be heard clearly in this brief sequence is "catchin' a wave and sittin' on top of the world." It accompanies Chino catching a wave on his skateboard while Toby watches. The status of the music as soundtrack or diegetically-motivated is suddenly clarified when Ellie turns off the record player from inside the house. In this sequence, both Toby and Ellie control the gaze and aural elements. Chino exists as the object of Toby's gaze and his approval while Ellie reminds him of what a child he is as she chastises him for skateboarding in the early morning hours. In this sequence, the telephoto lens is replaced by a wide angle lens in which Chino's every movement is framed, captured, and codified by Toby and Ellie as the parents of a "problem child."

Piers Handling (1977) refers to Shebib as a director who "prefers to present a situation which he then tries to understand as a detached observer" (9). The cinema direct elements of observation are an attempt to link cinematic and real time together dialectically in *Between Friends*. They provide opportunities for the spectator to observe the problems of male identity, and in conjunction with the melodramatic pauses in the narrative action they reflect back on other moments in the film. The opening sequence of *Between Friends* is only one example in which the viewer's relationship with ideal masculinity is undermined. Through the observational style of the telephoto lens, which temporarily disrupts the flow of time and space necessary to the plot-driven caper film, we are invited to rethink not only generic conventions but those governing gender, ethnicity and class as well. Effectively, we are watching Toby watch an idealized version of his former self in soft-focus and at an idealized distance indicated by the long shot. As I have already mentioned, this observational style is employed in at least two other significant narrative moments in the film: at Coker's funeral, and at the film's two closing sequences. In the funeral sequence, we are positioned again as observers, literally kept back from the intimacy of the moment shared by Coker's friends through the artifice of the proscenium. This strategy is both ironic and appropriate; it provides us with a critical distance from the event which we have no business sharing in, anyway.

When Will sings, "Shall We Gather by the River?" at Coker's funeral, a song that associates *Between Friends* with John Ford's films and the interplay between the community and the individual in the western generally (Handling 37), it implicitly points to the basic problem of the community in the film. There isn't one to speak of. The dysfunctional lower class family becomes a substitute, or a microcosm of a larger community

somewhere "out there," distanced from the concerns — and horrors — of their everyday lives. This recalls an earlier moment in the film when Will and Chino try to convince Toby to be in on the payroll heist in Coniston. Will has just been released from prison, and the group of men meet at a point along the Toronto Harbourfront that places the city's business district recognizably in deep focus and at a distance behind them. The construction of the mise-en-scène suggests that the plan being discussed occurs within the "backdrop" of commerce that has eluded or excluded them so far. This is not "home," a community to which they feel connected, but an alien and neatly contained metropolis that we only catch a glimpse of once in the film.

Conclusion

What kinds of conversations do *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* invite their viewers to engage in? Does the difference in seeing these films as contestatory rest in part with the visibility (or audibility) of their moving picture codes? In particular, is it the ironic treatment provided by melodrama that makes the cinematic architecture of the genre film all too familiar? Does this move signal not only the end to the classicism of Hollywood, but an invitation to revisit its (in)glorious ruins? *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* certainly do all this. They are two exemplary films that blur cinematic styles and bridge conventional categories, and in so doing they invite a sustained critical self-reflection on the cultural antecedents which inform the films' context. By inflecting elements of classic American genre films in order to comment on the historical connection between Hollywood cinema and Canadian cinema, these films form a new tentative and mobile link to their respective genres that makes them self-reflexive choices for cultural critique. In employing recognizable generic strategies in (cultural) landscapes that do

not quite fit the genre, the films permit critical analyses of both national cinemas, and the myth-making that feeds or restrains them. In the case of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*, masculinity, class and nationality are burdens to be represented, histories to be accounted for, inherited by way of borrowed cultural traditions within and outside of the nation.

Chapter Three:

Feminine Identity and the Intra/Inter National Subject:
La Vie rêvée and *Anne Trister*

What is the justification confining melodramatic categorisation to films about domestic situations and feminine conditions? Why are the shoot-out, the lone trek through the wilderness, the rituals of horse and gun, any less excessive than a family conflict?

Christine Gledhill (1987 12-13)

I believe that feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting. In the works of those female artists who are concerned with the women's movement, one finds artistic tradition as well as the break with it.

Silvia Bovenschen (1985 47-8)

In Chapter Two I discussed *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* in terms of their relationship with popular American genre cinema of the 1960s and 70s. In that chapter I tried to unravel the connections between genre theory and the heist/caper film and the Western when filtered through melodrama in order to discuss representations of masculinity, class and the nation in Canadian cinema in the 1970s. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are also significant to Québec and Canadian cinema history as they comment on some of the issues facing women in the 1970s and 80s, including the representation and greater presence of women in the public sphere. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are in keeping with feminist filmmaking in American, European, and third cinema contexts of the period that, independent of country of origin or genre, often dealt with narratives of subjectivity, depicting attempts to map out public spaces as women's spaces. The films of Marguerite Duras, Ulrike Ottinger, Helga Sander, Agnès Varda,

Anabel Nicolson, Sally Potter, Yvonne Rainer, and Sara Gomez are just some of the examples that cross national boundaries, but which concern themselves with the issue of female subjectivity and the public-private split which that representation often entails. Many of these films reinvent or inflect film language in order to address a specifically female spectator and to insert commentary on the representation of women in mainstream cinema. So too with *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*. They deploy strategies specific to women's cinema and art cinema, but often ignored in discussions of them are the films' indebtedness to the melodrama by way of the woman's film and the female buddy film. The manner in which these categories are variously invoked, upheld, and thwarted in the films represent the filmmakers' attempt to experiment with a new film language and to create a Québécoise film culture.

La vie rêvée is distinguished as the first feature-length film made by a woman in Québec. *Anne Trister* became a lesbian cult classic across Canada in the mid 1980s. These films, although made more than ten years apart, share the theme of an active female subject reconfiguring the Montréal urban landscape (public space) and the city's interiors (private and public spaces). The films strive to express a feminine point of view in these city spaces as they represent a site for an unruly subject within the domain of the nation. These terms fit well within my study of nationalism and unruly subjectivities in Canadian cinema, for like *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends, La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are connected by subject matter, their incisive commentary on sexuality, and use of melodrama as a critical tool. Unlike the two "genre" films of the previous chapter, *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are more explicitly related to art and counter cinema via women's cinema, but they too can be read in relation to American genre cinema, specifically the

female buddy film.[39] Both films deploy stylistic strategies with a feminist political intent; for example, subjective point of view shots link cultural and personal memory to an aesthetics of contestation. Both films are extreme in their distanciation and identification techniques and are thus critical and engaging in a manner consistent with melodrama's visceral and moral imperatives. Melodrama becomes a means to bridge Québec and international cultures by way of providing a common ground to express the difficulties of difference as they relate to the migrant nature of the female subject.

Synopsis of *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*

Both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* were made by francophone women in Québec. *La vie rêvée*, directed by Mireille Dansereau, was released in 1972; *Anne Trister* by Léa Pool in 1985. The "plot" of *La vie rêvée* involves Isabelle (Véronique le Flaguais) and Virginie (Liliane Lemaître Auger), two women who work at a Montréal film production company, B & C Films. They daydream constantly about finding an ideal man. The film depicts their dreams and their everyday lives, offering a strong contrast between their fantasies and reality. However, at times the film blurs the difference between a so-called objective or omniscient point of view and individual perspectives. Most often the blur functions to validate the subjective point of view of one or both of the central female characters, and to question the motives of the other characters they encounter. Several "ideal" romance options are depicted by the film, though none of these lives up to Isabelle's or Virginie's dreams. They include: a pushy and ultimately sexist back-to-nature dogmatist; the lives Isabelle's upper middle-class family members lead in Outremont;

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[39] Hereafter, I will refer to the genre as simply the buddy film, unless I am trying to distinguish it from the "male buddy film."

Virginie's politically-active separatist yet chauvinistic brother; the boys who flirt aggressively with Isabelle and Virginie in their cars on the street; and Jean-Jacques, the married man of Isabelle's dreams. At the end of the film, Isabelle and Virginie tear down the 1970s "lifestyle" posters depicting happy, heterosexual couples (usually walking hand-in-hand on a beach silhouetted by the sunset) that litter Virginie's bedroom wall. The white wall that remains becomes their tabula rasa, and in conjunction with the allusive soundtrack, suggests that Isabelle and Virginie are about to take off together, perhaps to build their own dreamlife.

Anne Trister concerns the problems of identity that the central character, Anne (Albane Guilhe), experiences as a result of her complex response to her father's death. She grieves, examines and rebuilds the numerous facets of her identity which are comprised of national, artistic, historical, religious, and sexual elements. Anne arrives in Montréal from Switzerland, is warmly received by Simon Levy (Nuvit Ozdogru), an old family friend, and stays with Alix (Louise Marleau), a psychologist treating a young girl, Sarah (Lucie Laurier) who looks uncannily like Anne. Anne regularly sends and receives romantic audio tapes from her boyfriend, Pierre (Hugues Quester), but when he visits her once in Montréal, their relationship, which has already become tentative since her departure from Switzerland, finally ends when she tells him that she loves Alix. Meanwhile, Anne has been renovating a loft in Old Montreal "loaned" to her by a friend of Simon Levy. One day, Anne makes a pass at Alix in the loft and is rebuffed. Alix and her "chum" Thomas (Guy Thauvette) have a complicated romantic relationship which is ultimately not very satisfying for Alix. Later, Thomas angrily confronts Anne in her atelier for being a disruptive force in his relationship with Alix. Anne, who appears to be only a bit shaken by the

experience, is clearly more distracted than we imagine; she forgets to re-set the brake on the scaffolding she is working from, and falls to the floor unconscious. While Anne is recovering in hospital, the beautiful, near complete loft is demolished to make room for waterfront condos. Anne recovers, and once released from the hospital, she and Alix go back to Alix' apartment together. Their encounter is sensual and erotic, and although there is the suggestion of sex, Anne continues her journey of self-exploration which includes a trip to Israel depicted in an 8 mm film she sends to Alix. The ending suggests that Anne and Alix have remained close in some vital way and that perhaps there is no completely clear and satisfying language to explain their connection. As with Anne's continued exploration of her identity, the ending permits us a few glimpses of her "progress" as she pauses to reflect on the movement between places.

Between Subjectivities

In "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," Teresa de Lauretis (1988) foregrounds an issue that she claims has been lurking in the shadows since feminism began dealing with psychoanalytic accounts of the subject: the "problems" of sexuality and female subjectivity. She argues that if feminist critiques of patriarchy provoked by rereading Freud and Lacan were initially confined to considering sexual difference as gender difference, and thus to a presumption of heterosexuality, "emphasis on sexual difference did open up a critical space — a conceptual, representational, and erotic space — in which women could address themselves to women" (155). However much seems to have been gained by recuperating psychoanalysis for feminism, de Lauretis points out that this initial step by feminist theorists was rightly attacked for obscuring other psychosocial forms of oppression since it still

limited the discussion to woman's difference *from man* as a binary

opposition, a totalising difference. This approach completely ignored any

differences between women as well as those between women and men of

different classes, nations, sexualities, ages, ethnicities, and so on. These are

also common complaints issued against psychoanalytic theories of the male

subject. Nevertheless, if the original idea is taken to its logical conclusion,

according to de Lauretis, one of the ideas worth salvaging is the critical space

it opens up for women to "concurrently recognize women as subjects *and* as

objects of female desire" (155). Rather than claiming that lesbian sexuality is

the "foregone conclusion" of this linkage of psychoanalysis and the female

subject, however, de Lauretis shifts the discussion away from the notion of an

imperative lesbian sexuality to the paradox of sexual (in)difference.

De Lauretis (1994) later identifies this "flaw" in the "perverse" logic of

female desire — and part of the trajectory towards attaining female

subjectivity — as a potentially powerful analytical tool for unravelling the

"problems" of sexual difference. By linking the notion of subjectivity to

recognizing the subject status of other women, to arrive at lesbian sexual

desire is only one conclusion of a psychoanalytic account of the female

subject. De Lauretis' discussion takes a different tack than other feminist and

queer theorists at this point. Within de Lauretis' terms of reference, when

women address themselves to one another they can, as subjects of sexual

desire, want something that is both the same as and different from men (and

other women). The paradox of female desire resides in recognizing the

possibilities for a non-binary logic; a desire that is neither/both and/or

different/same multiplies the potential for sexual subjectivities. Desire thus

amplified does not merely shift the term "woman" from its object status for

"man" to being the object/subject of desire vis à vis other women. Rather, de

Lauretis emphasizes that the conceptual ambiguity would probably more correctly be called a perversity; that is, both an active and inherent willfulness at the core of the paradox of sexual (in)difference, which can be analysed more carefully for multiple female subjectiv*ies* rather than relegating desire to a new binary system.

It is a perverse desire and paradoxical trajectory that is operating as the central narrative problematic of both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*, and precisely the unstated threat at the centre of the buddy film: the lure of female friendship. Both films are allegories for the attainment of subject status for women against the varied attempts to contain their disruptive potential, an idea that in the films is directly linked to sexuality, creativity, and the cultural and historical context of the nation. The changes that the characters undergo in the films include considering other women as objects of desire however differently desire is expressed. As this is linked with other developments concerning the characters' emotional and psychological well-being, the films suggest that lesbianism is a viable, positive component of female subjectivity, though both films are careful not to depict sex explicitly. However, the films' achievements are not limited to embracing lesbianism even theoretically as a new form of coupling. More than simply socially and politically progressive, *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* pose the question of lesbian desire in a complex context that unravels "normal" Oedipal narratives by not confining their discourses on female subjectivity to sexual-gender difference, an accomplishment which I will argue is attained in large part through the melodramatic mode. Both films examine the complexity of the oppression that each of the women depicted faces, as well as to link the issues they encounter to other historic cultural representations, including the imperative of heterosexuality. Thus, in the case of these films, while sexuality and gender

may be central sites of contention, both films insist that language, class and ethnicity must be equally dealt with since they involve traditions or conventions that contribute to a heterosexist, misogynistic norm. Thus, while each film claims that the cultural heritage of patriarchy affects all women negatively, and both films isolate the father-daughter relationship as both the immediate basis of this antagonism and as metaphor for phallic power, the analysis and subsequent contestation of women's subjugation arises from other specifically located cultural connections.[40]

As *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* operate along a parallel narrative course to the "popular" films of female friendship, the moments of female intimacy that they depict include making social and political issues relevant to their personal lives. The affective mode of melodrama ensures that the centrality of the issues is never lost and that they do not become disconnected from the dailiness of life. Both films depict the central female characters engaging in meaningful intimate conversation with one another in which "true communication" seems to occur. These moments are marked by the melodramatic conventions of intimacy such as the tight close up and the two-shot, and are sometimes accompanied by romantic music. This contrasts strongly with the female-male interactions in which communication is depicted as difficult with both parties often occupying different planes within the mise-en-scène, for example, or where their emotional distance is emphasized by cuts between individual images of the "couple" while they are talking. In *Anne Trister* these conversations are fraught with tension; in *La vie rêvée* they become an opportunity for the men to deliver monologues. Female friendship is a staple element of the melodrama that in the buddy

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[40] For a discussion of this issue in the Québec context of the novel, see Patricia Smart, *Écrire dans la maison du père. Lémergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec*. Montréal: Amérique, 1988.

film vies for top billing with the heterosexual couple's romantic liaison. In the buddy film the heterosexual romance ensures that the same-sex socializing never gets out of hand. Conventionally, this scenario expresses the underlying tension that the "other couple" inserts into the narrative, at the same time as it reassures the viewer that these same-sex relationships are only supplementary, and while *somewhat* gratifying emotionally, they could never occupy centre stage as economically or sexually powerful connections.

While *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* start out as female buddy films, and they adopt some of the same strategies that "straight" buddy films do, they don't do so in order to contain the threat posed by the female to female relationship. Rather, keeping the "girls" in their places is revealed for the unspoken tactic that it is: a means to affirm the heterosexuality of the players and the heterosexual couple as the power centre and zenith of the social order. The attempt at keeping the women separate at the expense of their friendship is a strategy that in both films fails. Instead, the films present the "perverse" logic of lesbianism as an alternative discourse, a signifier of self-evaluation and pleasure that permits the films to pause the heteropatriarchal discourse for examination. "Lesbianism" is deployed as an implicitly critical strategy that enables other possible voyages of discovery that the characters take, and is not intended as a replacement for the heterosexual couple as such. While "arriving" at the lesbian conclusion *is* part of the journey, these destinations are at the same time points of departure aimed at questioning a variety of identity formations that the characters, as well as perhaps the audience, have previously been taking for granted. The films depict "problems" of subjectivity in a manner unique to the melodrama. As in the woman's film, female subjectivity is foregrounded as an intricately patterned web of constraint and possibility, not as a fixed site of class, ethnicity,

language, gender or sexuality. The "problem of female subjectivity" is represented as a tension between the fantasies imagined and realities experienced by the central characters. These are filaments that push and pull the web in different directions, and depending on the movement across it, provide new perspectives on sexuality, which effectively disrupt the other threads as well.

The ideas associated with subjectivity and desire in cinema have tended to revolve around a discussion of the look (Mulvey 1975). As Mary Ann Doane (1987) has pointed out:

> Western culture has a quite specific notion of what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a woman looking. When a woman looks, the verb "looks" is generally intransitive (she *looks* beautiful) — generally, but not always. When the woman looks in order to see, the trajectory of that gaze, and its relation to the otherwise nonproblematic opposition between subject and object, are highly regulated (177).

It is useful to extend Doane's discussion of the look and narrative/desire that are part of the tradition of the woman's film of the 1930s and 40s to the issues that women's cinema have dealt with in recent years. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* deploy the strategies of counter cinema as well as melodrama in particular ways to create a critical space for the spectator, which engages us in a discourse on female sexuality. For example, the fantasy sequences of both films are just as often *clearly* bracketted as insert shots or subjective point of view shots as they are *unclearly* marked regarding the point of view from which they emanate. The purpose of this strategy is to wrench the spectator from a complacent position as a passive consumer of film images, generally by disrupting patterns of viewing, and to debunk certain assumptions about looking, specifically as it relates to "what women want."

What links these images discursively to the other images within the films, and one film to the other, is the sustained use of melodrama to address the position the female characters occupy in relation to power and desire. The social and aesthetic "constraints" of cinematic melodrama, such as muteness, gesture and non-verbal communication conveyed through close-ups and reaction shots, become some of the cinematic techniques that in *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* help to complicate subjectivity and address. Foregrounding visuality and non-diegetic or explicitly stylized use of sound often involve the spectator in intimate or at least private moments, addressing the spectator within an idealized site of communication "as though" s/he were "sympathetic." The actual identity of the actual spectator is deemed inconsequential as a result of the strategic use of identification techniques, which are by turns playful, uncomfortable and erotic.   Central to this destabilisation process is editing, and in particular, shifting points of view; in other words, through the power of looking and being looked at. But voyeurism requires distance; the clear objectification of images is conducive to maintaining this ideal distance and for wringing the most pleasure from the scopophilic drive. Doane (177) argues that in the woman's film the psychic premise of these moments is the slide into a pathetic overidentification with the image that invites the female spectator to consume herself and the other woman as objects of desire. The implied loss of subjectivity — for which the melodrama is famous — is interrupted and redirected in *Anne Trister* and *La vie rêvée*, however, so that this moment is not merely filled by the overall desire to consume. It becomes a value associated with the women's ability to communicate with one another. Thus the interruption acts as a would-be process of self-other examination, which is achieved, in part, by combining identification and distanciation strategies.

André Loiselle (1999) makes similar claims for the style of *Mourir à tue-tête* (Poirier, 1979). Loiselle argues that the film relies on the disjuncture between counter-cinema and melodrama to articulate its strong political message, a surprising achievement, he suggests, that cannot be attained through the conventions of women's cinema alone. Loiselle observes that distancing devices associated with women's cinema, such as the sequences depicting the discussion of the film within the film by the editor and director, are by themselves insufficient to disrupting the scopophilic gaze which seeks to acquire the most pleasure possible from this film's otherwise disturbing images (30). Loiselle claims that it is in the very centre of such desire — the intense emotional affect of the melodrama — that the film reaches its goal. Spectators, Loiselle suggests, are seduced by the masochistic melodrama's conventions of pathos generated by alternately occupying the victim's and the rapist's point of view. In the end, we are invited to agree with the film's political message in part because it helps to ameliorate our problematic access to the image, and in part because it offers us the salvation we have so far been denied (39). Loiselle argues that despair becomes a complex aesthetic strategy we all must "work through" on our bumpy journey through the conventions of counter-cinema and melodrama to arrive at political consensus.

Scaling the walls of the fortresses of art history, religion, and advertising, dismantling or dissolving generic boundaries — these are all presented as part of the "plot" of both films; the active deconstruction-reconstruction process of looking is provoked by displacing the hetero-logic of the gender-sexuality link. In both films, the boundaries that inform the normative gender-sexuality container also include national borders, and whether these are implied or explicit, the films' aesthetic treatment of such borders make it clear that the *ménage-à-trois* gender-sex-nation could hardly

be deemed a discrete and coherent identity category. Like the discourse on sexuality and female subjectivity, in which the characters find themselves grappling with the status of gender relations, the nation is comprised of what Sherry Simon, et al. (1991) call *fictions de l'identitaire.* These "fictions" help create a normative nationalism counter to what Simon refers to as *la pluralité forte* (45). This discursive regime obviates the untidiness of multiplicity and the possibility of multiple points of entry for the subject into discourse.

In *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister,* both Québec nationalism and internationalism are first identified as male and represented by the absent father figures in the films. In both cases, the weighty metaphors for a history of patriarchy are invoked by references to "fatherly" ghosts: Jean-Jacques and M. Trister. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* present the recognition of sexual difference as linked with national difference, but access to this discourse is achieved through an implicitly melodramatic treatment of the films. These issues are muted, rather than strictly unrepresentable, finding circuitous expression within the discourses of Québec nationalism that refer us instead to a highlighting of class — Isabelle's brother in *La vie rêvée,* and ethnicity — Simon Levy in *Anne Trister.* And, by suggesting that these discourses have historically been associated with the constitution of the male subject, and thus at least theoretically to a more coherent and stable position, the films begin by exploring the nation-gender-sexuality nexus of female subjectivity as fundamentally different; that is, lacking in class or ethnic division. With respect to ideas like cohesiveness and unity, community and separation, the films extend the analysis well beyond the condition of the women in the films. Following the logic of psychoanalysis, which suggests that female subjectivity is firstly "incoherent" and hysterically adjunct, the position

offered to the spectator by the films is interposed with female subjectivity as both separate from and connected to multiple sexualities and nationalities.

La vie rêvée and *Anne Trister* disrupt the masculinist, hegemonic logic of subjective coherency and cultural identity woven into their own identification strategies. If identification is made difficult under these conditions, it is to suggest the near impossibility of a coherent or discrete fiction of identity, and to reveal the work of creating a "sympathetic" spectator who thinks otherwise. Whereas the ideological and psychic force of the Hollywood woman's film was supported by alignments with what Doane refers to as "an entire array of extracinematic discourses" (178) that helped to define and direct womanhood and motherhood in very specific ways, the critical force of *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* comes from confronting rather than subsuming these extracinematic discourses of identity: nation, class and ethnicity.

La vie rêvée

La vie rêvée, is directed by a heterosexual woman.[41] It is a film that at once offers sexuality as a utopia for women at the same time as it argues strongly against its own utopic view of sex. The topic of sex — of heterosexual sex — is one of the film's main focal points, but sex is so pervasive in *La vie rêvée*, that the idea itself becomes excessive. This excess is one of the ways in which the film critiques gender relations. The two main female characters, Isabelle and Virginie, discuss the topic constantly, and are often presented in

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[41] I think it is important to say this only because Mireille Dansereau has publicly insisted that although her film is about women and that some people have recently interpreted it as lesbian they are wrong since she herself is heterosexual. (See my essay, "Querying/Queering the Nation," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, Kay Armatage, *et al*, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 274-290.) In this rather simplistic and literal-minded defence of the film she claims she does not understand how anyone could fantasize about the possibility that Isabelle and Virginie could become lovers.

situations in which sex and gender roles are at issue. The film's loose narrative revolves around their discussions of sex, relationships, and their fantasies about men, although there is nothing like a conventional plot structure in *La vie rêvée*. Male sexuality, as seen through their eyes, is made strange; this functions as a critique of heterosexuality as male sexuality, and, as Brenda Longfellow (1984) has pointed out in her discussion of *La vie rêvée*, it inverts the classic psychoanalytic question, "what do women want?" (153).[42] The film implicitly asks "what do men want?" although this remains a question that it never really answers.

If "the woman looking" occupies a different relation of power between subject and object than the "male gaze of classic Hollywood cinema" that alternative may be described as the desire to desire. According to Doane (1987 1), in the woman's film this is as much as the female subject can hope for; her desire for the cinematic image marks her excess, her rapture, her naiveté. In *La vie rêvée*, however, the looks of Isabelle and Virginie suggest that looking, wanting and having cannot be completely separated as they often are in the woman's film. In *La vie rêvée* looking is overtly associated with fantasy. A moment's glance generates a rich fantasy life that both Virginie and Isabelle indulge in. However, the film's discourse on female sexual desire is examined, in part, through the film's dialectical structure. Simply put, its combination of aesthetic collisions invites comparisons among the ideas it presents. Specific examples of this structure can be detected in the pre-credits portion of the opening sequence. Here slow motion followed by normal speed imagery is used as a means to explore the relationship of fantasy to reality. This establishes a comparative premise that extends beyond this sequence and

[42] See also, Longfellow's brief discussion of *Anne Trister*'s appropriation of melodrama in "The Melodramatic Imagination in Quebec and Canadian Women's Features," *CineAction!*28 ((1992), pp. 48-56.

informs other kinds of arbitrary divisions the film examines such as the split between mind and body, the personal and the political, the public and the private, and the hetero and the homo.

The first image or "establishing shot" is a medium close up of a man and a woman on a downtown street (later identifiable as Montréal) depicted in slow motion. They look like tourists posing for a photo anywhere, an idea that is conveyed by their friendly direct smiles and kitschy Hawaiian leis. This image is replaced by the disturbing home movie-like shot of a little girl lifting her nightgown and eventually exposing her genitals, also presented in slow motion and with her direct address gaze. Next, two young women (soon identified as our protagonists) are depicted twirling around, laughing and playing with young men outdoors; the sound and image track are out of sync. Finally, one of the woman is seen running up some stairs and then beating her fists against a closed door at the top of the staircase. Since all of these images have been presented in slow motion without a clear establishing shot as such, their status as imaginary is highlighted. As spectators, we are thus invited to try to make sense of the relationship of images to one another perhaps in a more overt manner than if the sequence was presented in a classic realist fashion with its location in time and space (and its narrative purpose) more firmly established. Only later do these images become clearer as the possible mindscreen of Isabelle, but their status is never completely clarified as to whether they are her memories, her fantasy or dream projections, or some combination of all of these.

A close up shot of a toilet flushing in the women's lavatory at B&C Films (the film company where Isabelle and Virginie are employed) is one of the first images in *La vie rêvée* presented at a normal speed, but it is still a rather unusual way to introduce the film's "real" setting. In any event, this

does not turn out to be the case, since not much time is spent at this location. The actors acknowledge the presence of the camera-audience by introducing themselves in a direct address manner, and the sequence ends. This brief sequence is noteworthy partly because it is in many ways quite unconventional; its placement as the second sequence with credits along with the choice of elements to be depicted don't serve any immediate narrative function. The sequence is repeated once more as though to emphasize its markers of stylistic difference. Upon closer examination, however, its purpose is more than simple scatological or self-reflexive "excess." It underscores the public-private blur that the preceding images have first suggested about the relationship of fantasy to reality (as well as to documentary and fictional filmmaking) which will later be more overtly linked to sexuality.

The credit and opening sequences may not contribute much to the establishment of "setting" per se, but they do clearly establish the film's point of view on spectatorship as an exercise in voyeurism, a relationship to film images that is here subtly contested. The excessively close view, underscored by the two instances of direct address, emphasize the act of looking. By implicating the spectator in looking at private moments, a strategy that finds its real home in melodrama, *La vie rêvée* disrupts the voyeuristic pleasure that might otherwise be offered by a more classic play between distance and proximity. These strategies are both dislocating and confrontational, and ironically, it is their very ordinariness that exposes the spectator's basic scopophilia while begging the question of what usually constitutes a "narrative event."

The opening suggests that the film intends to deviate from the voyeuristic norm to the extent that it will get closer to the characters' subjective points of view, rather than farther away, and furthermore it will

not mislead us into thinking that these scenarios emanate from nowhere. From the opening sequence onward, spectatorial complicity is attached to cultural critique, an idea that is foregrounded by linking two kinds of transgressive looking: sexual (inappropriate and potentially incestuous with the little girl's lifting of her nightgown) and confrontational (in conjunction with her direct address gaze), with the digestive or scatological (the flushing of the toilets). The blurring of public and private spaces is achieved by making visible the invisible of private bodily functions and connecting them to the spectator's look which is complicated further by the film's refusal to situate itself firmly as either documentary or fiction. The clearly marked boundaries of the public and private continue to be blurred at a number of junctures within the film and they demonstrate, among other things, the melodrama's adeptness at "transgressing" viewing contexts and genres.

The "function" of social and ideological border controls, conversely, becomes more apparent as the women grapple with their own personal and social relationships including the discourse on the relationship of feminine (and masculine) behaviour to appearance developed throughout the film. Social and cinematic conventions become particularly evident when "propriety" is transgressed. What the women say and do is often at odds with the film's position on the topics it deals with: *La vie rêvée* uses cinematic point of view to underscore ideological critique. There are numerous examples of this strategy throughout the film. Typically, when the two women enter into a social situation where they are compelled to make some kind of small talk with men, both "real" and "imaginary" moments convey an alternative version to the plot as it is presented. These scenarios are depicted from their subjective points of view to convey their disagreement with the social conventions, which function to keep them in their places as

little ladies, and to suggest they understand one another implicitly. By depicting several possible takes on an issue, cinematic point of view becomes a discursive strategy that encourages debate on the topic of sexuality and gender in a patriarchal society. This is perhaps what Seth Feldman (1984) is referring to when he describes *La vie rêvée* as an exploration of the relationship between "the subjective experience and the larger social context" (149).

The most striking effect of the blurring of boundaries is the film's tendency to destabilise sexual identity with its implicit invitation to renegotiate the relationship between film and spectator. Nowhere in the film is the notion that Isabelle and Virginie are or might be lovers mentioned. In fact, they spend considerable time fantasizing about men. Yet, as I suggested in the introduction, in *La vie rêvée*, one could say that lesbianism becomes the disruptive discourse that dares not speak its name. Its irruption may be achieved, in part, through the recognition of the subject status of the women for themselves and thus for one another, as well as the excess of sexual desire circulating in the film with no appropriate object to fix upon. It may also be that the circulation of desire is partly due to the erotic charge of the suppressed — but not unarticulated — lesbian subtext of the film which is available to the film's "readers" independent of their sexual orientation.

The sequence that best raises the issue of the lesbian subtext occurs when Isabelle has just been told that her contract with the company will not be renewed because of a lower demand for the Montréal company's services based on the uncertain political climate in Québec. Isabelle is introduced almost literally as "a piece of ass": she appears as a fragmented image with her buttocks and upper thighs forming the establishing shot of the sequence. The next shot adopts the point of view of her Anglo boss. He tells her, partly in

English, and partly in very poor French, that "for a woman this is not so important..." (separatist politics or having a job?), and that she "...should have no trouble finding a man to marry..." her. As Isabelle storms out of his office and races down the hall, images of her crying are replaced by her smiling and having sex with Jean-Jacques, the man of her dreams. Her ideal man, it appears, will rescue her from economic crisis and provide satisfying sex to boot. This *rêve* is abruptly interrupted by a low angle shot of a woman, presumably J-J's wife who breaks the spell of Isabelle's fantasy fuck by saying, "he always comes back to me."[43] Isabelle is left alone on the bed jolted from her reverie (as are we by the abrupt cut), and as though caught in the act, she quickly covers her genitals with her dress in what now appears to be her masturbation fantasy. When, at this point, a disembodied female voice-over whispers, 'You have to go all the way,' Isabelle sits up on the bed, and says — or rather thinks, in voice-over, "I would not have gone near this far without her."

Another ambiguous reference is made in a highly sexually-charged context. We can assume that Isabelle is probably referring to Virginie since the voice-over/mindscreen is followed by a medium close-up shot of her. It also raises the very question the film has so far been suppressing: if heterosexual romance and the (hetero)sexist context of work have so far provided unsatisfying experiences for Isabelle and Virginie, lesbianism (and escape) must be the logical next step. And, although patriarchal economic and social structures, rather than heterosexuality, are ostensibly critiqued throughout the film, they have become blurred by the excess of attention devoted to

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[43]Even though this woman resembles the one in the family photo on Jean-Jacques desk, which we have glimpsed at briefly near the beginning of the film, it is also significant in relation to the film's references to "lifestyle imagery" that she looks suspiciously like a model. Independent of whether she actually is Jean-Jacques' wife, or some other "ideal" woman, her image haunts their encounters.

sexuality and female friendship, and they are connected through the cinematic techniques I have mentioned. This signals the film's duplicity or ambivalence about heterosexuality even though our identification figures express a stalwart belief in heterosexual romance until the film's end. The sequence both raises and suppresses the psychic coincidence between the recognition of women as subjects *and* as objects of (female) desire that de Lauretis has identified.

This ruse of 'protesting too much' occurs again in a different form at about the three-fourths point in the film, when the two women conspire to get Isabelle's love object to meet her for an afternoon tryst. A series of still photos of the couple engaged in "lifestyle activities," which are echoed in the posters on Virginie's bedroom wall, provides the evidence that the image of heterosexual romance is important. The myth that these images carry is soon overburdened by the impossibility of the image becoming a reality, however, when Jean-Jacques is unable to maintain an erection. The film reasserts heterosexual sex as male-active, with the object of the penis entering the vagina as the defining feature (at least for J-J) of a "complete" sexual encounter.

La vie rêvée organises its discourse on the relationship of gender and sexuality to the social and political problems it raises throughout. Cinematic point of view and the film's dialectical structure offer several complex narrative entry points for linking the dilemmas in which Isabelle and Virginie find themselves to the social structures of the family and politics, to personal and cultural memory, and to rampant consumerism. In short, the film "levels" the competing and complementary discourses on female sexual subjectivity. This is achieved largely by excessively replaying the familiar subject matter of the woman's film: the trials and tribulations of heterosexual

romance and its antipathy to women's autonomy. Cinematically, this is accomplished by introducing a series of multiple short stories from the everyday lives of Isabelle and Virginie, similar to what J-F Lyotard (1984) has in another context called, "petits récits," which are dialectical and impure. According to Lyotard, the complexity of exchanges in a story-telling matrix is made more problematic, and harder to nail down ideologically, with the introduction of multiple narratives typical of postmodern texts (132-3). Andreas Huyssen (1992) has also discussed such story telling strategies, but has argued that mere multiplicity does not equal ideological subversion. Huyssen maintains that " [i]t is certainly no accident that questions of subjectivity and authorship have resurfaced with a vengeance in the postmodern text. After all, it does matter who is speaking or writing" (64).

That the two women in this film, together, cooperatively attempt to recreate their subjectivities in relation to the image-stories that comprise their personal and cultural histories is both aesthetically and politically significant. Their courage is exemplified by the fact that they reject some mythic images and reclaim others. The closing of the film has them tearing down the lifestyle posters and advertisements from the wall in an almost manic montage sequence. Isabelle claims that she is now free, but of what? These images suggests that the "dreamlife" of patriarchy provides no real options since it is based on romantic promises which are meaningless, impossible to achieve, or exploitative. *La vie rêvée* rejects patriarchy as an unfinished history of women's struggles, and in so doing, underscores the limitations of representing that struggle on film. This is signified by the shot of the plain white wall that once held the posters, accompanied by the layering of sounds that signals the end of the film. The image and soundtrack connect the women to a more complex history with an ending that, like much of the

preceding film, blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality by referring to off-screen spaces aurally that cannot be confirmed visually as diegetic in origin. We hear references to Québec cultural history (the musical spoons), as well as perhaps to women's biological history (the joyful sound of children playing). We also hear the sound of the girls' VW bug as they drive off into an open future. Altogether, the ending confirms what Silvia Bovenschen (1985) has claimed: that conquering and reclaiming are equally a part of a women's aesthetic revolution.

The Shock of Dislocation: Body, Aesthetic, Subject

It might be useful to briefly consider *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* in a manner relative to other emergent alternative cultural expressions; Stuart Hall's (1988) discussion of Afro-Caribbean cinema in the context of the black diaspora, for example. Hall argues that "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact" it might be more fruitful to "think, instead of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and constituted within, not outside representation..." (68). If cultural identities are not fixed, then the images that contribute to a cultural image bank are never frozen in their meanings. This condition helps subjects to manage the slippery slopes of subjecthood; the shifting relations of power and subordination do not depend on replacing one form of oppression or liberation with another, stereotyping for the burden of representation. In both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* the characters produce their own identities which are, in part, constructed from ideas associated with the representation of women in the long history of Western art practice and consumer culture. They rework these languages to include their own correctives and interventions.

Without abandoning conventional film language altogether, then, the films refer suggestively to a new language, an alternative women's cinema that while retaining certain elements of melodrama attempts to disrupt the relationships among conventional signifiers of gender. By emptying the sign-vessel labelled "woman" and draining it of certain meanings regarding femininity — in which class and ethnicity are inevitably entwined — new associations become possible, new ideas are "emphasized" or "made public," new signifieds are deployed. The films' aesthetic strategies directly address the selectiveness of representations of women. By highlighting the gaps in these representations, the films cleverly deploy sexuality as a bridge to other aesthetic and political possibilities. A central issue in the contestation of the heteropatriarchal status quo that signals the emergence of a desiring female subject is also the destabilisation, resignification and eventual collapse of the "already accomplished historical fact" of the modern (male) subject.

Reconsidering subjectivity as an incomplete process or an unfinished history permits a different approach to the unruly subject of Canadian cinema. As I argued in the Introduction, this is perhaps the approach that Martin Allor (1993) is suggesting when, in the context of Québec cinema and television, he describes the new Québecois/e subject as "both a people (le sujet-nation)" as well as exceeding "the limits of this national-subjectivity: to not be identical with it" (70). As with any approach that poses differences against one another, the issues surrounding subjectivity are never more clearly held in relief than when assumptions about what is culturally revered, or held as "true," "standard," or "normal" are overdetermined. Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon (1994) describe this in Foucauldian terms as "a 'particular ordering of things' which then becomes structuring of the knowledge we have and hold about ourselves" (38).

In addition to the political and historical references within the films and their social contexts, *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* also include the historical confinement of women to objects of the gaze as part of the cultural epistemology they will analyse (Berger 1972; Mulvey 1975). However, these "classic" scenarios are re-staged and presented ironically and confrontationally in the films to challenge the order of things, and thus to make new statements about female subjectivity. In *La vie rêvée*, for example, the main characters, Isabelle and Virginie take a trip to the graveyard on Mont-Royal. They pack a picnic and eat it in the nude. This image appears to be a direct reference to *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (C. Monet, 1883) in terms of its framing and the "narrative event" it depicts. What is noteworthy about *La vie rêvée* is not only its similarity to the Monet it quotes, but also the modifications Dansereau has made to her film. Its differences make a meta-comment on the tradition of Western art by implying that critical representational strategies must be continually reinvented. In particular, this is conveyed by the jump cuts which jarringly draw attention to the image's construction. Also significant is the absence of the two male figures in the foreground of the mise-en-scène of the Monet painting. In Dansereau's version we as spectators are invited to occupy their position as acknowledged voyeurs.

At other times, this process of critical analysis occurs through disruption and reversal; for example, by replacing male "actors" with female agents of desire, the prerogatives of male subjectivity are closely scrutinized and "the order of things" is revealed. In *Anne Trister*, this slippage between subjects and power (actors and agents) is perhaps most explicit in the scene in which Alix' boyfriend confronts Anne while she is working on her atelier. Although he does not refer specifically to the sexual advance that Anne has

earlier made on Alix, he is there to reassert his territoriality over Alix vis à vis domestic/private space. This means keeping Alix in the newly renovated space of his apartment and away from Anne's atelier. At the end of both films, it is most emphatically suggested that female sexual subjectivity is migrant, or in any case, does not or cannot really exist "here." The spectator is thus invited to explore other subject positions, forms of subjectivity and desire that now include the knowledge of possible movements between fixed points of nation and sexuality.

In his essay, "Cultural Métissage," Allor (1993) discusses the complexity of issues concerning identity and cultural discourse including the public discourse on issues of ethnic and linguistic identities (70). According to Allor, this complex structure or web of ethnic and linguistic identity includes the "pragmatic and public" as well as the "affective and personal" (70). He asks: "...(am I, are we, fundamentally American or something different; neither traditional nor simply modern or postmodern, something different; *étrange à nous-même*)" (70). While Allor is describing what I would call the experience of the postnational — to be both the nation and not identical with the nation, to be an outsider, an other, a stranger to ourselves as well as to each other — his ideas also describe the historical conditions of emergent subjectivities. The postnation is a complicated designation that refers to a real *or* imagined terrain comprised of newly-formed *or* dismantled national boundaries. The instability of the boundaries continues to challenge the idea of an original or authentic nation-state based solely on claims to a land mass. It signals a shift in imagining the nation as a community and includes subjects who re-define nationhood not just in terms of country of origin or migration, but those for whom the nation is a metaphor; as Allor puts it, national identity can be comprised of many components — public and pragmatic, personal and

affective. The meaning of national subjectivity is therefore extensive; it is an imagined repository for Other identity formations like ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and potentially much more or much less than we imagine as signifiers of identity migrate between public and private discourse, nation and subject. The postnation is thus a kind of conscious unconscious, with its subject always coming into subjectivity but never really arriving at the appointed destination.

The shifts in identity formations signalled by this new relationship between the nation and the subject that Allor identifies have tended to make the "ground" beneath the national unconscious precarious; the tectonic plates shift continuously to accommodate new "national" alliances. The figure of the woman, especially the trope of motherhood, has been historically deployed to consolidate many *anciens regimes* or to provide the metaphorical and actual foundation for subjects in the "new land," an idea so entrenched in Québec literature that it is susceptible to a sustained postnationalist critique.[44] Yet the tremulous relationship between nation and subject also suggests that citizenship can be reconfigured and home redefined. It is perhaps one of the effects of migration, which according to Iain Chambers (1994), destabilises all kinds of boundaries so that what was formerly "out there" is now located "in here" (2). *Home* is self-authorized, or as Chambers puts it, it is "a mobile habitat" (4). Home, so defined complicates identity and magnifies de Lauretis' (1988) notion of sexual in/difference by dislocating the

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[44] To delve into this in greater depth would take me too far afield from my immediate project, however, Michel Tremblay's plays, in particular *Les Belles Soeurs* (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart et Winston, [c1968] 1972) are excellent examples. Antonine Maillet's, *La Sagouine* (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1979) refers to a francophone and is located in New Brunswick yet it too serves as good example of a text that is critical of class inequities of francophone women across Canada and provides wry if not parodic representations of mother figures in keeping with the other examples. Mainstream Québec cinema made by men in the same period tends to characterise almost all women as mothers, bitchy girlfriends, or waitresses.

body of the subject, especially if that body refuses to conform to the metaphors that service the nation. Like the postmodern, when it is deployed as a critical strategy of modernity, the "state of the postnational" provides an opportunity to re-read or reframe the discourses of the national, not from outside or above but from within. If the national body is haunted by the fiction of a single nation — certainly a common *fiction de l'identitaire* — the displaced postnational "body" becomes indifferent to location; the competing and complementary discourses of gender-sex-nation work to dissolve cohesive boundaries of habitation rather than resolve identity issues.[45]

Anne Trister

Following from the above and my earlier discussion on gender, sexuality, and nationalism, I want to now address the ways in which *Anne Trister* sets up an experience of cinematic dislocation as an allegory for a national identity without clear origins or foundations. This is one way of considering the consonance of de Lauretis' and Allor's theories of identity in/difference that permits a critical "interference" of gender and the nation. *Anne Trister* presents several issues surrounding the personal problems of identity which de Lauretis and Allor might claim as complications of subjectivity. Specific examples of these complications are evoked within the film's narrative and mediated through Anne's experience of shock and grief, but they also have much larger cultural implications. The film suggests that a state of trauma is a central condition that affects the terms of address for a "becoming-Québécoise," the central issue of national-sexual subjectivity. Jim Leach (1998) has described this condition in terms of national cinema in

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[45]Identity in movement and *fictions de l'identitaire* are concepts that run throughout Québec literature and culture. A more in-depth discussion of these themes and theories would take me too far away from my current cinema project.

Canada as part of the "fragmentation of the other [that] opens up new perspectives on the problems of Canadian cultural identity which go well beyond the familiar binary oppositions: Canada/USA; English/French" (3).

To consider national identity as a process, as Stuart Hall suggests, or merely as an effect of dislocation, is an implicit critique of traditional discourses of nationalism. Following Hall, if we look at the ways in which national and sexual identity are related to one another from the perspective of a "becoming-subject," this opens up another means to analyse the ways in which gendered nationalism helps to highlight the trauma of subjectivity and signals a change in conceptualizing the subject of nationalism.[46] In *Anne Trister*, migrancy is linked directly with a variety of moments of being and becoming. Being "in between" is sometimes depicted as a self-imposed and ultimately liberatory component of migrancy. At other times, a migrant subject is also more than who Anne is becoming; as the film proceeds, migrancy signifies the others whom she represents. Anne is also a reminder of other exiled or diasporic non-subjects, she is a sign that forms an articulated relationship with the expulsion of the other: the Jewish, the lesbian, the woman.

Pool, herself a Swiss Jewish immigrant living in Montréal, often portrays women "in transit;" they are sometimes literally depicted en route from one location to another, or they are somewhere "in-between" more clearly identifiable portraits of traditional womanhood. *La femme de l'hôtel*, (1984), "Rispondetemi," Pool's contribution to *Montréal vue par* (1991), and *Mouvements du desir* (1995) are among the examples of this tendency in her work. In a statement that could aptly describe any of her films, Pool refers to

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[46]This idea, which I have been arguing is always present as a tendency in Canadian cinema, becomes more foregrounded in the 1980s and, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, is most pronounced in the 1990s.

La femme de l'hôtel as "a study of 'rootlessness, not belonging and internal exile,'" (as quoted, Clandfield 81). Without immediate paternal or geographic claims to identity, the film poses the question: can Anne ever be a subject, or is she so completely distanced from traditional signifiers of subjectivity that even a fragmentary sense of self is beyond her grasp? The temporary and liminal space that she occupies in Montréal represents an attempt to grapple with the possibilities and limitations of a diasporic or migrant subject position. Not only is Anne experiencing grief, but this traumatic condition echoes her position as a migrant non-subject displaced by the shock of non-identity, a state which the film links to mourning.

Constant movement, through both exterior and interior landscapes, is part of Anne's immediate experience of the world. She is disoriented. However, her disorientation is recuperated as an aesthetic strategy of trauma; for the spectator it is one of the dislocating identification techniques designed to shock her/him out of complacency, a strategy I identified in respect to *La vie rêvée* that is chosen from the lexicon of melodramatic language, but deployed in a new context. In *Anne Trister*, this strategy operates reflexively to provide commentary on some of the processes of cinematic identification as well as national identity. In other words, as spectators, we are "moved" to experience altered states similar to Anne's post-traumatic condition of grief, and through her eyes we are invited to reassess the ways in which identity is linked to origin. For Anne, as for the spectator, this is a redemptive process of self-discovery and recovery which mobilizes different kinds of subject positions.

If *Anne Trister* employs strategies of disruption or "dislocation" in order to resist the stabilizing effects of more classic identification techniques of cinema, one of the ways in which this is accomplished is by managing the

psychic play between distance and proximity for the spectator; that is, the spectator's relationship with images, including identification with the characters onscreen that sutures her/him to the text (Aumont in Silverman 1983, Silverman 1983, Hansen 1987). In *Anne Trister* the play in these stitches that manipulate proximity and distance between screen and "skin" is both foregrounded and heightened in a classically melodramatic manner; it is offered boldly through subjective point of view and intensified through the visceral effect of movement between over-identification and disidentification. Consequently, we are invited to shift rapidly between greater or lesser degrees of coherent subjectivity, agreeing, in part, to engage in Anne's confused desires as part of the pleasure-pain of identifying with her grief and trauma.

L'étranger te permet d'etre toi-même, en faisant, de toi, un étranger.[47]

Edmund Jabès (in Chambers 9)

The ongoing process of renegotiating identification/disidentification with the narrative events is echoed by the tension we may experience through our attachment to Anne's point of view, which we know is troubled. Her state of mind is tentative, and the narrative reflects this through its fragmentary style. Yet, the film nonetheless moves in a recognizable, if not linear, trajectory which takes the form of "the journey." The relationship between the narrative and Anne's point of view is complex; sometimes it is smoothly subjective, at other times jarringly so. Much of what this relationship between narrative and subjective points of view conveys about identity and subject positioning occurs through its discontinuous editing style

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[47]The stranger allows you to be yourself, by making, of you, a stranger. (My translation.)

and the placement of objects in the mise-en-scène. These ideas are introduced in the film's opening and linked to the question of female subjectivity and nationalism.

Switzerland, though differently organized, is multicultural nation like Canada that presents a complex idea of national identity. The film's first settings are places of transition and any cohesive sense of identification as it relates to location in *Anne Trister* is thus a bit tentative. In both the credit sequence and the opening sequence, the location is difficult to ascertain because cinematic point-of-view or conventional establishing shots are either not clearly presented or are absent altogether. The very first image is of Anne's back and we can hear her crying. Conventionally, in a more classic narrative film, a scene, especially one from the opening sequence, might be "broken down" into small, more clearly connected bits in order to provide the details of setting and their significance for the narrative events as they unfold. This sets up a tonal quality to the film that mimics Anne's emotional state. In *Anne Trister*, the unravelling of information is continually deferred, and our knowledge as spectators is gained slowly in an inductive process. Ideas are raised which may or may not be dealt with later on in the film. This has an uncanny effect, in part because by the time they are dealt with, it is almost after we have forgotten about them. When the issues resurface, they are not always clearly resolved but linked to other ideas.

In the case of this film's opening sequence, for example, the funeral procession begins in the midst of the event, occurring in an unidentified desert landscape with characters to whom we have only just been introduced, and only in the vaguest way. Spatially, this situates us as mourners: we are connected to the family as well as the familiarity of the burial rite itself while our emotional proximity to the events maintains a certain (perhaps safe?)

social distance. The sequence foregrounds the fact that the funeral is a ritual which oscillates between the private and the public event. It does so by managing the play between proximity and distance for the viewer in relation to the funeral. The setting might also be considered both social and intimate in the sense that we, as spectators, are not provided the details of place; we are expected to know the desert and understand its significance, or not, as the case may be. Thus, in this example, location is very much tied to identity; the spectator is addressed in the opening credits sequence as both an insider and an outsider of the rituals of the classic cinema narrative, as well as the Jewish burial rite.

The details of location and the viewer's ability to make sense of the mise-en-scène are equally important in the Swiss airport later in the opening sequence. The "real" setting is established by a small Swiss flag flapping in the background on the right side of the image. Dislocation, and its significance for the relationship between identity and cinematic identification, is modified somewhat but continues to be a factor with this second "establishing shot." Together, these images very slowly — and only if we are paying close attention — locate us as spectators in a familiar space (the airport), if not an immediately recognizable place (Switzerland). They are in this way similar to the images which open *La vie rêvée* in that they do not function in the manner of conventional establishing shots; both films confuse rather than clarify location, in part, for the purposes of establishing the characters' subjective and selective points of view.

Establishing shots conventionally tend to conflate space and place in the interests of introducing cinematic point of view and the narrative's enigma. Instead what we are confronted with cinematically — dislocation — also refers to a kind of paradox of identity-identification; the migrant national

subject has no clear origin, and the burgeoning female subject is only just establishing her status. The film underscores this notion by redoubling various signifiers of nationality — language, and cultural or religious rituals: to be an ideal Swiss is to speak French, English, Italian, and German, and in the case of the Tristers, an additional language: Yiddish. Cinematic point of view is linked to Anne, but it takes on multiple perspectives so even if it can be established as hers, the point of view seems to flit about from one place to another especially in the opening. In other words, if the ideal cinematic point of view is typically one which moves fluidly between that of the protagonist as the spectator's personal guide, and an omniscient point of view to reestablish "objectivity," these models do not operate conventionally in *Anne Trister*. Neither one is fixed in its purpose. There is no sense of security to resituate the spectator that might come from returning occasionally to an omniscient point of view when Anne's point of view waivers as it often does.

Furthermore, the images are comprised more often of fleeting glances rather than intense gazes, lasting an insufficiently long period for the spectator to feel well-situated or completely comfortable. These strategies can be accounted for somewhat by the personal nature of the journey narrative, but it is also here aligned with a mobile sense of national, religious or cultural and gender identity in which a woman is in transit between Switzerland, the desert, and Canada. Her fragmented gaze or glance is a look that lacks the authority conventionally bestowed upon a main character. Anne is, after all, a tourist.[48] The very issue of authority, including authorizing a point of view, and the real power struggles that occur in the narrative become part of the

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[48] This point is underscored a bit later when Anne arrives in Montréal and looks through the pay-as-you-view binoculars on Mont-Royal. The image mimics the position of the disoriented tourist. The camera duplicates the jumpy movements of Anne trying to manage the unwieldy binoculars, and in conjunction with the the telephoto lens, produces an almost nauseatingly visceral effect.

film's investigation. Dislocation and fragmentation are responsible for mobilizing other meanings, other positionings; they are strategies that pose the question "who is speaking thus?"

Anne Trister rebuilds spectatorship by dismantling the possibility of a coherent subject position for the spectator. Its discontinuous identification strategies as well as the uneven relationship between time and space together create little shock effects for the spectator; so moved by Anne's desire s/he experiences both (mis)recognition and indifference to the competing forms of engagement the film offers. The spectator is invited to occupy an unfixed position that oscillates erratically between proximity and distance (as concerns identification). This is a general characteristic of what Miriam Hansen has identified as the experience of shock (1987). Hansen links "culture shock" specifically to the cinema in her reading of Walter Benjamin. According to Hansen, the cinema's double photographic register as mimetic/indexical and representational is exemplary of the too-distant and too-close "object" which problematizes the relationship between the real and the illusory. The cinema is thus implicitly "shocking" because of its uncanny relationship to the real, and anxiety-provoking in the duality reflected by the statement: yes, this is real, no it is not.

Anne Trister exploits the uncanniness of the cinematic experience by directing these shocks. In this way, the film speculates on a number of possible points of identification for the subject of its address; it is one motif that is repeated throughout the film. Indeed, repetition, mirroring, and doubling are all features deployed in a number of ways in *Anne Trister*. Overall they suggest that a fixed identity is elusive, and, like so many airline schedules, identity is entwined in a complex network of far-ranging arrival and departure points; sometimes it depends less on who you are than where

you want or expect the trip to take you. Chantal Nadeau (1992) argues that this is in fact the film's greatest flaw: refusing, as she suggests, to acknowledge its strategies of sexual indifference occurs at the expense of sexual subjectivity and a clear position on the social differences of power that women occupy vis à vis men. Nadeau claims, following Teresa de Lauretis (1987), that this maintains the woman's position as the eccentric, as it relegates the woman as other to the space of ultimate indifference, "an impossible and indefinite position" (13). For example, the film sets up expectations about Anne's sexual identity and the future of her relationship with Pierre, her Swiss boyfriend, specifically through the exchange of audio tapes, and in the sequence depicting Pierre's surprise visit to Montréal. At the same time, however, the connection between Anne and her new friend, Alix, is being depicted as both friendly and erotic, but by introducing other forms of desire the film renders identification with Anne more complex rather than less so. Moreover, it is through Anne that the film's romance narrative develops. In both cases, romance as a signifier of personal or narrative desire is thwarted because sexual identity is left open and unstable, rather than represented as a simple shift in the relationship between object and subject of desire. Neither is romance presented as the central goal of the narrative, a fact that is made explicit by Anne's brief sexual encounter with a stranger outside Simon Levy's bistro.

These examples are implicitly counter to the ideological function of heterosexual romance in Hollywood cinema which typically idealizes the male-female couple. In *Anne Trister*, however, romance and sexual pleasure are not always equated. When Anne and the unknown man from Simon Levy's bistro get together in the alley outside the restaurant, it is clear from their repeated playing of the theme song, "Ridiculous," that they simply want

each other as substitutes for those absent lovers whom they truly desire, and the scene ends in a suggestion of mutual masturbation. The form the coupling takes as idea — sex versus romance — and practice — masturbation versus intercourse — is not presented as a foregone conclusion, but a momentary respite from their longing. This strategy suggests that Anne is an autonomous sexual subject, as well as functioning overall in the manner suggested by Elspeth Probyn: "to emphasize that images work not in relation to any supposed point of reference but in their movement, in the ways in which they set up lines of desire" (1995 9). Probyn has discussed subjectivity in terms of the relationship between place and space as a "be-longing;" the state of "being" and "longing" to be part of the place, a country or sexuality you can inhabit. Anne herself later comments on the mutability of sexual subjectivity and the perverse trajectory of desire when she tells Pierre simply, "I can't explain it. I love Alix."

In two important essays, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" [1920] and "The Uncanny" [1925] (in Strachey, ed. 1953-74), Freud discusses shock as an experience that is common to the fetishist and the melancholic. I will discuss shock briefly here in an effort to link them to Anne's traumatic subject position and by extension to the processes of cinematic affect that occur as a result of decentring the spectator. In the first essay, Freud develops a theory of trauma out of the experiences of veterans following the first world war. In the second, he discusses the notion of transference and substitution which the fetish object represents. In both cases, the shock of experiencing loss is minimized by the fetishist and/or melancholic individual in attempting to internalize the lost object. For the fetishist, the new object creates a sense of well-being. The fetish object is embued with both erotic pleasure and provides a trace of the lost object which is usually related to the phallic mother. The

subject gains an albeit illusory sense of control over that primary object through substitution; the new object diminishes the fear associated with the original loss and the fetishist is thus able to substitute pain for pleasure. For the melancholic, the lost object can never be retrieved because the slippage between substitute object and the real loss is impossible, and so "he" is destined to repeat the moment of loss nostalgically, in an often painfully obsessive manner with another, substituted, object.

For Freud, the social dimensions of shock could not be independent of its psychic or personal effects (Silverman, 1990). Shock is in itself ordinary in the sense that is a part of living in an urban, industrial society. It is only a matter of cultural context as to how its deployment will be affective. For example, Freud relates fetishism to both his observations of his grandson's game of fort/da and to the feet of the Chinese woman (1993, 29). The repetition of the shock moment is part of mastering objects in the world. It is directly linked to attaining subjectivity, acquiring language and managing the unmanageable/everyday events of one's life. The Surrealists called shock "convulsive beauty," and for them it was bound up with a notion of l'amour fou and the dismantling potential of conventional associations between objects and ideas (Foster 1993). As the subject is always in the process of self-protection, or what I would suggest is an attempt to construct a coherent identity, "he" is constantly hedging "his" bets, always aiming to produce/ward off the uncanny moment of déjà vu/imprévu. The relationship between shock and identity is that there are any number of traumatic events that can be conjured up to decentre the subject. Identity thus takes on the dimensions of a fetish object; it becomes a way to manage or salvage the trauma of its own loss.

The idea that identity allows one to present a coherent and cohesive self to the world is a fiction constructed over time, from the remnants of several lost objects, primarily home and mother. The fetishist/melancholic lives in fearful anticipation of the return of the shock moment, and in some ways is indicative of any subject's inability to heal, to transcend the shock moment through a substitute object, analogy or metaphor. This "mémoire involontaire" alters time and space because it returns the shock victim (subject) to the site of the trauma, to a rift in coherent subjectivity. If the lost object cannot be replaced somehow, the subject cannot move from experiencing shock to employing its trace — the traumatic-uncanny object — as a means of re-presenting him/herself in the world as a subject of discourse, and not merely as its object.

These ideas of shock, melancholy and the uncanny apply to the "identity under construction" or the migrant subject suggested by both Léa Pool and Iain Chambers, in the figure of the homeless stranger who is implicitly a shocked or split-subject. Pool and Chambers are careful to specify the individual dimensions of this kind of trauma, yet both admit that homelessness, with its attendant trauma, is a very common way of being in the world. *Anne Trister* addresses identity as a process, as a movement which is sometimes jarring — or shocking and traumatic — as well as lulling and calming. Thus, if shock is not inherently one thing or another, then it can theoretically be deployed for progressive aesthetic purposes. Arguably then, along with the experience of the "shock of identity" posed by the mémoire involontaire, a more distanced aesthetic strategy is produced: a restaging of the components of shock for redemptive purposes, a mémoire *volontaire* that is suggested by both Walter Benjamin (1968) and Miriam Hansen

(1999).[49] The deployment of shock as a critical strategy might operate as a means not to reduce the play of voluntary recollection, but rather, by intervening in the spatial and temporal relations of the mechanical relations of the cinematic apparatus, to redirect the shock effect. *Anne Trister* contributes to an understanding of the relationship between shock aesthetics and migrant identities by "embodying" a process of female subjectivity as mourning and construction.

The clearest example of an aesthetic strategy which engages the spectator in a kind of mémoire volontaire is the repetition of certain visual motifs in the film. There are several examples of repetition, but the most "memorable" of these are the many ways in which the film invites us as spectators to compare Anne to Alix' patient, the child Sarah. They are often compared to one another physically through graphic montage (editing) techniques which underscore their visible similarities. Pool employs elements of the mise-en-scène such as lighting, figure placement, and costume to aid the visual comparison. Likewise, the two characters can be compared to one another in terms of the film's "plot." Both of them come to Alix as "troubled children" looking for answers or ways of coping in the world of absent or problematic parents. They use the safe spaces of the clinic and the atelier as therapeutic places to play out the aesthetics of trauma in order to communicate their point of view to the world.

The film is obsessed with the construction and repetition of images of personal and cultural memory, which form an aesthetics of trauma. Anne's ongoing renovation of the Montréal warehouse, given to her by Simon Levy,

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[49] See also, Antonin Artaud's writing on the theatre. His ideal theatre is remarkably melodramatic in terms of its attempt to circumvent language to produce a moral and affective aesthetic. See *The Theatre and Its Double*. Trans. Mary-Caroline Richards. (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

is a central motif of the film reflecting her own personal metamorphosis. It is significant that the changes occur on the inside of the atelier since Anne effectively creates a trompe l'oeil, typically an illusion created by making a temporary *outer* "skin" or façade for a building undergoing major reconstruction. Anne's interior and exterior states of being are blurred, and sometimes confused; she must continually resituate herself in relation to other people and her status as object-becoming-subject is played out on the adjustments and modifications she makes to the trompe l'oeil. As this space is so connected to Anne's shifting sense of self, it is an appropriate metaphor for the changes that occur within her which are both distinct from and connected to her parents, her boyfriend in Switzerland, and her developing relationship with Alix.

This could also well describe the condition experienced by Sarah, Alix' young patient. Sarah refuses to allow Alix the "privilege" of remaining detached; she cannot retain her position as "scientific" observer of Sarah's behaviour, but must engage with her "up close and personal." Sarah confronts her with the materials of her own reconstruction by hurling paint at the glass observation booth that separates them. However, when Sarah's proximity to Alix becomes sexual and she touches her own lips, then Alix's, and then attempts to touch Alix' breast, Alix imposes a boundary, and restricts Sarah's actions. When Sarah reacts by curling up in the corner, Alix sits near her and extends her hand to her in a gesture of affection, thereby re-directing Sarah's compulsive behaviour.

This gestural scene is immediately followed by the sequence in the loft in which Anne and Alix communicate without words. The melodramatic techniques of muteness and gesture are in both cases deployed to cancel what Peter Brooks calls "the bar of repression" (1994b 19). It is an example of the

melodrama **striving** to express the inexpressible, **longing** to make central the abject, and **pleading** to destigmatize the taboo. All of these repressed elements are perhaps only briefly revealed for the purpose of reevaluating them, but they can never be completely overcome. The non-verbal melodramatic communication only manages the alternate discourse. The sexual taboo of child-adult sex is articulated and its impulse is eventually redirected, but it is not made into a metaphor nor limited by a simplistic comparison to the relationship developing between Anne and Alix. In short, the melodramatic enables certain discourses that might be otherwise excluded from our attention without making the point a "merely obvious" melodramatic tactic in order to return it to its place in the moral occult. This gestural, intimate moment also sets up the otherwise inexpressible lesbian undertone to Anne's and Alix' exchanges, an excess that spills over into the therapy sessions between Alix and Sarah. The sexual elements of each encounter are raised and then dropped, setting up and magnifying the suppressed eroticism underlying them. Later, when Sarah embraces the new teddy bear (the old one having been painted and bandaged practically beyond recognition), the link to Anne's own personal renovation project in the atelier is made most explicit. Anne stages a kind of ongoing subjectivity-in-process through painting and projecting imagery. Sexuality is only one colour in her palette of positionings. The illusory notion of a fixed and stable identity is linked to sexuality in this film, as I have so far discussed, but sexuality itself is part of a constellation, a fragment of other possibilities.

This idea is perhaps best expressed by one of the later sequences in *Anne Trister*, after Anne has decided to finish the renovations in spite of her more recent losses (her failed romance with Pierre, and the rebuff from Alix). It is in this sequence that she argues with Alix's boyfriend when he visits her

onsite. A close-up on the brake of the mobile scaffolding foreshadows Anne's fall; in her anger and distraction she fails to reset the brake and falls from the platform to the cement floor below. Anne is discovered unconscious some time later by Simon Levy, who has likely arrived to tell her she must now give up the atelier. Later, as Anne lies in her hospital bed, Simon and Alix discuss the building's forthcoming demolition. These images are intercut with slow motion shots of a wrecking ball crumbling the building, so that Anne, Simon and Alix, and the atelier are visually connected through editing. The significance of the sequence is underscored by the slow-motion crumbling of the almost finished renovations from the point-of-view of someone situated inside the building. As this space has become so closely associated with Anne, this marks a transitional moment in relation to her as well, possibly even signaling her death. It is thus more than a bit ironic that these images are so cinematographically sumptuous and the overall effect is so exhilarating considering that we are witnessing the end of Anne's dream space atelier. Perhaps this effect is produced, in part, by the fact that, as spectators, we are placed amidst the destruction of the atelier in a dark and claustrophobic low-angle shot. When the wrecking ball strikes, the sun streams in, and the result is an opening up of the space (which I personally experience as a huge relief). Being placed in the "middle" of several of Anne's desires — in this case, for her wish to recreate the atelier space — disrupts the coherency of our own desires, both as spectators and as social subjects. This is another example of how cinematic and narrative identification strategies seem to compete with one another. That these strategies are directly connected to a project of shifting cultural and sexual positionings is not insignificant.

Likewise, real settings and realistic situations are also important to *Anne Trister*. For example, Simon and Alix speak English, the language of commerce, when they discuss the building's demolition to make way for a condo development. This may also be one of the many ways Pool reflects on both the appropriateness of conventional language and metaphor, as well as its limitations for representing experiences. These representational caveats exist in the film whether the mode of expression is cinematic, recorded on tape, viewed on video, heard as music and lyrics, or spoken directly in French or English. As I argued earlier, the film's "language" relies on its audience understanding the cinema as a popular cultural form and on this film in particular as an example of counter-cinema that challenges the heterosexual romance of Hollywood narrative. In *Anne Trister*, language is presented as both expansive and limited, either too abstract and elusive or too literal to express experience. Language is linked quite explicitly to identity and personal experience, but it is in the interpretation of identity that language becomes one of the willful ways to respond to the "inadequacies" of expressing the fullness of experience; it is another way in which other meanings are mobilized.

As with *La vie rêvée*, the blurring of fantasy and reality in *Anne Trister* is an entry point, or a small port in which ideas such as the impossibility of representing experiences such as shock can be analysed. However, where blurring occurs, the ideas conveyed are not so fantastic and marvelous as they are metaphoric and uncanny. The above sequence ends with a shot of a mourning dove that has appeared before with Anne in the atelier. The bird is caught in mid-flight, desperate to "escape" from the façade created within the building while the image is framed to reveal only the shadow of the bird as it leaves with the sound of its wings flapping still discernible after the image of

the bird and its shadow have left the frame. This creates an uncanny sound-off effect; as an aural metaphor for the persistence of vision it also underscores the illusion upon which cinematic images rest. As with the trompe l'oeil, the atelier is only a temporary skin-space for Anne to occupy. It is both a chiaroscuro and a mock-up: it tentatively suggests that she herself is a construction, an image from which it might later be necessary to "escape" in order to survive. Because we have seen the dove with Anne earlier, and because the images are continually reconnected to Anne in hospital, the status of these images is also deliberately unclear. Like Anne, they hover between consciousness (or reality) and subconsciousness (or fantasy), and thus can be seen as emanating from her imagination as metaphorical projections of her semi-conscious mind, as well as existing "in fact." In either case, the images ultimately remain illusory, and however strongly they resonate outside in the "real world," the dove remains a chiaroscuro, a play of shadow and light.

It is significant that it is Alix's screening of Anne's 8 mm film within the film — the self-reflexive "reframing" of the event — that clarifies the location set out at the film's opening while it implicates Anne in its/her process of self/re/presentation. This bracketting device is another mediation of the already reflexive strategies of the film which permits us to reconsider this journey as part of a larger cultural phenomenon; Anne's film is a memorial for her father and herself; it is a metaphor for the migrancy of subjectivity, nation, gender, and sexuality, and an acknowledged self-representation. Cultural memory, the memorial, and autobiography link the historical and personal journeys. In the case of Anne, the journey is explicitly a voyage of discovery but unlike the history of her Jewish ancestors, the exile is self-imposed; the film returns to its own beginning by recalling once again

the nomadic history of Jews through Anne's journey. The difference between a fixed identity and the position of the subject in the discourse of identity is once again linked with the various departures and arrivals that the film depicts, and in this instance the idea that travel is more significant is underscored. The final "destination" is thus perhaps unclear — death being the only sure arrival/departure — but it is the movement from there to here and back again that is prioritized; the only real (narrative) destination is the accomplishment of Anne's healing process.

The subject of *Anne Trister* has no fixed address. S/he is not exactly provisional or contingent, but occupies an in-between place that troubles *les fictions de l'identitaire*. *Anne Trister* employs destabilising strategies of cinematic identification in order to disrupt coherent subject positions. The film chronicles Anne's experience of shock and traces the healing process as a re-evaluation, and literally, a reconstruction of her life. It also connects the personal situation which has prompted this process (the death of her father) to the condition of the diasporic subject and the shock of non-identity/identity. Her own subjectivity is partly relational, partly reconstructed. It is linked to but not contained by history and memory. As a migrant subject Anne comes face to face with her own relationship to issues of identity and (self) representation exemplified by the note that Alix reads after viewing the film. Anne has left Alix a different kind of love letter, which she has "modified" from Pierre's earlier note to her. Anne, as a stand in for the female artist-subject, "erases" or "crosses out" Pierre's words to form her own message, to create her own meanings. Likewise, the migrant subject is also a palimpsest of sorts. In being constructed within a culture subject to its rules, and by necessity reinventing the self for survival, Anne

must modify or displace the notion of a coherent identity in order to make a space for herself.

Conclusion

Our bodies become other bodies, that is, objects on the screen, further signs...

Iain Chambers (62)

As with Allor's national-cultural citizen (1993 7), the migrant female subject represents a "state" that exceeds the limits of (sexual) subjectivity; as de Lauretis might put it, she queers it, or to put it another way, by virtue of her same/different relationship to male subjectivity, she is not 'identical with it.' If we look at the historical relationship between nationalism and the female subject in Québec, this is more than a theoretical notion. There are many overlaps, mutual theoretical interests and connections between feminism, theory and politics with the two films I have been discussing. Central to this is women's writing in Québec from the early 1980s onward that works across media, as well as linguistic, ethnic, class and theoretical and creative divisions. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are both significant to representing the difficulties of the female subject in relation to Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism. Although feminist political action and sovereignty have by no means always been connected, their parallel paths often cross. The post-1980 PQ government was, for example, the first to develop policies specific to women's issues, yet, for example, abortion rights versus paternity rights in Québec were still contentious as recently as 1989. Feminism in Québec was also influenced by not only continental feminism,

but also by English-Canadian feminism, yet the connection is not always direct. For example, The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, begun in 1970, was a powerful voice for women's rights in Canada, and as with many women's groups in Québec, it was interested in class and race issues — in particular women and poverty — that have not always held a sustained and progressive interest for all separatist or non-separatist political parties.

As *La vie rêvée* makes direct references to the political climate in Québec, it also suggests that the separatist agenda was often at odds with the complete emancipation of the Québécoise; the male characters who represent separatism couch their sexism in separatist rhetoric, but are, with the possible exception of the Anglo boss at B&C Films, the most sexist of all the male characters in the film. Even though *Anne Trister* takes political issues into the specific realm of the female ethnic outsider, and Anne's loft represents an attempt to meld artistic, domestic and national spaces, in the end the building's demolition suggests this is an impossible space, incompatible with economic "progress." While Thomas, as Alix' carpenter-renovator boyfriend, attempts to take over the domestic sphere by recreating it in his image, he does nothing to resignify the politics of this space; he merely adds it to his domain of power. Both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* deal with the historical conditions of subjectivity by connecting gender to class, sexuality and ethnicity and by depicting the protagonists' attempts not merely to insert the feminine into public, semi-public, and institutional spaces, but to change the meaning of that space as a result. The filmmakers thus attempt to experiment with a new film language and to create a Québécoise film culture, to render problematic the assumption that spaces — especially the fraught notion of home — traditionally associated with women must forever contain them as subordinate subjects. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* make room for

renegotiating the position of women in Québec cinema as objects of analysis, as well as unruly social subjects of national and sexual discourse, and in doing so they "reterritorialize" that relationship.

Chapter Four

Displaced/Replaced/Effaced:
Reconstituting the Canadian (National) Family Melodrama in
Léolo and *Next of Kin*

According to Linda Williams (2001), home is the most loaded element of the melodrama, in part, as she suggests, because it stands as a testament to the idea of goodness. As a conventionally feminine gendered space, home is often depicted as a site of innocence and defending it becomes a matter of protecting its "virtue" as the good icon (188-189). In the melodrama, home is also the site of conflict, as well as a source of solace. In the films of the previous chapter, *Anne Trister* and *La vie rêvée*, home is depicted as an especially fraught place for women. In fact, it becomes so difficult a place to reside in that even with all its reconfigurations and manipulations, the central characters must eventually leave their new homes. In both these films, the power of their leaving is based largely on the fact that home is so closely associated with femininity. Leaving home then becomes more than just a means to redefine it on their own terms, it suggests a radical break from the conventions of femininity, and signals a refusal to be contained by its meanings, so that home, if it exists at all, becomes the "mobile habitat" suggested by Iain Chambers (4).

Paperback Hero and *Between Friends* can also be read in terms of their relationship with the notion of home. Part of Rick's problem in portraying Marshall Dillon in *Paperback Hero* is the impossibility of feeling at home in the genre for which he is a self-appointed representative. Even his "side-kick" Polkinov has difficulties with/at home. He and his young family reside in a too-small trailer, which contributes greatly to the tension in their relationships, while the frame of a house (the ideal home) Polkinov always

intends to build lies in wait on the outskirts of town. In *Between Friends*, the theme of returning to a place like home is the source of the male characters' dreams. Toby and Chino represent a longing for home that they both temporarily make with Ellie, but actually might be more accurately reflected as their mutual desire for the father figures, Will and Coker.

Home, as a conflict between site of origin and residence is central to *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*. Both films extend this conflict from the contested identities of central characters, which are most clearly embodied by the split Peter/Bedros in *Next of Kin* or Léo/Léolo in *Léolo*. They attempt to remake home in their own images, and their fantasies are to varying degrees successful. Yet whether we agree to participate in these *fictions de l'identitaire*, as spectators, we are confronted by the impossibility of believing in these mythical homes as they once were or might be. This parallels the knowledge we have about the characters, which we only have to through their overt self-performances. Both films challenge the notion of creating anything "real"— self, family, or home. These signifiers of identity are depicted as privileges that are so undermined by economic hardship or the fact of immigration, that they are, according to the films, the last great myths of the nation.

Synopses of *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*

Léolo (J-C Lauzon, 1992) is set in Mile End Montréal in the late 1960s. It is the story of an adolescent boy, Léo Lozeau (Maxime Collin), whose angst-ridden relationship with his family provokes him to withdraw and eventually to become catatonic. Léo repeats the following lines throughout the film: "Because I dream, that is not what I am. Because I dream, I am not." He recites these lines in order to distance himself from the terms of his

identity. He is stating that he is not a member of the Lozeau family; that he is not crazy, not working-class, and not a francophone kid from Montréal. Instead he claims to be Léolo Lozone, the child of a Sicilian peasant whose sperm has inadvertently impregnated his mother (Ginette Reno) via a tomato she falls onto at the (Jean-Talon) market. The film details his and his family's exploits, especially their rituals — picnicking at Île Ste-Hélène, the Friday night laxative, or visiting a family member at the sanitarium — all of which Léo considers to be evidence of their insanity and ignorance. As spectators, we are invited to agree with Léo's assessments, as well as to read them as signs of their class/linguistic oppression.

Léo has his own rituals. They are his attempt to stem the tide of his family's overwhelming oppressiveness. In the middle of the night he urinates off the balcony; reads *L'avalée des avalés* (Réjean Ducharme, 1966), the only book in the family home; and writes in a journal. He daydreams. He dreams of Bianca (Giuditta Del Veccio), his beautiful Italian immigrant neighbour whom he adores, and who also "does favours" for his grandfather for money. Léo masturbates. He obsesses. He buys shit from his sister Rita to avoid the enema bag. He dreams of killing his grandfather (a dream he comes dangerously close to fulfilling) whom he holds personally responsible for the lineage of his completely dysfunctional family. Léo also keeps a collection of insects and small amphibians under the house that one of his emotionally disturbed sisters attends to. When escapes such as these are no longer available to Léo or other members of the family, they suffer and go mad. Léo also eventually succumbs to his own despair and joins the others at the "family plot" in the sanitarium. The end of the film suggests that while Léo himself has died or at least succumbed to catatonia, his dreams have taken on a cultural force, becoming a cautionary tale in the final voice-over when he

states: "Because I dream, I dream. Because I am afraid to love, I no longer dream."

Next of Kin (A. Egoyan, 1984) is about Peter Foster (Patrick Tierney), a young man from an upper middle class WASP family. His only ambition in life is to play make-believe. This displeases his parents who decide they all must go to a family counsellor. In the first of several reflexive moments in the film, Peter spends most of his time during the initial counselling session asking about the video equipment being used to tape the family. He occasionally smiles obligingly at the camera. Later, when the family members are invited to view the tape privately, Peter arrives alone and is misrecognized as a doctor at the institute. Supplied with a stack of videotapes, we see him about to check out the problems of other families. One family, the Deryans, captures his attention. The Deryans' major problem seems to be the guilt that the father (Berge Fazlian) feels about abandoning the son, Bedros, in an attempt to seek refuge from Armenia in Canada. The suppressed anxiety this creates comes out in the father's relationship with his daughter, Azah (Arsinée Khanjian), but nobody seems particularly happy with anyone.

Later, when asked by his own counsellor what he wants to do to change his anti-social behaviour, Peter states that he would like to go away for awhile, but will keep in touch via audio cassettes. Peter goes to visit the Deryan family, posing as their long lost son, Bedros. In the process of getting acquainted and "being Bedros," Peter actually helps the family relationships improve, and decides that he really likes this family and wants to continue to be their son. The film ends happily after a night of birthday celebrations with a final tape to his (real) family stating that he won't be returning. Although Peter seems content, he has learned that it is possible to abandon a family, or to exchange one for another. It is thus uncertain whether he has settled here

or if he will take it upon himself to be counsellor/actor in a completely different family romance.

Narrating the National Family Melodrama

Reconstituting the family is the central narrative impulse of the Hollywood family melodrama, according to Noel Carroll (1991). He argues that, notwithstanding other generic plot devices, in the family melodrama the family must be salvaged or a surrogate one established, by whatever means necessary. Whether the family is reformed or re-fōrmed, the resolution — the psychic redemption of the protagonist — depends on it. The concerns of the family melodrama are a useful way of framing the narrative problematic that both *Léolo* and *Next of Kin* are driven by, and to which the films adhere even when the consequences are dire for the family or for the protagonist. As Peter puts it:

> When you are raised with a group of people you are obliged to love, you don't really get a chance to see them as people....And...that means...you can never really love your family because you are deprived of the freedom you need to make that commitment: the freedom of choice.
> Peter/Bedros, *Next of Kin*

Peter makes the above speech at Bedros' birthday party near the end of *Next of Kin*. Peter and the others are celebrating the birth of Bedros, whose role he is playing, as well as Bedros' so-called reunion with his family, a family whom Peter **has** chosen as his own, unbeknownst to them. In *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* the family is depicted as an overtly oppressive force in the lives of the main characters, Léo and Peter. They are members of families, which as the above quote from the film defines it, are comprised of people thrown together from whom love is expected, rather than freely given. From

the point of view of these "children," much of the family's oppressiveness lies with the fact that everyone is expected to play a pre-determined role in order to fulfill someone else's fantasies. Peter and Léo assert their right to do the same, but on their own terms, which are contrary to those imagined by the family. Peter has refigured his role, which while it is still limited to being a son in a family, is nonetheless *his* role in a family of *his* choosing. Léo imagines a new identity and family independent of the Lauzeaus, but reality is constantly at odds with his fantasy. As neither family can be reformed, both Léo and Peter re-form it as "Léolo" and "Bedros."

David Rodowick (1991) argues that the social and the psychic are central determinants to the melodrama's figuration of patriarchal authority. The authority "figure" is conventionally embodied in a single character, the father, who represents "a complex network of social relations whose symbolization is undertaken by the domestic melodrama" (240). In both films, the children are expected to live up to the demands of their fathers, in particular. These fathers are often depicted as demanding and unreasonable, prone to abusing their power and authority. The coercive force associated with the father is present independent of whether they make specific demands upon the family; the family has internalized the patriarchal panopticon that the fathers represent. Members often police one another in his absence thereby facilitating the symbolic and actual power of the father.

What makes *these* fathers especially interesting, however, is the films' insistence that it is only within the realm of the domestic family melodrama that they are able to exert any real authority. Rodowick argues that the combined institutional and familial authority is "the lynch-pin on which the structure of conflict will turn, it is a system of power against which the logic and the order of the representations of social relations are measured" (240).

Thus, while Mr. Deryan may come off as a bit defensive in the interview with the psychologist, he is no match for the institutional authority that the doctor represents. As a patriarchal figure, or as an agent of the patriarchal order, his authority is limited by his social status: the fact that he is a classic first generation merchant-immigrant grinding out a living in an off-the-beaten-track retail store. He is thus no economic or social force to be reckoned with, and this lack of authority elsewhere seems to compel him to be more authoritarian at home.

In effect, both fathers have become obsessive in their desire to control family members, to make the family conform to their authority and their vision of the structure of their little fiefdoms. In our first encounter with M. Lauzon he looks like a lowly ox as he drags some heavy chunk of metal along the floor of the forging plant; he is literally a beast of burden. His authority within the family comes from his physical strength and voracious appetite; his "presence" derives not from the social position he occupies or his competency in the role, but rather that father-as-head-of-household is the pre-determined logic upon which his authority turns, an absurdity that the film underscores over and over. Both fathers perform their roles as incomplete and incompetent patriarchs, in part, because they lack the social status that would give them credibility in the larger world where they too must fall into line. Due to their class and ethnicity, the fathers are only minor agents of patriarchy. For their contributions to its social and psychic structure, they receive benefits in keeping with their roles as supporting actors.

The pressure to perform to the expectations of others is not limited to fathers and sons, or even the other characters in the films. In an indirectly reflexive manner, this pressure comes from the audience as well. As inescapable as it obviously is for us as spectators, only Léo and Peter

acknowledge their own role-playing and the combined pleasure and burden it is for them to maintain. The repeated use of voice-over and direct address narration become structuring principles that the films deploy in order to foreground performance. In *Léolo*, three intermediary "voices" or overlapping points of view are employed to tell Léo's story: Léo himself (Maxime Collin), J-C Lauzon as the voice-over narrator, and Pierre Bourgault as the Word Tamer. Léo writes in his notebook, while the narrator and The Word Tamer read his passages, as we only later discover, posthumously. Peter, in *Next of Kin*, recites his lines several times, as though practicing them for the benefit of his new family and sometimes in voice-over on tape for the folks back home, or for us. Because so many of the lines are repeated, in both films the notion of role-playing is heavily underscored. However, if the aim of the repetitions is to reassure us that as spectators we are ubiquitous, in practice these films create the opposite effect, for even though we may presume that we see and hear all the somewhat overlapping recitations, the excessive repetition also reveals that the performances vary from audience to audience.

The effect of this strategy is twofold: on the one hand, it foregrounds doubt and spectatorial anxiety — in effect cautioning us as spectators of the possibility that all the performances we view may be incomplete. On the other, this strategy aligns us with the demanding parental figures in the film, so that we, like them, monitor the behaviour of our little charges as though knowing what they are up to at any given moment will enhance our sense of control over the narrative/family. Yet the "complex network" of patriarchal authority, in which we are implicated, is undermined by the performances. For example, while certain lines at first seem to be selectively performed for just one of the audiences, the fact that they are ultimately performed for us —

the cinema audience who cannot control them — is clarified when, for example, Peter, or The Word Tamer, confront us directly with the power of their gazes. In direct address, Peter explains it thus:

> I realized a long time ago that being alone was easier if you became two people. One part of you would always be the same, like an audience. And the other part could take on different roles, kind of like an actor.

The level of sustained performance and the self-reflexive references to acting are obviously then part of what structures our relationship to the characters in both films. Moreover, as spectators who are effectively addressed as demanding and ineffectual parents who seem incapable of change, and who are constantly reminded they have no authority here, it is as though we bear a greater responsibility for the characters' duplicitousness and well-being than the parents depicted in the films. This is a rather familiar strategy commonly deployed to suggest complicity in any number of genres, including the domestic or family melodrama. In *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* the frequent references to the fact that the characters are playing (social) roles is often so overdetermined as to be unbelievable, and yet sometimes the performances are also so powerfully poignant that their affect is inescapable.

In searching for reason as well as passion within this oscillating mode of address, we are invited to consider our own place within the drama. This not only introduces the ideas of spectatorship as complicity and surveillance, it helps manipulate the tension between omniscient and partial knowledge about the characters. The films extend this strategy to the point of social critique so that at the very least we are invited to wonder why power is organized according to the hegemony of the family. In engaging us by turns in the ordinary and the excessive — that is, the poignant and the almost farcical — we experience the visceral effect of dramatic contrast that is central to the

melodrama. This in-between positioning for the spectator becomes an analytical method as it effectively disciplines and displaces our desire for narrative control. Our status as spectator-subjects is revealed to be both too much and too little; we are made over as split subjects, addressed as alternately controlling and helpless; we are made complicitous in the films' outcomes, while having been constructed by their discourses.

This "impossible" situation, which is so typical of the melodramatic techniques of emotional constraint and excess, links us to the perspective of Léo and Peter, but not strictly in conventional terms of cinematic identification. We are authorized as spectators and positioned as social subjects with responsibilities inside and outside the film texts. In one moment, we are addressed perhaps as ideal "Canadians." That is, as citizens of a multicultural state, and consumers of national culture who are familiar with stories of immigration, our point of access and address is conjoined at the site of the films' moral occult. In the next moment, we are chastised for not being the ideal parents in the Freudian family romance. So, in both cases we are caught up in a classic melodramatic, nationalist quest, positioned between twin fantasies of ideal subjecthood, which Linda Williams (1991) defines as "the quest to return to and discover the origin of the self" (11). Just how difficult it may be to locate the self is made "eloquent" by the competing melodramatic terms under which the characters are made known to us. Through a series of conflicts, which arise as a result of the differing desires of the individual and the family/community, the connection between the national and the melodramatic subject is highlighted.

This brings us closer to identifying the critical method of melodrama that is linked to what Rodowick calls the "symbolic divisions and oppositions which organize the narrative around the problem of individual identity both

social and sexual" (240). In *Next of Kin* and *Léolo*, as in all family melodramas, there is a rift in the psychic family structure, a tear in the fabric of the symbolic realm it represents. In both of these films, leaving a gash behind also marks the difference (or locates the border) between meaning and being, which may also constitute a turning point for the family's reformation. The rift between the sexual and the social thus becomes evidence of "difference," effectively displaying the plight of the virtuous/split subject of melodrama and national discourse.

Because the films foreground the positioning of the central characters as split subjects — splits that occur within a narrative loaded with elements of surveillance and performance — both films can also be read as allegories of the multicultural nation brimming with repressive apparatuses. As allegories, the films signal the impossibility of taking up a position within the social and symbolic order. These are crises of meaning and being where origin and identity — the central problematics of both the family romance and the multicultural state — are inevitably put in play by the existence of the split subject who is never the "I" of discourse. This crisis cannot be smoothed over because, as an act of disavowal it also effectively avows the anxiety under which the subject comes into being. By suggesting an allegorical relationship between the family and the nation, I am arguing that the films engage in their semiotic deconstruction.

Because Canada is not a third world country, but does not occupy a prominent position within multinational capitalism vis à vis film production, certain elements of Fredric Jameson's work on national allegory might be more useful here than they have been in describing so-called third

world literatures.[50] While it is doubtful, as I have so far been suggesting, that Canadian cinema can be wholly contained by any definition, national allegory nonetheless allows us to consider the ideological relations of power between dominant and subordinate positions that multiculturalist discourse tends to gloss over. In the melodramatic mode of analysis I am claiming for these films, the idea of the national allegory becomes a point of contestation or commentary on these relations of power. That is, national allegory provides a framework for considering the relationship of the discourse of multiculturalism and its tendency to interpellate subjects into relations of power based on ethnicity and class. Melodrama becomes a method by which this operation is exposed within the national allegory and melodrama is the vehicle for the subordinate position to be given expression. My use of the term national allegory is thus intended as tool to consider the means by which Canadian cinemas, specifically *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*, are allegorical. In the sense that Leo's and Peter's performances are what Jameson might call their own personal "embattled situations" they are also allegories for the public culture and multicultural society in which they live (69). That is, however much the terms of this relationship may differ, their performances also speak to the context of multiculturalism as a central aspect of their identities.

In *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*, the reflexive treatment of performance becomes the key critical strategy for deconstructing the melodramatic narrative conventions of family life, as well as those of the nation. The

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[50]See "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall), 1987, pp. 65-88. Several critics have attacked Jameson's attempt to lump all so-called third world writing into one "general theory." See, for example, Aijaz Ahmed, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" excerpted in Bill Ashcroft, et al., eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 77-82. Ahmed states "...there is no such thing as 'Third World Literature' which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge" (77).

romantic ideals upon which the family is presumed to exist, i.e., the love of the parents for each other, supersede any sense of commonalty or group cohesion that the "members" may actually share. Not only do the family "individuals" in these films often appear estranged, when they do show their "love," frequently it is in very cruel ways. According to Léo and Peter, their so-called relatives do not have anything in common with them; both "boys" redefine the terms of their "affinity or consanguinity."[51] Whether as a cool manipulation of the meaning of self-representation that Peter refers to when he describes himself as split between actor and audience, or in the case of Léo's oft repeated line, "because I dream I am not," both films offer the potential for a new mode of signification outside the confines of the family/nation. Yet, the family collective represents a major obstacle for all members as concerns their individual struggles to achieve a sense of identity or sovereignty that might exclude it.

The family, like the nation, is an institution that has become not only oppressive but practically meaningless. The boys cannot exist within it, but neither do they want to exist completely without it. In the case of *Léolo*, the family is a powerful sign, a seemingly monolithic yet ultimately empty signifier which Léo attempts to refigure. In *Next of Kin* the family is more a façade than a fortress; one that is easily penetrated by an outsider. These are classic metaphors for the relative durability of the nation. In both films, the meaning of the family is so manipulated by the central characters that it has lost any of its original, romantic or positive associations, or inherent

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[51] Degrees of affinity and consanguinity refer to the basis for Canadian (and many other nation's) statutes and provincial marriage acts. These are laws that determine how one person is related to another. The primary function of these laws, which are an indirect result of incest taboos, is to prescribe who may marry whom by imposing a degree of separation between blood relatives. This law has been supported by a number of social and familial conventions over millenia, as well as more recent scientific evidence relating inbreeding to mental deficiencies.

cohesiveness. As a metaphor for the nation, it has also lost the expectation that it should represent such social ideals.

It is apparent by now that the analogies between the family and the nation in both films are plentiful. It is primarily by placing the concerns of the multicultural nation alongside those of the family that the unwritten rules and regulations, which might typically help organize one or the other into some meaningful or coherent entity, begin to appear idiosyncratic, if not altogether preposterous. Instead, those social structures that traditionally have held families and nations together are exposed as not only ironic, violent, and barbaric, but in cracking open the sign system itself — in suppressing the conventional second-order signification (mythification) process — they are revealed as completely arbitrary. If the highly melodramatic performances in the films are linked to a social critique of the family and the nation, the family/nation is treated like a fictional conceit, a melodramatic language that the characters/citizens agree to participate in and to manipulate for their own needs. Both family and nation are objectified, submitted to narrativisation, made strange. A primary strange-making ploy is the fantasy-fear of origin and identity that equally plagues subjects in the family melodrama and the multicultural nation.

Christine Ramsay's (1998) discussion of *Léolo* as a poetic text also provides some clues as to the film's deployment of melodrama as a critical mode. Ramsay claims that Julia Kristeva's notion of poetic language negotiates between the semiotic and the symbolic and helps us to understand the position Leo occupies in relation to language and power. Ramsay argues that Leo must resignify the self in negative terms, outside the self "by confronting the self 'with the hypothesis of its own nothingness'" (34). In this process of self-abnegation, where attempts to access the symbolic via verbal or

written languages fail, Leo constructs an alternative "language" that is emphatically melodramatic. In Leo's desire for selfhood and the self-expression upon which his subjectivity turns, there exists a sometimes literal, subterranean system of signs. The mise-en-scène "collects" bits of detritus, fragments of an alternative sign system, but like so many insects and amphibians they are insignificant; that is, they fail to signify in the symbolic realm. The languages of gesture and muteness do not reside in Kristeva's symbolic, they exist in a parallel universe that connects the semiotic and symbolic worlds.

If, as Rodowick claims, the melodrama represents the intersection of the psychic and the social, and as Peter Brooks (1976) argues, it applies pressure to underscore the terms of this arrangement, it is only plausible that "the domestic melodrama demands that sexual identity be determined by social identity" (Rodowick 240). Rodowick further argues that "the family both legitimizes and conceals sexuality by restricting it to a social economy defined by marriage — men assume the place of their fathers in the network of authority, and women are mirrored in this network by their relationship to men as wives, mothers, daughters, etc." By the standards of the family melodrama, both *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* fail miserably — even tragically — in achieving this ultimate goal. Rodowick and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1991) agree that, while few classic melodramas ever acknowledge the impossible position in which the characters are placed in the battle between the psychic and social, when these characters must finally accept or conform to the social and psychic restrictions of the family, they nonetheless "concede its *failure*" (240). This failure is expressed by the commonplace situations in which characters tend to express their dissatisfaction and sexual angst: in the form of

violence, sexual impotency, alcoholism and other psychological disorders (241).

While characters in classic melodramas often wish they could separate social convention from sexual desire, they are often paralysed in their wish to satisfy both. Peter and Léo, by contrast, express their dissatisfaction with the status quo directly, through their willful refusal to take up their "proper" places in the family. They reject the constraints of its normative sexual and social order. Furthermore, their refusal to submit to the Law of the Father doesn't dispense with the problem, it usually highlights it. Peter, for example, is depicted as asexual or presexual, content to play the role of the dutiful son to the hilt, as long as he can substitute the basic players for ones of his own choosing. On the surface, at least, this seems like a way for Peter to maintain the status quo in a way that serves the demands of the symbolic order, but so fundamental a disruption to the family renders problematic its basic definition. Léo, on the other hand, is an adolescent who desires Bianca. And although he knows she "fools around" with his grandfather, Léo won't have sex with her himself because to do so would tamper with her position in his fantasy life and acknowledge her locality, making her ordinary and too familiar, rather than mythic, and exotically Italian. Léo chooses to "feel up" the neighbourhood "tart" and to jerk off into a slab of uncooked liver, rather than sully his imaginary life concerning Bianca. This is remarkably in keeping with the often violent repression of sexual desire that the family melodrama requires of "children" in order that they will take up their appropriate social positions as adults. But as Rodowick and others suggest, sexuality is a threat to the social order, "a threat to narrative stability" (241). Léo's refusal becomes an obstinate form of displacement, and a problem that the film must return to again and again.

Rodowick argues that the melodrama tends to redirect the violence of repression inward. As he puts it, "the expression of violence would seem to be regulated only by an economy of masochism which often gives the narratives a suicidal thrust, channeling the disruptive forces back into the system" (241). In *Léolo*, this results in what Rodowick identifies as the family melodrama's attempt to balance extreme paralysis and irrationality (241). In order to negotiate between the inwardly and outwardly directed violence that describe the family realities, both Peter and Léo are "forced" to redefine its terms. Peter, in casually making over his family, redirects the violence of separation towards his original parents while at the same time he repairs the tear in the fabric of his new family by providing himself as its "patch." Léo's attempts to cope with his family by maintaining an alternate fantasy life fail after his grandfather tries to drown him in the little plastic wading pool. Léo must rid the family of this maniac, and so tries to strangle him in the bath, the primal scene of his grandfather's involvement with Bianca.

Family, not family

Unlike the protagonists in *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* whose identity is only partially comprised of "blood ties," Léo and Peter experience the family as central to their identities. Rick, Toby and Chino, of *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*, respectively, all resist the original configuration of the family, preferring instead to inhabit alternate selves, families, and geographic locations — also ones of their own making — and thus to free themselves to attach new meaning to the terms of their imagined lives. Remaking the self via the imagined family in *Next of Kin* requires that the entire nuclear unit be recoded; it must be newly signified to accommodate the fact of the individual "child" who abandons his "real" family in favour of

one he has adopted and with which he also has nothing "essential" in common. As I have suggested, for Peter, the construction of a new family seems as deliberate and arbitrary as his chance viewing of a family on a videotape in a therapist's office. Likewise, Léolo's birth is rewritten, but it remains his fantasy, a surrealist experiment involving the chance encounter of a plum tomato, some errant semen, and his unwitting mother.

Both scenarios can be read as critical extensions of the childhood fantasy-fear of adoption. By "adopting" new families both characters reverse the fear of abandonment, which is the childhood fantasy that is central to Freud's, "A Child is Being Beaten." According to Judith Mayne's (1993) reading of this scenario, abandonment can be defined as a sense of overwhelming loneliness and strangeness (*unheimlich*) that the child feels will be compensated for by fantasy. In the case of *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*, fantasy is a way of living with the spectre of being exiled even while living in the presence of the intimate others of a family. By wresting some power from those omnipotent figures, the parents, Léo and Peter, like many other "children," have devised a way of effectively stating: "I abandon *you*."

Judith Mayne (1993) and others[52] discuss this aspect of Freud's work on fantasy as uncannily cinematic and I would add, surprisingly melodramatic. Mayne highlights the cinematic metaphors and analogues that are used to describe the child's experience of the world. For the child, the world represents a confrontation with a series of enigmatic images, a "mise-en-scène" of desire-fear into which he tries to locate himself meaningfully.

Fantasy theory, which according to Mayne, lends "itself to a definition of spectatorship as oscillation rather than 'identification,'" (86) is very similar

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[52] See, for example, Mary Ann Doane's, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," in *Femmes Fatales*. (New York/London: Routledge, 1991).

to melodrama's mode of engagement. The tendency to plunge the spectator into a variety of different emotionally-charged positions is a basic strategy of melodrama that pushes our attachment to the film into another realm. In this case, the difference from how we conventionally conceive of identification is perhaps only a matter of degree. However, oscillation also facilitates multiple subject positionings within the text to extract the most power and "feeling" from it. In dealing with the world's contradictions, while at the same time attempting to exact the most pleasure from his encounters, the child learns early on the strategies of disassociation, multiple positioning, and oscillation.

It is not only the degree of involvement, it is also the degree of spectator mobility that is at stake in the melodrama. In melodramas the above strategies conventionally align us with the virtuous protagonist in order to reveal the moral occult (Brooks 1976; Rodowick 1991; Nowell-Smith 1991). The child chooses this fantasy life over the comparatively stogy, unsatisfying and potentially cruel fixed subject position of his "true" identity. This deftness and adaptability of subject positioning is reflected in the paradigmatic Freudian narrative: the child's description of his own beating experience outside of a first person narration.

The three original Freudian fantasies, which are linked to the access to language, assist the child in explaining his predicament: the primal scene fantasy which explains his origins; the seduction fantasy which elucidates the origin and upsurge of sexual desire; and the castration fantasy which ameliorates the perplexities of sexual difference. The first two are what Léo/Léolo ostensibly utilizes to make sense of his family and his position within it. In keeping with the structure of Freud's psychoanalytic expository narrative, Léo is the author of his own elaborate primal scene fantasy in

which he willfully and repeatedly positions himself as misrecognised within the reality of his family. In his stories he invites the reader to empathize with his plight as an outsider-witness to the bizarre rituals of his family, most of which involve food, shit, and sex. The seduction fantasy involves his neighbour, aptly named Bianca,[53] whom he idolizes. And, while she trades "sexual favours" for money from Léo's grandfather (like washing his back and biting off his thick and yellowed toenails), she does not take this very seriously. Apparently, Bianca is also adept at oscillating within and outside the apparatus of the family romance. She positions herself within the fantasy to extract the most pleasure she can under the unfavourable conditions in which she lives.

When Léo actually tries to kill his grandfather it does take place at the same location as the "primal scene" involving Bianca, but there are many elements of his temporary hatred for his grandfather that are more complex than simple Oedipal jealousy, or even castration anxiety. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Léo sees his grandfather as the originator of the predicament of the family; he blames him for their craziness and unhappiness, and believes that by killing him Léo can retroactively change the terms of lineage under which the family functions; he can rewrite his/[s]tory.

Peter/Bedros has managed to accommodate his fantasy life quite nicely. He too is unwilling to take up his place within the symbolic world, preferring instead to remain "the son" forever. Fantasy is helpful in explaining the

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[53] "Bianca" literally means white in Italian, but when constructed in the feminine singular form (with a word ending in "a" rather than "o" which is masculine singular) it carries cultural connotations of classic femininity such as goodness and virginity. In *Léolo*, Bianca's status as virgin or whore is uncertain and ultimately irrelevant since she is depicted as an elaborate projection by Léo. The fact that he tries to situate her within his own psycho-sexual consciousness is, however, central to the drama.

choice made by Peter/Bedros. The appeal of fantasy in relation to Freud's other theories of sexuality mentioned above is for Mayne, threefold. Following the lead of Laplanche and Pontalis who argue that fantasy provides a solution to the major enigmas of life that confront the child, Mayne claims that fantasies are "original" in the sense that they provide a structure or a means by which a variety of scenarios can be imagined. While it could be argued that on the surface Peter/Bedros wants to return to the oedipal scenario described above, he does not imagine it in terms of obsessively duplicating it. It is thus not as Mayne might put it, retrograde or regimented (87). Rather, it is a fantasy in which Peter actively envisions himself performing the role of Bedros, where he "negotiates" a position for himself within a mise-en-scène of desire he has staged. Thus the Peter/Bedros fantasy provides what Mayne suggests is an opportunity for decoding experience in a non-reductive manner since there is no rigid distinction between manifest and latent content, which are surprisingly similar structurally to the psychic and social. Membership in the family, then, is only one type of fantasy. It might be logically concluded here that this desire, like any other, is placed in a hierarchy according to the most fervent wishes of the child. As with Léo's imaginary Italian immigrant family, and Peter's Armenian one, the fantasy also involves the desire to restage national origins and differences.

Mayne suggests that the notion of variety and negotiation are crucial for understanding cinema as fantasy as well as for moving away from apparatus theory wherein the subject of the cinematic fantasy can only be male (87). The child is permitted some degree of agency within the ideal site envisioned by fantasy since fantasy exists, like the unconscious, as a repository of desires which, unlike the unconscious, is readily accessible. The familial subject of the Léolo/Bedros narrative can occupy many positions since the

multiplication of positions (at least two, possibly more) has offered a number of entry points into the fantasy narrative: as subject, object, and verb (action itself). Since fantasy occupies the mise-en-scène of desire, and is not its object, it is best described as a setting, a scene pictured, potentially one among many. This raises the question of non-coincidental identification and the precariousness of sexual identity. Like the child engaged in fantasy, the spectator doesn't identify with a fixed point of view whether this is defined in terms of the gaze, or a character or a sexuality/gender. Instead, according to Linda Williams (1991), the more fluid position we occupy suggests that we identify with what the "mise-en-scène of desire facilitates" (15). For both Peter and Léo, the fantasy of the family is a fantasy of origin integral to the restaging of the desire for non-coincidental identity; that is, the family is crucial to the terms within which national identity is imagined.

So far I have been arguing that the fantasy of the nation is a central component of the texture in which Peter and Léo imagine the family, and that fantasy provides a key to addressing the subject as multiply-positioned. If the structure of fantasy is shared with melodrama's multiple entry points, the films hold out the "promise" that Peter and Léo can be desiring national subjects. And, if this is not exactly outside an Oedipal narrative, it is at least one with sufficient pauses, ruptures and disruptions to the Oedipal trajectory as to suggest other possibilities. By conceiving of melodrama as a site where fantasy is activated, we are able to return to the significance of representation in the child's desire for a world s/he controls. To some degree, Peter Brooks (1976) discusses Balzac's narrator from *La peau de chagrin* in a similar respect, when the narrator "applies pressure" to the rather banal details of the story of a man who enters a gambling house with one franc in his pocket and who must relinquish his hat at the door (50-1). The narrator examines the

movements of characters and attempts to attribute motivation to their actions, thereby providing an opportunity for the reader to assess the significance of life's daily events. Brooks suggests that in this way melodrama provides a means not only to highlight the social and psychic, but also becomes a mode by which to analyse it as a distinctly class-based critical method. Perhaps this too applies to the characters in *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*. Léo and Peter are by choice or by chance members of the working class and immigrants. Like Balzac's characters, they "apply pressure" to social conventions, and in this case the family romance. Through them we are invite us to see it as strangely as well.

Nation, postnation

Smaro Kamboureli (1998) also "applies pressure" to language as a means to analyse how language policies represent the mise-en-scène of multicultural desire in all its contradictions.

> The law of language introduces a cultural syntax of agonistic relations that exceeds the intentionality of the legal text itself; in fact it reveals contestation to be what produces the discursive site of ethnic otherness.
>
> (Kamboureli 212)

The contested discourses of nationalism that are referred to by Kamboureli in the above quote exist in the very text upon which one idea of Canada is ideally described: The Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Kamboureli focusses on the ironies of the act, which she plays off the other hidden ideal: bilingualism/biculturalism. Its desire to be a national document that tells us French and English are both official languages is undercut in her analysis by the fact that each text is a translation of the other. She suggests that the irony

is a discursive moment that inaugurates other syntaxes of culture that disrupt official statuses. The Act sets into motion a potential disruption of sexuality (law and marriage, hetero and homo), ethnicity (non-ethnic, French/English), and the nation (non-nation) (212). Ironically though unintentionally, the Act multiplies the terms of Canadian identity. In *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* these same issues are presented as willful, even ironic reconstructions of the family, important features of imagining the diasporic subject as well as a means of issuing a complaint about the state of the nation with its implicit lack of choice about membership in the "collective." Problems in the basic definition of the family are reflected in the modifications to the family unit by both protagonists. The family, as a microcosm of the federation, is often depicted as violent, arbitrary, or insane. They are both inseparable yet institutional bodies with articulated appendages requiring ideological and mythological connections which together suppress the feverish shudders of an unstable discourse.

One of the major problems, with the traditional formations of both the family and the nation, is their institutional rigidity and their inability to confront the problems that result from attempting to create a unified front. The family/nation prefers a seamless, perfectly rational container; a story without any narrative disruptions caused by the real differences in class, race, gender, or sexuality that might inflect or infect their myths. In Canada, bilingualism and multiculturalism, upon which the modern nation was retroactively founded, are at the heart of the problems that the families in *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* can only obliquely refer to. Each film represents an attempt to contain or to somehow manage the misfit family, one that is neither multicultural nor bilingual; neither wholly anglophone, francophone or allophone. The inconsistencies, the displaced desires, the lies that require

glossing over — these are at the root of many of the family problems and by extension, those of the nation's. The films detail the consequences of living — and of not living so well—with these all-important myths of origin.

In the immediate post-official multiculturalism and bilingualism period of Canadian cinema, the ongoing commentary on the ills of the nation were, as I have discussed earlier, exemplified in English Canadian cinema by the male protagonists in *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*. The pan-Canadianist orientation of the struggles put forth in these films suggested that the cultural foe was aggressive, American and masculine. The idea that the characters are themselves immersed in these very modes of being is underscored by the fact that they straddle American and Canadian cultures, both iconographically and generically. Both films suggest that the protagonist's downfall is a result of his inability to extricate himself from the myths of either nation; he is unable to detach himself from the genre in which nation and gender are spoken iconography, and largely for "sport." Following Stuart Hall (1991), this decoding is a process of cultural negotiation; neither a strictly oppositional nor a dominant encoded Canadian subject position that we, as spectators and players, may be privileged to see, but which we may be equally stuck in or complicitous with. In this way, it is possible to consider *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* as willfully positioning themselves as alternative texts, examples of neither English-Canadian nor Québécois cinema.

But what of these texts that are neither clearly part of one tradition or another? Do these films as a national allegory suggest the failure of more familiar or dominant languages to explain the fact of the immigrant/Québécois other? And vice versa, for the "other" languages — cinematic, gestural, even silence — do these represent a successful attempt to

deflect the homogenizing influences of "linguistic" hegemony? The failure of language is at the heart of both Léo's and Peter's problematic existence, and its chronic repetition and perhaps seemingly ineffectual recreation — its "resort" to the poetic language of melodrama — is likewise the source of their redemption. Losing language, even while potentially gaining another, is a distinctly immigrant plight. Both *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*[54] deploy melodrama to expose the failure of the languages of the nation — namely multiculturalism and the inherently contradictory notion of bilingualism — to coexist, and furthermore to contain them.

It is worth remembering that *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends* portray working class, non-ethnic white males and the discourses of masculinity specific to them, while *Next of Kin* and *Léolo* deal with ethnicity as well as the erasure of ethnicity as directly related to inequities of class. In *Paperback Hero* and *Between Friends*, it is the difference, or lack thereof, between American and Canadian cultural iconography and myth, that is central to the problem of identity. The degree of mobility Léolo and Bedros are permitted in rewriting themselves into their adopted/imagined familial and cultural histories (Armenian/Canadian, Italian/Québécois) reflects not only their age and class, but the willingness or refusal of others to participate in their personal mythmaking. Their power to narrate, for their stories to have meaning and validity, requires a critical mass. Léolo, albeit unwittingly, must rely on the storyteller, the intradiegetic narrator to "protect" his/story, whereas Peter can take up the Bedros role because he has economic mobility and has learned enough of the family history by watching videotapes of their

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[54]See Carole Desbarats, et al., *Atom Egoyan*. Trans. Brian Holmes. (Paris: Editions Dis Voirs, 1993), for a discussion of Egoyan's ongoing interest in the relationship of languages to experience. They argue that Egoyan often stages a confrontation between different languages in terms of form (film vs video) and memory (English vs Armenian) in order to try to capture "authentic experince" (29).

therapy sessions. But both characters perhaps rely most of all on the audience itself to maintain their stories. The act of mythmaking, like the suspension of disbelief, requires the willing participation of spectators in order for the story to be both told and heard. A discourse can be, as Michel Foucault (1990) has argued, "both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (101).

In *Léolo* and *Next of Kin*, psychotherapy is complicitous in helping to maintain the status quo role by supporting the myth of the unity of the family. The family also acts as a kind of super-discourse upon which other discourses can be appended, especially though not exclusively nationalism. *Léolo* is set vaguely in the period of Quiet Revolution Québec where officially, at least, the tenets of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, which acted as the mortar between the bricks of the former Duplessis government, were crumbling. Léolo's and his family's mental illness is depicted as directly connected to the repressiveness of the family as a microcosm of the larger social order in which mental health institutions are also implicated. They are criticized for being ineffective in dealing with what the film ultimately suggests are economic and political issues. The occasional glimpses we have of the humanity of the family is all the more poignant when members attempt to rise above the pettinesses produced by this context by trying to tell their own stories. Although these stories are sometimes presented ironically, it is almost in a cruel way that they indicate the loss of innocence of Léo and Peter.

Both Léo/Léolo and Peter/Bedros bear the marks and emblems of the virtuous body that Brooks (1994b) argues must be displayed and recognized in the resolution of the narrative (18). If these films are the critical melodramas I

am claiming them to be, or if they deploy melodrama as an analytic strategy, what they reveal is indeed a new kind of moral occult: the effects of the family on the child, and those of the nation on the family. Both films become memorials for the effects of multiculturalism when they suggest that substitute parents can be imagined and children can be exchanged. Bedros is both remembered and desired by Peter, while Léo desires both the hope of the family through Léolo and its defeat. These characters exist at many crossroads which are conventionally the purview of the melodrama. They are located at the site of desire, which as Christine Gledhill (2000) argues is "generated at the boundaries, stimulating border crossings as well as provoking cultural anxieties. This is particularly the case where social identities — gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality — are shifting" (237). As with many melodramas, the recognition of origins is often delayed in these films. Recognition often comes too late for the characters, but in deploying melodrama as a means for reading contemporary culture, the "too late" becomes an aesthetic strategy that is capable of "bringing the 'others' of official discourse into visibility" (241). Thus while *Léolo* and *Next of Kin* can be read as family melodramas, melodrama itself can also be understood as a cinematic mode that helps to organise a variety of anxious, marginalized and unruly subjects of national discourse into visibility.

Chapter Five:

Queer Nation?:
The Unruly Subject of Postmodernism/Melodrama in
Forbidden Love and *Perfectly Normal*

> Queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise
> incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex,
> gender and sexual desire.
>   Annamarie Jagose 1996

As broad and potentially inconcise as this definition seems to be, when

queer techniques are strategically employed the results are often recognizable,

if not easily quantifiable. Queering is an activity, as well as an analytical

model, that invites us to reconsider the most central and highly held values

of a society; queering makes the ordinary appear strange and can provide an

opportunity to rethink the logic of the sexual hegemony of social and political

institutions. As an aesthetic strategy, its unhinging potential is enormous. I

will argue that *Forbidden Love* (A. Weissmann, L. Fernie, 1992) and *Perfectly*

Normal (Yves Simoneau, 1991) are examples of queer cinema writ large, in

part, for the way they challenge the stable sex-gender-desire relationship

referred to above by Jagose. My reading of these films is that they deploy

melodramatic techniques as queering strategies to foreground these

"incoherencies" at a textual/genre level precisely because they are a part of the

film's discursive context. Textual and contextual elements start to become

blurry. Irony, camp, and melodrama are strategies that respond to the cultural

and analytic context of queer readings. In very different ways, these films

rework the terms under which genre, gender and national boundaries exist,

revising references to high art and popular culture, and manipulating the constraints of national cinema.

Forbidden Love has both an historical and dialectical relationship to women's cinema; to the politics and aesthetics of the lesbian postmodern; to the institutional framework of the National Film Board; and to Canadian culture in the 1990s, generally. These formal and discursive arrangements involving the style, subject matter, and the conditions of production and reception of the film, including spectatorial address, all contribute to the queerness of *Forbidden Love*. Likewise, *Perfectly Normal* relies on the representation of cultural traditions that are stereotypically Canadian, as well as those that emanate from "elsewhere." What could be more Canadian than hockey and beer? Place these signifiers of Canadianness alongside those of Italian opera in drag, and perhaps surprisingly rather than polarizing them, they *both* begin to look a little unstable, if not outright queer. The borders between things suddenly appear arbitrary. In certain instances, the identifying features of what constitute stable categories are deliberately hybridized, their contents are indiscriminately placed together to invite reconsideration of the very ideologies of gender construction and nationalism that they are conventionally presumed to uphold.

Perfectly Normal? What a Drag!

Perfectly Normal is the story of a young man, Lorenzo Parachi (Michael Riley), the son of Italian immigrants who works in a beer factory, plays hockey, drives his deceased father's taxi cab for extra cash and listens to his dead mother's opera records. Renzo (the diminutive form of Lorenzo) has a modest dream: like Polkinov in *Paperback Hero*, he wants to build a house on the outskirts of town, "it's not much, about two acres." Renzo is a shy,

attractive and unassuming young man; a perfectly normal characterization of Canadian masculinity. He picks up Alonzo Turner (Robbie Coltrane), a rather predictably loud and large American visitor who, unprepared for the Canadian winter, gets into Renzo's cab on the night of his arrival complaining about the cold. Alonzo ends up at Renzo's place and procedes to get drunk and change Renzo's dream to one better suited to his own purposes — running a dinner-theatre style restaurant. Later, Alonzo will convince Renzo to engage in, as he puts it, "a little innocent cross-dressing" when he plays the female lead in the Vincenzo Bellini (1831) opera, *Norma*. This will occur at a restaurant called La Traviata (named after the ever-popular Verdi opera composed in 1853), which Renzo will also end up financing.

The opening credits sequence of the film works in several subtle criticisms that link the artifice and convention of American (genre) cinema to familiar stereotypes about Americans and Canadians. This is largely due to the fact that the plot of *Perfectly Normal* is at odds with the experience of having the narrative unfold in a discontinuous manner. The film sets up a tension between the absence and presence of clear markers of cinematic address; those conventions generally associated with melodrama, as well as the thriller and horror genres, are paralleled with the discourses of nationalism. With the hints of setting and characterization of the thriller-horror loosely established but counterpointed by irony, we, as spectators, are invited to read this film according to its vaguely generic references — in keeping with the genres invoked, as well as against them.

It is night, and we are introduced to an enigmatic American stranger in extreme close up as a face and a fedora. The stranger always spells trouble, especially when he arrives bathed in high contrast backlighting which initially obliterates his facial features. The stranger is a problem to be

eliminated, a disruption to the narrative that must be smoothed over by the film's end. But Renzo has also been introduced in close up with his face obscured. We see him in mid-motion with no other elements of the mise-en-scène to locate us as spectators as he puts on his plain white mask. Is this a hockey mask? A metaphor? Is this means of introducing the character a way to set up a vague reference to the *Phantom of the Opera* or is he akin to Jason of Hollywood's *Friday the 13th* series? Once Renzo removes his mask, the close up is intercut with the face of an older woman who writes a note and then falls on top of a record album playing on a turntable. A brief glimpse of a cemetery in the midst of a Roman Catholic burial rite follows. In a moment we will see Renzo lying face up on the ice, then at work with his arch enemy Hoblisch, and finally driving the taxi and meeting Alonzo. We've now been introduced to "The Players."

Much is made of the fact that Alonzo is coded as American, a modifier that in this context means he is at the very least a threat to national-cultural security. Besides being loud and large in his big white suit, he has an accent that is a vague eastern seaboard mix. Renzo expresses subtle disdain for Alonzo's pushiness, but he is also fascinated by him, conflicting emotions that the audience is invited to share, which positions us as sympathetic if stereotypical Canadians. At this point in *Perfectly Normal*, I imagine every Canadian watching the film thinking: "Those Americans — they don't know anything about Canada. And this guy is so clued out he doesn't even know how to dress for the weather!" You can practically hear Renzo sigh and see him roll his eyes, but he is far too polite for that. Alonzo, however, is a variation on American stereotyping that might fulfill another Canadian fantasy: he is a charlatan who isn't entirely confident in his role as "confidence man" and not only do we see this, but so too does Renzo.

Taking Alonzo home, however, is still not as straightforward as it might seem. The American has already attempted to con him (with pizza), but Renzo refigures the terms of their encounter by reciprocating with a gracious though tentative offer of kindness; a glass of wine and his father's winter coat. Alonzo does not go home with Renzo for the cinematically conventional purpose of having sex with him, nor is Renzo the object of Alonzo's crazed lust for murder as the thriller genre would have it. The act is instead overlaid with Canadian "politeness" and reserve which, while helping to defuse the unknown "threat" posed by Alonzo and his voracious appetite for everything, nonetheless seems beyond the dictates of Canadian stereotyping. Although as Janice Kaye (1994) argues "Renzo and Alonzo are basically posed as binary oppositions of Canada/female, America/male" (68), the film is also critical of such national characterizations, and thus invites us as spectators to once again position ourselves accordingly. Renzo's behaviour appears to be rather excessive in its own way; both an act of generosity, and potentially a really stupid thing to do. Renzo does not offer Alonzo a place to stay unreservedly. Alonzo pretty much passes out on his couch after drinking most of a bottle of Chianti himself, and although he plays on Renzo's humanitarianism, both characters "refuse" to behave according to the equally ridiculous stereotypes of hapless Canadian and menacing American.

Once articulated, however subtly or unsubtly, the film does not merely dispense with these cultural and cinematic codes and conventions. As Laura Mulvey (1994) puts it, the melodrama is an aesthetic which historically has exteriorised, rather than psychologised, emotion and conflict through gesture and tableaux (132). In its melodramatic mode *Perfectly Normal* simply defers the narrative's enigma for a higher moral or critical purpose, displacing the underlying anxiety it generates onto other elements of the mise-en-scène. The

"American threat" is minimized, but not completely eliminated, by the fact that this information is shared in the film's unrestricted narration and that we are in on the national joke of the stereotype. Instead, sexual and national anxieties are shifted, they play off the safeguards of economic, heterosexual and national convention; but for the reassurance that a cab fare is an exchange of perfectly normal services, and the offer of a coat or a couch an admirable, humanitarian thing to do, this might be a very different story.

As spectators, thus far we have been invited to occupy a number of positions, which are both complicit and critical of the stereotypical depictions on screen. At this transitional point in the narrative, the ideas of change and choice are familiar if somewhat conflicting, perhaps eliciting feelings of dread and desire. By contrasting these emotions — warning bells about the charming Alonzo with the desire for the boring Renzo to have an adventure — the film plays into conventional identification strategies of anxiety that invite spectators to get caught up in the enigmas posed at the opening juncture of any narrative. What will happen now? Is this a thriller or some other genre? How will the story end? In other words, as spectators, what we don't want is for everything to be perfectly normal, we want a story, an adventure, but at a safe distance experienced vicariously through the cinema. *Perfectly Normal* plays on that generic fear/desire for at least two reasons. First, by doing so, we as spectators have an almost guaranteed attachment to the narrative via the illusion of clarity promised by the equally illusory sense of stability offered by a seemingly coherent national subject positioning and the formula of plot-driven genre cinema. Yet our involvement in the activities of both Alonzo and Renzo is incomplete as complicitous voyeurs constantly deferring that other narrative we also fear/desire. Second, the actual adventures of Alonzo and Renzo are rendered 'normal' and rather

amusing by comparison to what *could* have happened in the thriller/sex movie we didn't get.

This doubling of narrative possibilities — the one raised by subtle references to thriller-horror conventions coupled with the story actually depicted on screen — is a strategy more typical of the melodrama, which I will also discuss later in reference to *Forbidden Love*. In *Perfectly Normal* this technique is aimed at disarming the spectator who in paying close attention to certain details of the story will certainly miss others. If we follow the conventions of the thriller, the effect of missing those details is usually deadly; spectators will be shocked and thrilled by the surprise, and perhaps made to feel responsible for the soon-to-be victim's distracted attention, which will inevitably create an opportunity for the villain to strike. In this film, however, the melodramatic textual device operates in a much more subtle manner, generating moral responsibility like the genre film without the violence.

As I mentioned earlier, the narrative is unrestricted, so while these strategies engage us viscerally in the melodrama, pornography, and the horror, pace Williams (1991), it is with a lesser sense of responsibility for the unfolding narrative action than these genres conventionally invite us to feel. Williams, for example, describes the spectator's involvement with these different genre films in terms of their physical response to them: sadness, arousal, and fear all have physical manifestations. In this film, as spectators we are cued to experience all three, but once this has happened we are also freed up to be involved in a very serious debate on the nature of stereotypes; categories that, in particular, involve national, social, and sexual boundaries. *Perfectly Normal* offers a more heterogeneous version of nationhood, one that plays into stereotypes about Americans and Canadians in order to

critique the homogenization of the subject, not only to permit deviations and transgressions, but to celebrate them.

For example, the "threat" of (homo)sexuality remains just below the surface and is only fully realized near the end of the film. When this issue is at last dealt with, the threat is recast as panic, changing the terms and responsibility for sexuality as fear/desire which resides with Hoblisch. Hoblisch, the man who bullies Renzo at work and on the hockey rink, is so entranced by Renzo in drag that when one of the patrons refuses to be quiet during Renzo's performance of Norma, he starts a fight that ends in trashing the restaurant. The performance of masculinity becomes both an aggressive and transgressive moment in this new, overtly homoerotic context, confirmed by the beatific look on Hoblisch's face as he watches Renzo sing. It is something to be celebrated if only because the enigma of why Hoblisch has been bothering Renzo throughout appears to be solved, but in gaining a new identity and perspective, the bully must also accept responsibility for his own transgressive desires.

Transgressions can be passively and actively engaged and both options provide a space for the carnivalesque disruption of social norms or categories. Violations of gender norms are among the most "disturbing" acts of transgression. Thus, as *Perfectly Normal* makes clear, to engage in transvestism is more than a little innocent cross-dressing, it is an active, outward sign of gender in conflict with the sexually-embodied subject, and in this case, it wrecks havoc on an already conflicted masculinity. In her discussion of *M. Butterfly*, Marjorie Garber (1992) identifies transvestism as a crisis of categories. In *Perfectly Normal* the final act of transvestism, Renzo's operatic performance in drag, is the outcome of what Garber would term "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that

permits border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another"
(125). The metaphors associated with transvestism are in Garber's hands
strikingly consistent with those that might aptly describe national boundaries.
In *Perfectly Normal*, gender/sex and national divisions become overtly
permeable and interchangeable. These categories, the film suggests, were
always leaky, but the cross-border shopping for a sexual identity — that is,
transvestism — is a point that is driven home by the performance.

Transvestism, or cross-dressing, is conventionally associated with
pretending to be something or someone you aren't. This is also the typical
conceit of the con artist that carries with it an implicit insult to whoever is
addressed that he or she will be *fooled* by the performance. Alonzo tries very
hard to maintain the act that he is a successful restaurateur and a connoisseur
of high culture; an opera fan/singer and a chef/gourmet. By donning the
clothes of the so-called opposite sex, the transvestite becomes an explicit
example of an embodied transgression of social codes concerning acceptable
gendered behaviour. The transgression takes place as a violation of the idea
that, by convention, clothing will accurately reflect the biological sex of the
wearer, but transvestism queers those normative associations. It troubles the
notion that sex and appearance are one and the same, and reveals that
wearing clothes is always a social and economic contract, which is
nonetheless adaptive to changing fashions for men and women. Perhaps
what is so unsettling about the transvestite is that s/he reveals the arbitrary
link between sex and gender performance to be a convention that we rely on
for categorizing people and their behaviour. Apparently, clothing doth the
man make, and in this case, so too with the con artist. Alonzo performs
several roles in keeping with his appearance: white suit/loud American,
apron/Renzo's wife, smoking jacket/Gloria's john. It is only when he appears

"unmasked" by the effects of alcohol, on the evening of the restaurant's opening in the sequence when he tells Renzo of his past as a failed restaurateur, that he seems "perfectly normal" and without artifice. The next time we see Alonzo in his chef outfit at the restaurant, the image and the associated identity (cook) actually correspond.

Feeling cheated or delighted by the gender ruse at the heart of transvestism are two common reactions to drag. In the course of the film, Renzo 'provokes' both of these responses from Hoblisch. In retrospect, we might argue that throughout the film, Hoblisch's behaviour towards Renzo is evidence of both characters' inability to perform masculinity in a convincing way. This may have something to do with Kaye's (1994) contention that "*Perfectly Normal* constructs the Canadian male character as more feminine than masculine....Even as a hockey player, he plays the most passive position — goalie — a player often considered to be different from the rest of the team, as well as the literal 'goal' of the other team of men" (67). Renzo, the goal/ie in question is pursued by Hoblisch; his "teammate" at work and on the ice, who has it (in) for him. Renzo never rises to the bait, however, so Hoblisch, while becoming more and more of a macho bully, is effectively incapacitated, one might even say emasculated. He can't seem to place Renzo in a position that will render him completely neutral, nor does Renzo facilitate or reassure Hoblisch of his own masculine subject position, as is the bully's wont. This is not exactly the same thing as being feminized and herein lies the problem: Renzo's existence points to a problem of categorization.

Renzo is neither an ineffectual male nor a passive female; performing in drag points to a larger "problem," the problem of his gender infidelity. This fact precipitates other crises of gender performance. The most obvious of these crises results from the film's final performance, but several others

precede this, including the ongoing fact that everyone around him plays "top" to Renzo's role as the "bottom." Even his new girlfriend, Denise is positioned as more active than he is, a point that is underscored by the use of highly melodramatic music; she actively lusts after Renzo, initiates a date and later, sex, and in the opera sequence breathlessly whispers, partly to herself and partly to him, "Renzo. You're — beautiful." Renzo is what Garber might refer to as a mechanism of displacement that the transvestite initiates. As she puts it:

> [T]he presence of the transvestite, in a text, in a culture, signals a category crisis elsewhere. The transvestite is a sign of overdetermination — a mechanism of displacement. There can be no culture without the transvestite, because the transvestite marks the existence of the Symbolic" (125).

Renzo's subversiveness concerns the notions of closure and aperture. He occupies several so-called categories — passive masculinity, cross-dresser — but refuses to belong, to identify with any one of them explicitly. Unlike Alonzo, whose disruptions are like the carnivalesque and meant to be recontained after whatever performance he engages in, Renzo's disruptions to the narrative via his performances of gender are queer and excessive, and he reminds us that their foundations are always shaky. In the end, while the restaurant is being destroyed, Renzo is oblivious to everything but his own pleasure in his performance. While he has effected untold ruptures to his own personal boundaries, pointing to crises and gaps in political categories, he has also contained others. In both underplaying his masculinity in conventional terms and overplaying his unconventional femininity, Renzo marks the moment of displacement.

Allan Hepburn (1998) identifies Renzo's predicamant within the film as a situation in which two kinds of performances overlap: the athletic and

the operatic. And while hockey "may just be opera on ice" (34), Renzo's adept negotiation of both spaces of very differently encoded gender stereotypes underscores not only his inherent queerness, but suggests the permeability of these sites. Their ability to support clearly demarcated gender signs becomes questionable as Renzo, bearer of the signs of masculinity and nationhood, is himself so easily "transgressed" by others. It is this blurring of so many borders and boundaries — genre, gender and nation — that is at issue in both films. In the case of genre alone, the treatments produce an unconventional mix of the horror and the comedy, hockey and opera, women's cinema and pulp fiction, the documentary and the melodrama. These categories have becomes queer; that is, incoherent.

Queering the NFB: *Forbidden Love*

I would like to take the argument I am developing around the idea of queering gender, genre and national boundaries in a slightly different direction by posing a question: What, in particular, does the activity of queering have to do with national cinema as melodrama in Canada? Perhaps, if we treat Canadian cinema as a genre, in the manner that Stephen Neale (1980) discusses genre; that is, not as a set of exclusive conventions with particular motifs, but as indiscrete phenomena in which discourses are shared across a range of narrative and iconic possibilities, then Canadian cinema as national melodramatic cinema in my examples becomes radically queer. By doubling the already troubled borders of genre, Canadian cinema might be analysed for the way in which individual films set into motion discursive effects. New questions arise from the disruption of one category as it affects another. For example, we might now ask, to what degree are gender boundaries related to those of genre? To national borders?

If, as I have been suggesting, we forego what Ramsay (1993) identifies as "the typical markers of a film's Canadianness," as well as the notion that realism and documentary are binary oppositions, we might be more receptive to what Christine Gledhill (2000) refers to as "boundary crossings and disputes [which] become productive sites of cultural activity" (224). In this way we can move away from the strict formalism of genre criticism (even auteur criticism) as well as traditional accounts of Canadian cinema, and towards a mode of discourse that can be loosely called "melodramatic." Its organising principles are more in keeping with Peter Brooks' (1976) idea of the melodrama as a mode of excess signification, which is achieved primarily through exaggeration and repetition. Melodrama provides a narrative context for wilfully expressing the inexpressible because of the enormous pressure *not* to do so (26-53). The approach I am suggesting does not abandon form altogether, but addresses Altman's problems with genre analysis as a strictly formal exercise in which the examples used to underscore certain generic tendencies don't often fit the theory. This new approach moves us a bit further from the text, encouraging us to engage in larger cultural readings of films by helping to situate them in relation to a variety of aesthetic and social discourses, which will inevitably be redefined by such an analysis. This approach attempts to balance the dictates of an admittedly loose genre in the terms set out by the films themselves: genre itself becomes a fiction we agree to participate in, self-reflexively. Here melodrama moves between genre and aesthetic strategy and towards a mode of analysis. I now take as my example for this attempt, the National Film Board of Canada, and *Forbidden Love.*

Forbidden Love (1992) is a documentary-melodrama hybrid. The film alternates between documentary interviews involving a number of women who reflect on their lives and times as lesbians in the repressive context of

the 1950s and 60s in Canada, and an open-ended fictional pulp romance set in the same period where girl meets girl and has a great night of dancing and sex. *Forbidden Love* has the dubious honour of being one of the last films made by the women's unit, Studio D, as well as the first overtly lesbian film made at the NFB. Lynne Fernie suggests that the NFB's working processes, at the time *Forbidden Love* was conceived and produced, are largely responsible for its success. She cites Studio D, an overtly feminist space within the NFB with its visionary leader, Rita Fraticelli, as major influences in allowing women to work, in large part, in a creative and supportive environment. Fernie has commented on the ongoing support and resources that the project received, citing filmmakers, producers and many others at the NFB who offered practical help as well as encouragement.[55] The result is a film, at first modestly proposed as a women's history film, that has won numerous awards and recognitions.

According to Fernie, the research and development phase of the project, which precedes the formal presentation of any film proposal at the NFB, was, in the case of *Forbidden Love,* a necessarily lengthy process. Talking to "the subjects," searching the "archives" looking for evidence of a lesbian cultural history in Canada involved a degree of digging and primary research that would not be quite so daunting today (in part because of the film itself). The thoroughness of the research is what contributes not only to the credibility of the film, but also to its confident stance on the subject matter it depicts.

The central problematic of *Forbidden Love* is twofold: on the one hand, the film's aim is to negotiate some kind of satisfactory relationship between personal and cultural notions of lesbian identity in Canada, and to validate

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[55] From the author's unpublished interview with Lynne Fernie, July 2000.

that identity. Yet, on the other hand, it undermines any implied stability of this subject position, refusing to posit lesbian identity as a ticket to the world outside the frame as though the film's ideal time and space were capable of extending beyond the cinema. In other words, *Forbidden Love* engages in a kind of queer utopian juggling act that attempts to strike a balance between its postmodernist aesthetic strategies and (modernist) lesbian sexual politics. The film depicts two fantasies of an ideal lesbian mise-en-scène: the pleasure and the politics of sexual subjectivity. Hot sex and the promise of romance in lesbian heaven are depicted in the pulp fiction parts, while the film captures an historical fragment of the lives of Canadian lesbians through their "unashamed stories" in the documentary portion of the film.

Forbidden Love flirts with the audience in the manner of its *address* which suggests a lesbian spectator position. Independent of the "real" identities of individual spectators, the film at first teases the audience with the fundamental promise offered by its parody of the documentary mode, reeling us in under the pretence that we will know more about the subject of the film, i.e., lesbians, than we did before. Although presented as a parody, this implies an intention that fits with the educational mandate of the NFB. In exchange, however, *Forbidden Love* makes palpable the more salacious elements of its address by linking the desire to know of the documentary with the desire for the "real" representation of sex in the lesbian pulp genre portions of the film. This strategy undermines what Bill Nichols (1991) calls the "discourses of sobriety"[56] associated with the instrumentality of the documentary (3-4).

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[56] According to Nichols (1991), "documentary film has a kinship with those other non-fictional systems that make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare - these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can affect action and entail consequences" (3).

By appealing to the pro-filmic event it references, a (classic) documentary film typically permits viewers to engage in voyeuristic activities unencumbered by guilt. This is, in part, due to the lofty promise of attaining knowledge about the real world outside the film frame, an implicit separation of the mind from the body. In *Forbidden Love*, however, the conventionally cool and hot registers of the documentary and the pulp fiction are often mismatched. The film refuses to sacrifice the heart to the head. So, for example, while we might expect (to enjoy) the "heat" of the love-making scene in the pulp fiction portions of the film, we might not be prepared for the characters to take a pose and stare directly into the camera as they do at the end of each of the vignettes. This effectively "cools off" the audience by confronting us, albeit playfully, with our lustful looks. Moreover, because these sequences alternate with the documentary interviews, achieving the sexual "pay off" is, in keeping with the melodrama, both deliciously delayed and prolonged.

These textual strategies make us acutely aware of our voyeuristic complicity, and thus our potentially multiple or "queer" identities. The desire to *know* is thus intimately linked with sexual desire, and as neither desire is neatly separated from the other, the blur between them implicates the spectator in a politics of looking. The result is that *Forbidden Love* manages to be pro-lesbian for lesbians and non-lesbians alike, but their positioning as spectators, indeed their access to the stories will necessarily be different. Perhaps this is a matter of the postmodern (film's) knack for irony, or its seeming ability to do what Linda Hutcheon (1991) calls, "speaking with a forked tongue" (10). In contrast to Laura Mulvey's (1975) account of the classical positioning of the spectator as always-already male, *Forbidden Love*'s strategies open up another form of spectatorship that may indeed be one

realization of Mulvey's theory of a dialectics of "passionate detachment"(18).

A queer spectatorship, such as the one I am suggesting, may be merely one that does not exclude lesbians. In this case, however, the film includes the non-lesbian while also functioning, in the NFB tradition, as a way of gently informing outsiders about a "different" culture.

"Full" is, I think, an appropriate word to describe the style of *Forbidden Love*. As I have suggested above, the film's complex treatment of the subject matter, deployed by the documentary and melodramatic modes, constitutes a politics of style that is part of its rich analytical potential. Even the film's opening plays knowingly with the conventions of the institutional style of the NFB by satirising both the Board's logo and its tendency to warn viewers in writing about the usually tame contents of its films. This tactic helps to convey the NFB's image as "nice and inoffensive," but the logo with its fluidly-moving figure, who presumably represents the ideal, non-gendered, and multicultural Canadian, is the first image to take a "shot" from the filmmakers. The logo is accompanied by the sound of a honkin' saxophone solo; the music later includes drums and a hot electric guitar riff. Together the image and soundtrack suggest that the film already offers contradictory positions for its spectators. On the one hand, it briefly conforms to the opening of any NFB film, and to its political (if not aesthetic) mandate of correctness — to interpret Canada to Canadians — no matter how diverse we may be. On the other hand, the musical style of the soundtrack suggests that this film may be "hotter" than expected, and, in retrospect, it serves to remind viewers that some of the people who were groovin' to that sexy urban music known as R&B were dykes.

The NFB logo is followed by the disclaimer, "Unless otherwise stated the people who appear in this film should not be presumed to be

homosexual..." The music then fades as one inter-title is replaced by another: "...or heterosexual." In the first inter-title, the form and message are consistent with the middle-class liberalism, which could be argued to be the Board's overriding ideology given the style and subject matter of many of its documentary films. The warning carries an aura of sobriety that reassures the viewer about the seriousness of the film and the worthiness of the subject. The inter-title is thus connected to the film's title, suggesting that the film will be a serious (albeit vicarious) look at "perverse desire." *Forbidden Love* is, after all, a topical, educational film. However, the unexpected kick comes in the second half of the inter-title, which both undermines the sobriety of the message and links the film to an arguably subversive tradition that is also part of the legacy of some of the units of the NFB.[57]

The identification techniques set up at the beginning of *Forbidden Love* are part of its self-reflexive, postmodern pastiche of film genres. The interview-style documentary favoured by feminist filmmakers, some within the NFB, is intercut with a filmic version of the lesbian pulp melodrama to create a new hybrid style that is more than the sum of its aesthetic parts. This particular stylistic treatment of the subject matter, besides suggesting an historical and aesthetic continuity, makes the film both playful and serious, as well as engaging and distancing. The parodic mode permits a wide-ranging critique of the ideologies that have traditionally informed the identification techniques of the melodrama and the documentary, yet the film is truly self-reflexive and thus not above scrutiny itself. For example, *Forbidden Love's*

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[57] The tradition is long and wide. Subject matter has often been broadly interpreted in the topic-driven documentaries produced by the NFB, especially Unit B, the French Unit, and Studio D. See, for example, *The Days Before Christmas* (T. McCartney-Filgate, et al., 1958), *The Things I Cannot Change* (T. Ballantyne, 1966), *Les raquetteurs* (M. Brault, C. Groulx, 1958), *La Lutte* (NFB collective, 1961), *Jour après jour* (C. Perron, A-C Poirier, 1962), *Rouli-roulant (The Devil's Toy)* (C. Jutra, 1968) *Daisy: The Story of a Facelift* (M. Rubbo, 1973).

evocation of the documentary film's discourse of sobriety is not unconscious. It suggests that these discourses are purposeful, ideological apparatuses implicated in the historical containment and pathologizing of sexuality.

The rhetorical strategies adopted by both scientific discourses and the classic narratives of popular culture have together lent a legitimacy to exploring the "problem of lesbianism." This is a common feature of the classic documentary film: to objectify and therefore distance the relationship between active agent and subject matter. By clearly positioning the "investigator" and the "investigated" on either side of the apparatus, the film suggests an unequal power relationship that also effaces the prurient look into the world of the Other. The documentary impulse of science, or indeed the scientific impulse of documentary, along with the pulp fiction novel of straight popular culture have offered two possible sources for locating and learning about lesbians.[58] According to Jaye Zimet (1999), in order to explain (away) the lesbian, or to mete out poetic justice, "the story" has often had the same ending: "[i]n the end the lesbian gets her due ... marriage, insanity or ... suicide"(27).

None of these options has been altogether satisfactory to the lesbian herself. The daily struggle of keeping body and soul together was not usually accurately reflected in the popular culture of the period. Ironically, some of the women in the documentary portion of *Forbidden Love* explicitly link their burgeoning sense of a lesbian community to the pulp novels, which

[58] Historically, searching for lesbian subjects has always been part of a larger scientific discourse of sexual pathology, specifically 'medical conditions' such as nymphomania and frigidity, and psychoanalytic explorations involving sexual inversion and perversion. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Random House/Vintage, (1978) 1990); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality* (London/New York: Routledge, (1986) 1995); and Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Desire and Perverse Sexuality*(Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

were conventionally written by heterosexual men. They compare their own lesbian identities with those suggested by the tortured fantasies of the novels. In retrospect at least, some of the women actively read these novels against the grain. Rather than simply learn the lessons offered by such homophobic texts by resolving their own lives according to the outcomes of the novels, the women portrayed in the film were clearly selective about what to accept or reject. They negotiated their lesbian identities in relation to what was offered by popular culture and, if occasionally they took away the knowledge that there were other "freaks" like them out there somewhere, that also meant that they actively sought out and created a lesbian subculture. To do so must also have meant gaining a temporary respite from a comparatively more hostile world, or at least in *Forbidden Love* the interviews and the women's stories suggest this.

Their reading strategies indicate that while the hegemony of science and psychoanalysis may still be alive and well, these women, in reading the novels against the grain, seized upon an instance of discursive instability. As Michel Foucault (1990) argues, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (101). Revising elements of the interview-style documentary in combination with the self-reflexive lesbian pulp novel is a strategy that permits *Forbidden Love* to valourize lesbian history and experience. This overtly revisionist practice celebrates the pleasures of lesbianism without making the lesbian pay, and refuses to empiricise or imperialize her desires.[59]

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[59] Alternatively, lesbians have resided in the realm of fantasy, gothic figures who have often been associated with vampires or other monstrous examples of the feminine. See, for example, Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (London: Penguin, 1992) for examples of "monstrous lesbians" as vampires, an ongoing tradition in mainstream cinema, if not a sub-genre of the horror film itself. Weiss discusses, among others, Theda Bara (*A Fool There Was*, F.

Nichols argues that the "documentary opens up a felt gap for the viewer between representation and its historical referent" which suggests an awareness on the part of the viewer of their differences and of the documentary's tendency to suppress that knowledge (48). But whereas Nichols discusses the style and ethics of proximity to the subject as either a kind of tactful cinematic distance or comfortable viewing position, the queering of the documentary/melodrama together undermines this safe, proprietary mode. The body of the lesbian is neither invisible, nor a highly visible object of voyeuristic pleasure; this body is indexical, historical evidence of disavowal as much as of desire.

In the mismatched modes of cinematic address, which occur with some frequency in *Forbidden Love*, we are as likely to encounter the melodramatic within the documentary interviews as we might in the pulp romance portions of the film. In this film, melodrama serves the documentary's purpose of conveying knowledge to the degree that the body provides visible evidence which can be put to use to underscore the thesis of the film, while in the fictional section the melodramatic body helps to reveal unknown but highly significant pieces of information, pertinent to the film's moral

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Powell, 1914; *Sin*, H. Brendan, 1915) as the classic vamp-lesbian whose voluptuousness and ethnicity were linked with evil and an unnamed, but abhorrent sexuality. This "type" was contrasted with the more conventional depiction of femininity as 'pure,' blonde and virginal. See also more contemporary films such as *The Hunger* (T. Scott, USA, 1980). Weiss suggests that these films can be linked to a literary tradition which goes back at least to the Victorian novel *Carmilla* (J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 1871). But, as popular culture and science have never been entirely discrete entities, in part, because their narrative strategies and sobering discourses cannot be clearly separated, the pathological and the fantastical lesbian have inevitably overlapped. Like anything else, the cultural context within which the *idea* of the lesbian circulates is part of its discursive horizon; so, whether medical or literary in application, this representation has typically been tinged with the rhetoric of science with its implied narrative trajectory ostensibly aimed at "discovering" causes and cures. The hegemony of science together with the expediency of a classical narrative has lent legitimacy to such pathologizing gazes, a common feature of the classic documentary's impulse to "discovery" most notable, perhaps, in ethnographic cinema.

resolution. From this perspective, *Forbidden Love's* aims for providing knowledge are surprisingly similar in the documentary and the melodrama.

Women's Cinema, Queer Cinema

The historical and critical conditions of counter-cinema conventions and their links to feminist film theory and practice provide another example of the discursive relationship between text, context, and spectator. Feminist critiques of the patriarchal structures of Hollywood cinema began from the position that if a woman's place is always as a cultural outsider, then any pleasures she receives must be attained "against its grain." This has alternately been seen as a practice of conflicting or inappropriate readings of culture that theoretically has produced either masochistic or unruly cultural consumers in women (Mulvey, 1975; Johnston, 1973) . But it might be further argued that these conditions provide a queer discursive space in which a film such as *Forbidden Love* is only the logical outcome. *Forbidden Love* is ironic and unusual, multiplying the effects of its postmodern artistic practices such as pastiche and parody. Notwithstanding the complexities of the screen-spectator relationship, the film addresses the lesbian spectator directly, or treats the spectator as though "it" were a lesbian.

Yet, tempting as it may be, *Forbidden Love* refuses to create a world in which the presumed desires of its audience are put ahead of its political aims. One of the film's implicit goals, in recovering parts of lesbian culture, is to remain connected to both the history of feminism and women's cinema. This might present a dilemma for a film made in the early 1990s where the spoken or unspoken pressure to arrive at theoretical consensus and political solidarity on the subject of the then burgeoning and sexy sounding sub-genre of feminist, gay and lesbian theories known as "queer theory" may have been

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substantial. There certainly was much discussion of queer theory's terms of reference and its relationship to women's cinema.[60]

In rethinking a definition for women's cinema in 1990 while reflecting on films made by women in the 1980s, Teresa de Lauretis (1990) attempts the daunting task of accounting for the many components that help to define women's cinema as it has emerged over a specific historical period as both practice and attitude. This task is likely to have been more difficult—and perhaps all the more interesting and satisfying—in the giddy theoretical context offered by queer theory. De Lauretis concludes that there are any number of 'guerrilla tactics'—discursive possibilities, specific textual strategies, and counter-cinema audiences—that contribute to the ambiguity of the term 'women's cinema,' and while these ambiguities may sound not unlike the incoherencies referred to by Jagose, de Lauretis does not subsume them under the queer umbrella. Rather, she takes some of the central ideas concerning women's cinema proposed by earlier critics and recontextualizes them for the 1980s. She cites some of the contributing factors for consolidating women's cinema as the "mutual support and interchange between feminist film critics, scholars, festival organizers, distributors, and filmmakers" who together comprise a critical mass. De Lauretis moreover argues that "'women's cinema' is not just a set of films or practices of cinema, but also a number of film-critical discourses and broadly cast networks of cinema-related practices that are directly connected with the history of feminism"(9).

De Lauretis herself is, in part, responsible for not only the status of the term "queer" employed in its new, non-pejorative manner, but also for

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[60] See, for example, the debates in Bad Object Choices, eds. *How Do I Look?*, especially de Lauretis's "Film and the Visible," and the subsequent questions and commentary. The anthology represents a selection of papers and discussions from the conference of the same name, held in New York, October 1989.

queering the predominantly white, middle-class, and heterosexual character of feminist theory/film theory.[61] Independent of queer theory, as such, she has produced more subtly-nuanced critiques of patriarchy that foreground the inter-connectedness of racism, classism, and lesbophobia by employing gender-based film analyses using semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxist theories.[62] De Lauretis, like some other feminist theorist/critics, eventually abandoned the term 'queer.' According to Jagose (1996), de Lauretis did so "on the grounds that it had been taken over by those mainstream forces and institutions it was coined to resist" (127).[63]

Among the many postmodern aesthetic strategies, multiplicity, reflexivity, parody, and intertextuality are the most prominent in *Forbidden Love*. Together these produce what Patricia White (1995) might call a "narrative with a vengeance." White tackles Teresa de Lauretis's analytic approach to feminism and cinema in which de Lauretis claims that the most interesting works disrupt the Oedipal narrative and instead "stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject

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[61] See, for example, Jagose on de Lauretis in *Queer Theory*, and de Lauretis "Queer Theory" pp. iii-xviii, and *The Practice of Love* "Habit Changes," pp. 296-313.

[62] B. Ruby Rich ('A Queer Sensation.' *Village Voice*. 24 March, 1992) is also cited as having "re-invented" the term 'queer' and applied it to film and video. However, the article referred to (by filmmaker, Greta Schiller) in Tamsin Wilton, ed. *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), post-dates at least two other prominent references to the term: Bad Object Choices, eds. *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), and Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 3:2 (1991). In any case, Rich also expresses her own concerns about the use of the term queer in subsequent articles. See, for example, B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound*, Sept. 1992, and Tamsin Wilton's reference to it in "Introduction: On Visibility and Morality," in Tamsin Wilton, ed. *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1995).

[63] Jagose states: "Explaining her choice of terminology in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994), de Lauretis writes: 'As for 'queer theory', my insistent specification lesbian may well be taken as a taking of distance from what ... has very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry'" (1996, 127).

in it" (86-7). White is interested in the potential for "the negative Oedipal complex, defined as the subject's desire for the same-sex parent"(86). This is a response to the fundamental disavowal of the Other within psychoanalysis that seeks only to highlight the "positive" Oedipal complex. The heterosexual resolution of the triadic relationship between the child, his mother and his father is achieved at the expense of "sheltering deviant desires and cross-gender identifications under the familial roof"(87).

White suggests that to admit the negative Oedipal complex makes the structure itself more complex. Focussing on a more elaborate or complex sexuality may thus invite new research and analysis of the strange case of heterosexuality as well. White is, I think, calling for a queer theory of sexuality in which psychoanalysis is "outed" as a discourse that cannot fully explain heterosexuality any more than homosexuality. Psychoanalysis is effectively "put in its place" historically and culturally as 'merely' one of the more popular Victorian discourses preoccupied with producing rigid sexual categories by applying standards that define everything beyond a narrow symbolic realm as deviant.

The Oedipal trajectory, disrupted, is precisely what is at stake in *Forbidden Love*. It is a narrative with a vengeance for its excessiveness, for the manner of its address and the identification techniques it deploys, and in particular for the way in which these strategies refer to but refuse to adopt an Oedipal trajectory and resolution. Like the opening credits sequence that I referred to earlier, the next sequence addresses this notion of heterosexual presumption concerning spectatorial address and identification. It employs the tactics of give and take, or setting up the expectations associated with one story and "satisfying" them with another. The sequence opens with a long shot of a truck in a vast landscape. The "washed out" almost sepia quality

gives it the character of overexposed film stock; it is literally an "outdated" image. It thus locates the moment depicted firmly in the past, and judging by the costumes and music, this is likely the late 1950s or early 60s. On the now explicitly diegetic soundtrack, the song, "Tell Laura I Love Her," is announced by the disc jockey. The relationship of the image to the sound track might suggest that the song refers to the heterosexual romance of the couple in the image, since "the couple" acknowledges it with a knowing look. The song (by Ray Peterson) is referred to by the disc jockey but not performed in the film. As the young woman gets out of the truck, her boyfriend gently cautions her about the woman on the train platform.

In this context, it might be safe to assume that there has been a conflict between the two women, and that they have perhaps been vying for the young man's love, particularly as the woman at the station is quickly identified as 'Laura' indicated by the cut to her in medium close up and the fact that the other woman calls her by name. The song itself recalls a fairly typical conceit of the melodramatic modes from both film and music genres of the 1950s, a musical subgenre characterised, in part, by the figure of the masochistic male torch singer.[64] Because the song is not actually performed in the film, its status as a secure marker of heterosexual love is questionable. Given the song's new reference within the context of the film the heterosexual presumption upon which the "joke" relies is completely undermined. The affair, which has ended, is clearly revealed to have been between the two women, and one of them, heartbroken, must now leave town.

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[64] The almost, but not quite, falsetto voice of Ray Peterson is reminiscent of other male torch singers of the day, notably, Canada's Paul Anka. In this film, it could be argued that the boyfriend fills the role of the male masochist suggested by the song's generic reference since he sits anxiously (and idly) by while his girlfriend actively deals with Laura.

This sequence demonstrates that heterosexual romance is a reference point, not something to be taken for granted. In retrospect, the couple's anxious reaction to the song's title—their "knowing look"—indicates the fragility, *not* the stability, of their union. By extension, their status as the only heterosexual couple depicted in the film (whom we never see before or after this sequence) suggests that heterosexuality itself is a social fiction which requires the constant cultural propping up that the song ostensibly provides. Moreover, the suggestion that the song as a cultural product and an ideological apparatus could be "consumed" by both lesbians and heterosexual men, however differently, is also underscored by the revelation that Laura and the woman were romantically involved. The song is indiscriminately deployed as a marker of romance; it could easily have been "their song" and the heterosexual couple's reaction to it, given the context that is developed in the sequence, suggests its malleability.

In a postmodern, post-Freudian world, where *everyone* is familiar with the classic, realist narrative structures, wittingly or otherwise, it may be timely for a clever, new queer cinema simply because the old ways of telling stories are boring everyone. Rather than manoeuvring or negotiating unfriendly texts, the appeal of a narratively queered *counter*-cinema is that it opens up those incoherencies between sex, gender and desire to which Annamarie Jagose refers. It is important to remember that these are the foundations not only of queer theory, but the foundation upon which classic Oedipal narratives rest as well. Perverse desire is a response to all structured sexuality, and according to the terms of psychoanalysis, neither homo nor heterosexuality has the pathological edge in this respect.[65] Narratives

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[65] See, for example, de Lauretis 'discussion of perverse desire and female sexuality in *The Practice of Love* (1994), pp. 3-28, which is theorized following Freud's "Three Essays on

establish conventions easily, but foregrounding incoherencies is a kind of textual strategy of irony and excess that is difficult to conventionalize and contain, and thus it would seem to have much to offer queer cinema. By alluding to the textual strategies associated with the classic narrative and redeploying them in a reflexive manner — in this case, the context of queer cinema — both the subject of lesbianism and the lesbian subject become visible. So, while the narrative trajectory of the sequence that takes place at the train station may seem quite conventional, its participants and the outcome are not.

The film undercuts its reversal of the classic reference even further— effectively stressing the "duplicity of the scenario and the female subject[s] in it"—by resolving the narrative of this sequence that takes place at the train station in a realistic, but not completely satisfactory manner. *Forbidden Love* continues to underscore the caveat that homosexuality is no more "real" than heterosexuality. However much they codify human interaction, they are social discourses imposed on reality through language and convention. Thus the women bid their tearful good-byes, but these are also artificially and excessively emotional, even for melodrama, particularly since the film has yet to invite the spectator to become invested in the film's narrative resolution, or to identify in any way with these characters. The sequence ends with a close up on a locket which the other woman has just returned to Laura. Laura protests, but eventually waves good-bye with the locket in her palm. The gesture appears very wooden, and the image then becomes highly saturated with colour. The camera tracks out while it freeze-frames Laura's direct address gaze, and shrinks the image to create the effect of a paperback

Sexuality," in James Strachey, ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74.

book. The long shot is then digitally altered as it dissolves into the cover of the lesbian pulp novel, "Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives."

As spectators of conventional narrative cinema, at the beginning of this sequence we might have expected that "dispensing" with Laura at the end would have been a means of dealing with "the problem of lesbianism," and that once she left town, the narrative would take up its proper function by returning to the concerns of the heterosexual couple. This is clearly not the case. The film dismisses the couple not Laura. Furthermore, the washed out sepia tone with which they have been associated now indicates their very drabness while the narrative "chooses" to follow Laura's more colourful adventures in the exciting underground of a lesbian bar.

The "hot" and "cool" emotional temperatures, or the wrestling between the classic narrative and the subject matter of the film, underscore the tensions in keeping with the melodramatic mode of the film.[66] And while it does so playfully, the effect is to convey an anxiety that something unforeseen may yet happen. Everything, however amusing, is not all fun and games for lesbians. There is a nagging sense of ill- or unresolved tensions in the film, which subverts the conventions of the original pulp references. The first tension foreshadows the interview featuring Ann Bannon, a writer of lesbian pulp novels who acknowledges the difficulties of writing for the often tragic narrative resolution that the lesbian pulp tradition imposed. The second embues the film with a different kind of tension that is later expressed as an erotic charge and taken up in the revised pulp fiction sequences. While

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[66]This idea is in keeping with the socially critical stance of the 1950s Hollywood melodrama analyzed by Thomas Elsaesser in "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in Nichols, Bill, ed. *Movies and Methods Volume II.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 165-189.

Ann Bannon claims that "some of her women survived," this film's ending suggests another possibility. Our protagonist, Laura, has not only survived, but judging from her "successful" entry into lesbian sub-culture that the film depicts (and which is underscored by the playfully romantic commentary of the female voice-over narrator celebrating her affair with the woman she meets at the bar), chances are she will actually flourish. Melodrama offers new approaches to the documentary as well as the pulp novel, and in doing so it suggests new ways of exposing cultural history to the accountability of a critical gaze.

There are at least two purposes for revising the pulp formula in *Forbidden Love* itself. The happy ending of pulp romance in the film can be seen as a means to reconstruct the aesthetics of melodrama for lesbian political revision. As Laura Doan (1994) suggests, the utopic revising of the fictions becomes a marker of the "progress" of the real history of lesbians and lesbian culture (x). However, the parodic mode that these portions of the film engage does not completely allow the spectator to forget that this is indeed a conscious revision, a fiction we as spectators agree to participate in for the duration of the film. The tension that results from these competing strategies makes identification problematic for everyone. The most overt of the techniques is perhaps the previously mentioned direct address gaze combined with the freeze-frame that ends each section of the pulp melodrama parody of *Forbidden Love*. This strategy both invites spectators in and keeps them out by making visible the processes of identification; the direct address gaze thereby undoes the voyeurism of spectatorship with one hand while offering it with the other. This gaze is the gaze of the lesbian protagonist(s). Her/Their desires and ours are aligned, thus our mutual voyeurism is "outed" and made complicitous in a tenuous erotics of identification.

The Lesbian Postmodern and Camp

If *Forbidden Love* is an example of postmodern parody which re-examines ways of knowing knowingly, it takes issue with those forms (documentary and melodrama) stylistically. Thus the film works in the way critics of the lesbian postmodern such as Robyn Wiegman (1994) suggest is true of postmodernism generally. Following Lyotard (1984), she claims that "the postmodern doesn't transcend the modern; it rereads the modern, not from beyond but from within"(13). Examples of postmodernist cinema such as *Forbidden Love* thus contribute to a confrontation between discourses — Lyotard's *"grand recits"* — that, however embedded within a history of unequal power relationships, are here aesthetically challenged, providing what Foucault suggests are stumbling blocks, points of resistance, or a starting point for an opposing strategy (101).

Such films rely also upon a tradition of political/feminist filmmaking, as well as the work of critics, and a leaping critical mass of lesbians who together, and in excess, challenge the grand cultural narratives with their own "little stories." The cinematic strategies of identification thus resonate outside the film as a politics of identification, though not necessarily as a strict identity politics. *Forbidden Love* demonstrates that there is both strength and pleasure in identifying with a community of like-minded, desiring women. However, the various strategies the film sets up, such as the structurally layered address of the melodrama and the documentary, impose a critical distance; they engage the spectator in a dialectic between the pleasure of identification and the new found pleasure of criticism.

Spectators who are particularly marginalised within socio-political discourses (perhaps because they are part of a sexually diverse but subordinate

group), arguably make especially astute cultural analysts and "willful" spectators. This may be due to the fact that they must engage in an ongoing process of (re)negotiating their tenuous positions as cultural consumers of representations that tend to exclude them. According to Penny Florence (1993), this marginality or alterity invites lesbians to "perform complex manoeuvres when watching films that make it possible to gain pleasure against the grain of representational and narrative structures"(127). This argument has also been made for gay camp. By providing an alternate narrative to the one depicted on screen or elsewhere, gay men have reread popular culture to include themselves as its potential subjects.

It could thus be argued that queer spectators, in particular, manoeuvre with a high degree of agility within and outside the dominant discourses of gender and sexuality. This presents at least two—sometimes competing sometimes complementary—positions for them. One acknowledges the exclusive nature of heterosexual romance upon which much of mainstream cinema rests, and another admits that in order for any film to be understood, the queer spectator must be familiar with those very modes of social discourse and cinematic address. A third or queer position results from the relationship between these two that acknowledges their adept skills as cultural negotiators and survivors: the queer spectator is in some ways always a cultural guerrilla. S/he is constrained by cultural exclusion and may take pleasure in the willful act of re-working scenarios to include her/himself. Films about sexuality and gender — in other words most (if not all) films — are thus susceptible to unruly queer readings or aesthetic treatments.

Postmodernism tends to valourize multiplicity, reflexivity, parody, textual and sexual ambivalence. In those texts which are postmodern and directly involve sexuality and gender, the availability of queer readings is

especially highlighted. However, as Robyn Wiegman suggests, in terms of the lesbian postmodern, a merely "facile embrace of contradiction, multiplicity and flux" is insufficient for claiming a politics of postmodern lesbian aesthetics (14). A similar critique has been mounted against camp. According to Brett Farmer (2000), gay camp articulates "gender disidentification" (116). This is not the same thing as politicising gender and sexuality. Laura Doan argues that films can and do exist along a continuum of postmodernist-lesbian to the degree that they "enable an interventionist or transformative politics" (x). They foreground the complexity and instability of the categories of gender and sexuality by employing defamiliarizing cinematic strategies. As a theoretical and aesthetic model, camp has suffered through the very terms of its analysis: many critics have argued that in prescribing and analysing camp, its disruptive potential is inevitably diminished. Likewise, irony and ambivalence are highly volatile tropes, very difficult to nail down politically.[67]

Forbidden Love and *Perfectly Normal* achieve the queer "goal" of destabilising or intervening in and multiplying sexual subjectivity, but do not stop there. It's not as though you can take lesbian or gay sexuality and postmodernism and place them side by side to get "The Lesbian Postmodern," or "Day Camp for Queers Everywhere." When you put these ideas together, the first kind of transformation that occurs is between them. Both queer sexuality and postmodernism are changed by their association with the other. Although there is a strong argument to be made for the recuperative relationship between sexual diversity and postmodern culture, together, films

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[67] See, for example, Brett Framer's rendition of the discussion of the pros and cons of a camp aesthetic/politics in *Spectacular Passions*, (Durham, SC/London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 111-150.

such as *Perfectly Normal* and *Forbidden Love* do not simply provide spectatorial experiences that please everyone, *even* queers. Rather, the lesbian postmodern as it exists in *Forbidden Love*, for example, marks an opportunity for the politicization of postmodernist practices where melodrama is deployed as an agent of postmodernity. As an explicit example of cultural questioning, queering becomes query. In *Perfectly Normal* sexuality becomes a means to selectively anchor and unmoor the relationship between politics and culture in a manner consistent with postmodernism. Both films contain camp elements, and, as camp is indebted to irony as well as legibility, it relies on a community of doubly-positioned interpreters, i.e., those who "get it," and who can read "it" in a number of ways. Meanings are never pre-authorised by the direct connection between film text/director/ audience, but postmodernism highlights this tendency. Thus, whether the camp is understood at all, and whether it is read as politically retrograde or progressive, indicates not only its volatility and subversive potential, but the central ambivalence of postmodernism.

There are any number of textual devices that can be deployed for political purposes. In the documentary portion of *Forbidden Love*, the interview-style adopted suggests that the women's lives are both ordinary and extraordinary. The women are depicted in conversation with the off screen filmmakers. Their conversations are sometimes edited together so as to create a conversation among the women interviewed, but the situations they face are also shown to be unique to them individually. At the same time, it becomes clear that these lesbians are constrained by many of the same issues that affect other (heterosexual) women's lives at the same historical moment. The new conversation that emerges from this layering of conversations through editing connects the women's stories. This functions as a rhetorical

strategy, a common feature of documentaries which Bill Nichols suggests is "the means by which the author attempts to convey his or her outlook persuasively to the viewer." Nichols (1991) explains that strategies such as these are based on Aristotelian rhetoric; its success or failure is achieved through evidence and artistic proof, or "factual material recruited to the argument" and "the quality of the text's construction"(134). In this case, however, to get caught up in these "recruitment" or rhetorical strategies is to align oneself overtly with these lesbian women, not only with their struggles but their desires. Since the women remain individuals, neither their stories nor their desires can be contained as a group and dismissed; the film is evidence of the reintroduction of their stories to the larger historical and cultural context from which they were previously excluded. Likewise, however overtly the rhetorical devices are presented, they are depicted within, and not outside, familiar representational forms of documentary which also have historical resonance and relevance to both lesbian culture and feminist filmmaking.

Together the combined styles of melodrama and documentary exceed the constraints of either the classic or modernist mode taken individually. The film is thus stylistically "queered" since the juxtaposition of the two styles is neither delivered nor can be taken as "straight." In effect, the film overlays stereotypes about lesbianism onto these familiar generic conventions. These expectations are modified, undermined, or completely discarded by blending the two styles. The implications of mixing the expectations of one genre with the outcome of another go well beyond attaching certain conditions and values to the conventions based on new subject matter. "Queerness" itself is also expressed (or "outed") as an excessive aesthetic value: excessively sexual, and in this case, excessively woman-

centred. For example, *Forbidden Love* includes many references which are directed to many audiences simultaneously. This audience is not only an "ideal" or general Canadian audience; in some cases the references are quite specifically addressed to lesbian spectators. Thus sometimes non-lesbians are initially excluded, and some of the references are never explained. The pay off for the lesbian spectator is in seeing her desires represented on screen.

Forbidden Love and *Perfectly Normal* share a camp aesthetic. Traditionally, camp has been more explicitly associated with gay male performance of sexuality, especially drag or drag queens, than with lesbianism, with the notable exceptions of butch/femme stylizations and more recently, drag kings.[68] Nevertheless, both films' treatment of heterosexuality has a self-conscious and ironic element to it, which is in keeping with camp. As I have been suggesting, *Forbidden Love* tries to balance the interests of serious history and documentary with a send-up of the pulp novel. This confident position on the subject matter becomes an invitation to the spectator to share equally in the pleasures of ironic sexual subjectivity and critique. In this way *Forbidden Love* dares the spectator to think of lesbianism as absolutely ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. *Perfectly Normal's* critical deployment of stereotypes as well as transvestism is in keeping with a camp sensibility, which is nonetheless difficult to locate consistently due to its queer/postmodernist "incoherencies" that are, in part, provided by gender parody. As with the shifting terms of queer/queering, the central problematic for camp is the question of whether it is an aesthetic or a reading strategy. Farmer argues that camp is "both an effect and expression of the ambivalent relations between gay subjects and dominant heterosexuality"

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[68] For an excellent historical and theoretical account of the recent phenomenon known as the drag king in Montreal, see Colleen Ayoup's (2000) film *Drag Kings*.

(116). The manipulation of the codes and conventions of heterosexuality, which is central to camp, suggests that it is a means to foreground the overall theatricality of life, including sexuality.

If we return to the notion that melodrama as a mode facilitates entry into fantasy as mise-en-scène of desire, through affect and excess signification of displaced desire, then perhaps we are not far off from reading a politics of camp in conjunction with melodrama, specifically as it pertains to the performing body in *Perfectly Normal*. According to Peter Brooks (1994b):

> The melodramatic body is a body seized by meaning. Since melodrama's simple, unadulterated messages must be made absolutely clear, visually present, to the audience, bodies of victims and villains must unambiguously signify their status.... [The melodrama cannot] reach its denouement until the virtuous bodies have been freed, and explicitly recognized as bearing the sign of innocence....marks and emblems that eventually permit the public recognition of the virtuous identity. (18)

The film is embued with an overall sense of theatricality and most of this is accessed through Renzo as performer or spectator, a point of view that is both embodied and virtual. There are several "stages" for these performances, venues for his self-performance and eager viewing exist from the very beginning of the film. From the first shot of his prone body splayed on the ice rink, we see him performing his grief. Later, he performs the quiet masculinity of the working class bottle inspector in the beer factory, but in a space that resembles a rotunda style theatre. As a cab driver he is more a cinema spectator as he quietly listens to the sometimes mad vignettes performed by his passengers while he watches them in the small screen of his rear view mirror. And he plays hockey.

Renzo also lives the life of an esthete listening to opera in the richly decorated apartment of his deceased parents. This setting is at odds with his other roles, a masculinity associated with the working class and Canadian

nationalism. The warm and rich colours of the luxurious apartment contrast strongly with the cool whiteness of the rink and the factory, as well as the comparative drabness of the night. The apartment represents an alternative (Italianate?) cultural space, carved out but still contained by the larger Canadian reality of factory work and hockey existing outside it. However lush the setting might be, before Alonzo comes to live there we have no real sense of this. Rather, as spectators, the apartment is a space to which we have had access strictly from Renzo's point of view. The rooms look like nothing more than a series of framed doorways, entrapping Renzo in a life he can't escape without Alonzo's help. This is Alonzo's self-proclaimed purpose as restaurateur: to "add colour to their drab little lives" an effect he obviously also has on Renzo's life. It must be remembered that as the Verdi opera, *La Traviata* is also linked to a revolutionary moment in Italy's history.[69] In a sense, this too becomes Renzo's little revolution.

Camp as an aesthetic strategy is meant to be decoded according to the queer subject's place in the "straight" scheme of things. The overt exhibition of the gendered body for decoding — as well as its insistence upon existing as an alternatively sexualized body — marks one of the ways in which queer subjectivities are articulated against the grain. Susan Sontag argues that camp "incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content', 'aesthetics' over 'morality', of 'irony' over 'tragedy'"(as quoted, Farmer 109). Everything about camp, like much of postmodern irony, appears in quotation marks. In *Perfectly Normal*, this might be read as a contradiction to my earlier suggestion about the film's seriousness on the subject of identity construction. Privileging the ending

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[69] This opera was adapted by Verdi from Alexandre Dumas' *La dame aux camelias*. It continues to be very popular in part because it allows the audience to read gender anxieties as well as political and nationalist allegories of revolution into the overt critique of the petit bourgeoisie that it depicts. According to Matthew Boyden (1997), this is certainly how its first audiences at La Scala received it.

from the rest of the film might thus lead to the recuperability of the performance; it could certainly be argued that while heightening its campiness, the closing performance is a safe one; a kind of straight camp, if you like, which is only the culmination of so many other dysfunctions. However, if we look within as well as beyond the final performance, to the potential means by which "camp displaces the legislative stability of gender binarisms through queer re-formations" (Farmer 123), then we have an entirely different relationship to the film's depiction of transvestism and its overall camp aesthetic.

In *Perfectly Normal* melodrama becomes a means to anchor the critique of gender/sexuality/nation, refiguring and salvaging camp's unmooring potential as a more overtly legible politics of transgression. The melodramatic body of this film is more site than index. If virtue accrues to the powerless, then Renzo's performance throughout is emblematic of the virtuous body of desire; that is a body with quotation marks, but without a conventional, identifiable masculine desire. Renzo appears not to be the master of his own sexual subjectivity, because rather than acting he is acted upon. Another way of reading this is to consider Renzo's performance as the subject's only means to unmask the difference between **meaning** and **being** as a remnant of modernity. This is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the penultimate sequence of the film, when the fight breaks out in La Traviata. This sequence simultaneously signals Renzo's absolute relinquishment of self-consciousness and an adoption of another kind of self-awareness that allows him to experience the free-floating pleasure of performance in the moment while it collapses the distinction between audience and actor. We have seen so many instances of performance throughout that it is practically impossible not to view the film as a mediation on performance in its various

guises and implications, and herein lies the critical strength of camp, not its weakness. We have, after all, witnessed the varied performances: national, ethnic, gender, age, class, and sexuality. In *Perfectly Normal*, melodrama and camp together yield a discourse that in *Forbidden Love* is a result of the hybridizing of melodrama and documentary; both films simultaneously address an avowal and a disavowal, or what Farmer, refers to as a mode of "ambivalent psychic protest" (121). In the complicated postmodern relationship of sexuality to nation developed in the context of these films, this is indeed an accomplishment.

Conclusion

Susan Rubin Suleiman (1992) reminds us that to conceive of art as a strict political platform rather than as a forum for debate locates the notion of resistance firmly within texts (or films) and "not in their readings." Suleiman cites Stanley Fish's argument that "every reading of a text, no matter how personal or 'quirky', can be shown to be part of a collective discourse and analysed historically and ideologically as characteristic of a group, or what Fish has called 'an interpretive community.'" Suleiman also challenges the hierarchy of the "correct reading" which she claims valourises certain readings at the expense of others. She sees this as operating hegemonically to block new interpretive and discursive strategies that seek to define what a thing *is* (in this case postmodernist culture), and then names what it can *do* (324-5). This approach to culture ignores the long history of women as cultural consumers who have "stolen" pleasures from a variety of cultural sources and used them for their own (queer) purposes.

According to Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) "in-jokes" such as those found in *Forbidden Love* can function to redress the

"lost" history of the ex-centric while voicing a complaint about the way things are now. The film is thus a kind of representational metaphor for a cultural salvaging process which is locatable as both lesbian and Canadian. This film performs a kind of doubling or juggling act; a double-voicing/double-imaging to both connect and dissociate itself from the mainstream of culture through the use of hybrid film styles. The complexities of a politics of identity and postmodern aesthetics are thus related, but not identical. For however tempting it may be to conflate feminism and anti-homophobia in acknowledging the many things they share in common, their relationship is not, as Craig Owens (1992) and Eve Sedgwick have reminded us, "automatic or transhistorical" (219).

By examining some of the "queer" aspects of cultural discourse—those instances of discourse that raise incoherencies but do not adequately address or settle issues of sexual politics—notions of both film textuality and potential viewing situations are inevitably opened up. A queer reading, against the grain, to steal pleasure is also an implicit politics of interpretation. This is one place where the politics of identity—sexual, national, and ethnic—and the aesthetics of resistance coincide. Together they produce, as the end-title of *Forbidden Love* suggests, "another fragment, another telling, as we break the silence of our lives." In any example of queer cinema or the lesbian postmodern, the relationship of the aesthetic to the political has a different range, tone, and impetus (and therefore effect) which can also be related to the cultural context in which the films have been released, particularly the changing political climate regarding feminism, postmodernism and sexuality. In *Forbidden Love* and *Perfectly Normal*, the emotional and sexual "temperatures" of the films fluctuate along with their broad, genre relationship to the melodramatic. The films fit implicitly with melodrama as

a critical strategy of historical and national reflection or revision. Their revised and newly contextualized melodramatic strategies invite a critical reading that links the mode of production with analysis. Yet the melodramatic cultural antecedents of a queer cinema in Canada also depend on other non-Canadian queer social referents as well as an aesthetic context of "straight" popular culture. These are also ambivalent systems of signification against which *Forbidden Love* and *Perfectly Normal* are posed that go well beyond the "constraints" of the nation, or a clear notion of national cinema.

Conclusion

> The difficulty with submitting the term melodrama to a conclusive, critical definition is that it is such a historically complex phenomenon. Moreover, this problem is complicated by the apparent ease with which it is possible to point out melodramatic situations and conventions in a wide variety of dramatic and literary media of different historical and cultural situations. (237)
>
> David N. Rodowick (1991)

In "Madness, Authority, and Ideology in the Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s," David Rodowick refines his definition of melodrama (above) by calling it an aesthetic ideology that takes many forms; it is historically contingent upon social, cultural and economic determinations, and, as a structure of signification it enables certain forms while disabling others (238). Melodrama is thus as much about "what it is not" as "what it is." Its so-called failure to signify — what Rodowick calls its "discontinuities" and "equivocations" — are rather the means by which melodrama underscores "eloquent silences" (238). What Rodowick claims are the potential shortcomings of melodrama, are to my mind, the very things that suggest melodrama is an ideally suited mode of analysis for contemporary culture. This is due in part to what I have been arguing throughout this thesis; melodrama works within and against generic and other narrative conventions by offering an alternative or complementary system of signification that highlights the contradictions of political, economic, and social conventions.

These contradictions are also part of a larger aesthetic and theoretical issue that Judith Mayne (1993) describes as *the* central problematic for film studies: specifically, the paradox of spectatorship. Mayne argues that the main problem facing film critics and cultural theorists is that the cinema, in

constructing an ideal spectator, engages him/her in the very psychic and social processes that make it difficult to analyse films. Analysing a film thus becomes a question of whether, like melodrama itself, the cinema is an exemplary site of dominant ideology or one where a struggle for meanings is played out. Mayne asks whether a mainstream film is only ever a mere instrument of "the system" or whether it can also be a challenge to it. This is the "drama" that melodrama stages; its aesthetic strategies can engage both the heart and the head in the process of analysis, making recourse to conventionally opposed notions like critical distance, on the one hand, or the overidentification of cinematic affect, on the other, equally problematic since melodrama typically involves the spectator in both forms of address. Yet the question remains whether this issue is so basic to the cinema and so all-encompassing as to be irrelevant.

Consider the consonance between Mayne's ideas concerning the paradox of spectatorship and what Rodowick discusses as melodrama's equivocal nature. Historically, melodrama has been a mode for dramatising the differences of power between characters in an effort to make legible the moral occult. These dramatisations are often compared to discrepancies that exist in the larger social arena. The melodrama arguably restages such power struggles as an aesthetically displaced operation that not only facilitates the battle for new terms of subjectivity, but can also stifle them. In the domestic melodrama, for example, Rodowick suggests that "the set of determinations" involves the psychic and social relations of production, in which the institutions of the family and marriage, as well as the iconography of the middle class home, are privileged "contents" (239-240). This does not mean that other institutions are excluded from consideration, or that the family is only ever simply revered or castigated for its part in determining social and

psychic relations. However, the issues that are dealt with will inhabit and reproduce the structure of familial power relations, in particular with the 1950s melodrama, the struggles between the son and the father for dominance, and the place of women in the new post-war economy. Given the pressure under which the middle class family operated as both mirror and microcosm for the American nation in the post-WWII period, it is not surprising that a crisis of representation would result from trying to "balance" individual desires against the authoritative structure of the family and the small town.

Mayne's argument is that what's needed for studies of spectatorship is a similarly staged contest for power between individual desires for meaning and those of authoritative institutions and industries, as well as theoretical discourses. She calls for an examination of the competing claims to the homogenization of cinema and heterogeneous responses to it, or what she calls the gap between address and reception, fantasy and negotiation, in between the claims of resistance and domination (78-79). This is precisely what I am hoping melodrama does for our understanding of Canadian cinema: melodrama becomes a means to account for the contradictory ways in which spectatorship functions. (Are negotiating such contradictions not the very terms under which subjects of the modern nation imagine themselves?) Under these circumstances, national cinema becomes, as Stephen Heath suggests, a site of contradiction and struggle par excellence (1991, 180). If melodrama, as a critical category or method, provides us with a useful means by which to analyse the cinema, it must be receptive to both historical and aesthetic changes, as well as cultural differences. And, at the risk of proposing melodrama as a totalising theory, it shouldn't matter whether we are discussing 1950s Hollywood melodramas or Canadian films from 1972-1992.

Melodrama deployed as a critical method should be capable of bridging various contextual differences without subsuming them. Indeed, one of the strongest features of melodrama — related to its apparent malleability — is that as an analytic method it functions by delaying and possibly diverting the attainment of the ideal subjectivity that is conventionally offered by the psychic and social processes of the cinema to which Mayne refers. If melodrama is often concerned with the "too late" recognition of the subject's position within the social order, it also has the potential to question the terms under which membership is taken out therein. And, as I have been suggesting, employing melodrama in the study of national cinema provides an ideal site for taking this idea much further; it offers the possibility for theorizing the unruly nature of subjectivity itself, as well as its articulated relationship to the social practices and conditions of watching movies. Melodrama, as it is deployed in this thesis, functions as an implicit challenge to notions of an ideal spectator. In this case, the deferral of desire is a critical as well as aesthetic delaying tactic. It provides us, spectator-critics, with a much needed wedge for prying open an otherwise uncontested moment.

A film that does not fit within the established national, temporal or linguistic parameters of this dissertation is *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, a recent Inuit film directed by Zacharius Kunuk (2000). Nonetheless, I am struck by, among other things, the film's receptiveness to a melodramatic reading. The film adopts many conventions that are attributable to the melodrama and to ethnographic cinema. These styles combined offer what I consider to be melodrama's greatest hybridizing critical potential. As I have discussed in my analysis of *Forbidden Love*, the mixture of two distinct film styles can be an unsettling yet highly pleasurable experience that serves an

educational and critical purpose. *Atanarjuat* is another example of my proposition that realism and melodrama are not oppositional or antithetical. In this case, the aesthetic strategies associated with each "genre" complements the other as they underscore the limitations of the documentary mode of ethnography and of mythmaking.

As a form of auto-ethnography, *Atanarjuat* provides spectators with a position in which we are treated as insiders and outsiders by turns in our engagement with the film. The narrative is structured to provide commentary on its own mode of story-telling. The film self-reflexively layers the sound and visual tracks by offering a variety of voice-over narrations, chanting and singing in conjunction with a spacio-temporal logic that disrupts classical continuity and a linear sense of time passing. *Atanarjuat* does not consistently adhere to the 180 degree rule of classic realist narrative or documentary cinema. These strategies are deployed selectively to jar the spectator into rethinking the veracity and authority of what is being depicted. Moreover, within the narrative contexts provided, the classically melodramatic emphasis on mise-en-scène and gesture means we are invited to pay particular attention to the relationships presented and to not trust what we see.

These strategies, in combination with the hand held digital camera, convey a sense of immediacy and personal involvement with the events that is in keeping with the melodramatic mode, as well as the legacy of the cinema direct movement of the 1960s. The effect is to implicate us in the outcome of the narrative. Indeed, the digital camera is adept at alternating between the observational style immortalized by the NFB's Unit B, as well as involving us intimately with the action as it transpires, a method of filmmaking typified by the productions of the French Unit in the same period. This movement

between close and distant observation, however, is also largely responsible for melodrama's complex visceral effect as discussed by Tom Gunning (1994). As spectators, we often have the sense of being either too close or too far away; our access to the characters and their dilemmas are frustrated by the strategic management of our temporal, spatial and emotional proximity to events. As with the specifically melodramatic use of close-ups that function consistently to underscore the "eloquent silences" of the Inuit women, these techniques enter into a very different visual discourse than their aesthetic predecessors. Nonetheless, they make legible the moral occult — and this includes a critique on how the Other has been depicted in the classic ethnographic film — by providing a contemporary context for reading the Atanarjuat myth of the Inuit nation near Igloolik at the turn of the last millennium. I will return to some of these ideas briefly after a synopsis of the film.

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner as Melodrama

An unknown shaman visits the community (Igloolik) and introduces evil. The camp leader, Kumaglak, is murdered with the help of his own son. The new leader, Sauri, drives out his old rival Tulimaq through mistreatment and ridicule. Tulimaq loses confidence in his ability to provide for his family. The power begins to shift when the by now resentful Tulimaq's two sons grow into young men: Amaqjuaq is called the Strong One, and Atanarjuat is the Fast Runner. As the camp's best hunters they provoke jealousy and rage in their rival, Oki, Sauri's ill-tempered son. Atanarjuat even wins away Oki's promised wife-to-be, Atuat, in a head punching competition. Oki vows revenge. When Atanarjuat goes hunting, leaving behind his very pregnant wife with his sister-in-law and brother, his travels take him near the community and Sauri's camp. Sauri offers Atanarjuat a

hunting companion, his daughter Puja who was spurned when Atuat and Atanarjuat were united. Eventually, Atanarjuat takes Puja as his second wife. When she and Amaqjuaq are discovered having sex, Puja is banished from the brothers' camp. She runs home crying to her family, but neglects to inform them of the reason she has been sent away. Egged on by his intimidating father, Oki and his friends plot to murder both brothers while they sleep. Meanwhile, Puja returns and begs forgiveness, promising to turn over a new leaf if she is readmitted to the brothers' family. She is welcomed first by Atuat and her sister-in-law and later by the two brothers who also resolve their own differences. While the men sleep, however, Amaqjuaq is speared through the tent and killed, but Atanarjuat miraculously escapes, running naked for his life across the melting spring ice floes.

Eluding his pursuers, and with supernatural help, Atanarjuat is hidden and nursed back to health by an old couple who themselves fled the evil camp years before. After an inner struggle to reclaim his spiritual path, and with the guidance of his elder advisor, Atanarjuat learns to face both natural and supernatural enemies, and heads home to rescue his family. Atanarjuat reunites with Atuat and their son. Tulimaq announces that they will have a party to celebrate the Fast Runner's return. Atanarjuat invites Oki and his friends to join him in a pre-party feast of fresh walrus. Will he continue the bloody cycle of revenge, or restore harmony to the community? At the moment when Atanarjuat could kill his lifelong enemy, he slams the deadly blade onto the ice beside Oki's head proclaiming that the killing must end. In a ritual cleansing ceremony, the evil is released and all of Sauri's children are expelled from the camp. Atanarjuat takes his place as the camp's new leader.

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner is based on an ancient Inuit legend, which takes place in the area around Igloolik. Paul Apak Angilirq, the film's head writer, asked several people about the legend then wrote down and integrated their versions into the film's screenplay.[70] A layered effect is retained by a number of elements, but is achieved primarily through the manipulation of time and space as mentioned above. The past and present are both evoked by certain costume choices. The dress of the people, which dates back to drawings from the Perry expedition in 1822-3, is counterpointed with the reflective eye coverings to deter snow-blindness, which also happen to look like the latest in snowboarding eye wear that could easily be advertised in a recent issue of *Gear*. Costuming then creates a subtle but unsettling sense of temporal paradox and dislocates us as spectators about how it is we are to consume the story as myth or actualité.[71] But, if we have a skewed sense of the duration of time, this is not necessarily confusing as it creates a timeless quality to the story being told, a dislocation in time that is also part of the film's spatial organization. For example, it is often unclear as to whether one event will precipitate another since threats and demands uttered by characters often do not come to an immediate or overtly causal conclusion. Furthermore, the locations remain fairly constant with the sometimes abrupt change of seasons signalling the only visible differences between geographic spaces. Some of the classic signifiers of the passage of time are thus difficult to locate. The manipulation of time for the express purpose

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[70] Isuma Productions (2001) information on DVD. *Atanarjuat: the Fast Runner* (Z. Kunuk, 2000).
[71] This strategy is in keeping with recent experimental ethnographies, which to discuss in detail would take me too far afield at this point in my conclusion. See, for example, Catherine Russell's discussion of the autoethnographic subject, personal and cultural memory and the use of video as a means to intervene into the discourse of ethnography, in *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). See especially, pp. 275-314. I discuss some strategies in my MA thesis, *The Postmodern Ethnographic Cinema of Trinh T. Minh-ha*, (London: University of Western Ontario, 1995).

of delaying narrative resolution, however, is a distinctly melodramatic use of the temporal elements of cinema. In *Atanarjuat*, the constant deferral of the climactic event invites the spectator to immerse him or herself in the moment. The effect is to accentuate the emotional attachment we may have to the characters, as well as to convey an importance to the daily struggles of life. For example, even the minor details of life on the Arctic tundra with its seasonally elongated daylight hours offer an alternative "time-space" yet these dislocating conditions are offset by the familiarity of specifically familial and community relationships that are central to the classic melodrama. These "domestic" moments, rendered in painstakingly authentic detail, take up the majority of the film's time and are equally "ethnographic" and "melodramatic."[72]

The delay in resolving the tension between Atanarjuat and Oki, however, does provide a narrative focus, but in the end, when the threat Oki represents is finally eliminated, this is not depicted as either retribution or comeuppance. To do so would undermine the "progress" that Atanarjuat has made, personally, and cancel out the utopian vision of the film. Atanarjuat is clearly the virtuous one of the two men. The film presents this in a classic melodramatic fashion, which Brooks (1976) has argued is a staple of the melodrama; Atanarjuat is "the bearer of the sign and proof of virtue and innocence" (27). Yet it is precisely because Atanarjuat has already proven himself through the physical and mental endurance tests of being chased over the ice, and in defeating his supernatural and flesh and blood foes, that

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[72] According to the documentation accompanying the film's DVD release, every effort was put into researching and imitating life as it would have been as part of recapturing the lost history of the Inuit people near Igloolik. The purpose of this strategy was to end up with a cultural document for those involved in the project as well as for people in the community. This research and performance of historical verisimilitude included costumes and modes of transportation, proper handling of various implements used in the making of an igloo, the preparation of meals and the maintenance of the oil lamps (Isuma Productions, 2001).

this display is both anticlimactic and very important to the community and, by extension, to the spectator. Melodramas often stage endless obstacles and obfuscations in an effort to underscore the moral message. In *Atanarjuat* this is not only done repeatedly, but excessively; in other words, in a manner that goes well beyond the aim of conveying the moral purpose of the story to the audience. Thus when we see Atanarjuat prepare the igloo for his meeting with Oki and his cohorts, and later see him retrieve the stashed knife and ice-shoes, we are presented with a moral dilemma. The question becomes whether we, as spectators, who may very well hope that Oki will be murdered, are up to the challenge of the new terms of the moral authority that Atanarjuat will soon represent. In effect, the details of the mise-en-scène in combination with the extended delay of the narrative resolution invite us to participate in our own betterment. Thus when Atanarjuat slams the blade on the ice near Oki's head, when he could just as easily have slit his throat, this is not simply a sign that he is the physically superior or "fast" one. His preparation suggests that he is indeed the smarter one, capable of outwitting the established immoral order; but Atanarjuat is also a sign of the new moral authority, and thus must be equal to the challenge of unfair play yet capable of rising above it at the same time.

This suggests a shift in the terms of engagement, a new morality, in fact, that has been envisioned by members of the community all along. The mobile camera in concert with extended close-ups have offered alternative readings to the "main event" that has taken place throughout the film; that is, the rivalry between Sauri's and Tulimaq's people. The significance of gesture as sign language that provides access to an alternate system of meaning is underscored through the close-up. These moments also insert a structured pause into the narrative that suggests conflict. The women, and

others without direct access to power within the camps, rarely object to the events that concern powerful men overtly, and only sometimes are they depicted in dispute with each other. Instead what usually happens in *Atanarjuat* is that the camera zooms in on the women's faces to register displeasure, disgust or disagreement. Several theorists have discussed the close-up's potential for melodrama. Among them, Rodowick has claimed that class in the 1950s family melodrama is encoded gesturally, but as with the classic melodrama, these gestures in *Atanarjuat* are encoded within a nexus of social power that is also gendered. Rodowick writes: _

> Notice the curious paradox which takes form here: although the family tries to substitute itself, pars pro toto, for the global network of authority in which it is implicated, it also imagines itself as a world divested of significant power addressing itself to an audience which does not believe itself to be possessed of social power" (239).

Rather than resolve this basic contradiction, the melodrama provides an opportunity to rethink the ways in which the subject is both ruled and unruly in relation to the authoritative institutions depicted. The sign system of the melodrama provides a lexicon of gestures within the narrative context established that is adeptly read by the audience to suggest things could be otherwise.

In my truncated analysis of this film, I hope it is clear that the melodramatic aesthetic techniques deployed by *Atanarjuat* suggest that imagining such an alternative discourse is no less possible here than it was/is for the 1950s melodrama. Melodrama is neither inherently progressive nor retrograde. One might argue, for example, that more than merely suggesting its adaptability, the reason the mode of storytelling in *Atanarjuat* is melodramatic is due to melodrama's insideousness. It thus would be only logical that the Inuit imagine themselves by the means of this agent of

colonialism and modernity. Yet if melodrama's equivocal nature makes it adept at telling highly engaging stories, then equally convincing is the argument for a negotiated position that the film opens up. If, as David Thorburn claims, melodrama is a central modality of twentieth century culture, and as Michel Foucault (1990) argues, all representational strategies are only accessible as discursive effects, then in this case irony is clearly the effect of melodrama. Its sometimes poignant, sometimes bemused positioning of spectators highlights the ironic since melodrama usually says at least two things at once. In the contested terrain over the meanings attached to popular representations of Canadian culture, the ironic mode of melodrama adds another layer to the "confusion" rather than helping to clarify how an aesthetic object "should" be read.

Deploying a melodramatic analysis of Canadian cinema, in particular, opens up what the discourse of multiculturalism has been attempting to manage: difference. In the period of cinematic representation I discuss, multiculturalism has become the sign writ large of Canadian cultural anxiety about difference. As a sign, multiculturalism can subsume or enable difference. As an umbrella term, multiculturalism can flatten differences in an attempt to efface all differences so that class, race, gender and sexuality, among others are contained within its neat categorization of otherness. Real differences may be difficult but are not impossible to express in this context, and melodrama provides a handy wedge for prying open the conflicted discourse of multiculturalism. As I have argued earlier, following Peter Brooks' (1976) notion that melodrama becomes popular in moments of intense social crisis, official multiculturalism and its attendant discourses set in motion a crisis in the representation of difference. When this occurs, according to Linda Williams (2001), the inexpressible is especially receptive to

melodramatic modalities (300). Although Williams discusses race as the inexpressible but central signifier of American anxiety, I am suggesting that the anxiety over the representation of race is only one of the differences that is managed by multiculturalism and expressed by melodrama. In the representative period of 1972-1992, my analysis suggests that we have seen this anxiety over difference displaced melodramatically in films as diverse as *Paperback Hero* (P. Pearson, 1972) and *Anne Trister* (L. Pool, 1986). Moral legibility, which is melodrama's aim, arises within disputes over the management of differences in access to power based on class, gender, race and sexuality. These social and political issues — or "problems of difference" — become more readily accessible through the melodramatic mode.

Thus it would seem that *Atanarjuat* is perhaps not so incongruous a film for this discussion. From a strictly logistical point of view, *Atanarjuat* could only appear when it did because of the lag of resources to the underdeveloped north, so the strategies that I have identified in "southern" Canadian film in the 70s and 80s don't appear there until much later. Yet as I have been suggesting, the film's entry into the theoretical and visual discourse at this later time provides an opportunity to revisit them, as well as a number of other issues I have been raising throughout this dissertation. For example, in dealing with the "problems" of difference that multiculturalism attempts to suppress and that melodrama unleashes but cannot adequately manage, *Atanarjuat* is poised as a film of the nation and not-nation — Inuit/Canadian — that is exemplary of the unruliness of Canadian subjectivity. Embedded within the discourse of multiculturalism is the sense that subjects are variations on a theme of difference, and that immigrants and other Others trouble the boundaries of inside and outside the nation, attesting by their very presence to the porousness of subjectivity and the permeability

of the border. What then are we to make of this film? Is it Canadian or Inuit or neither — some hybrid funded by an Inuit-driven production company and subsidized by the National Film Board of Canada and Telefilm Canada. Is it really a co-production of two nations similar to the likes of *Léolo* (Canada-France) and *Perfectly Normal* (Canada-UK), which we nonetheless can claim as our own? Yes and no.

If multiculturalism is the umbrella term to describe difference in the Canadian nation, then melodrama provides the language for doing so, a magnet by which the films collect fragments of neglected discourses like the inexplicable detritus of modernity. Nationalism is indeed one of the elements that this lodestone attracts. Those nations left behind, altered and reconfigured are salvaged by the unruly subject of multiculturalism. The endlessly varying differences become the ruins that are redeployed and recoded within melodrama's sign system in a manner suitable to the narrative conventions each film establishes. It makes no difference whether the films adopt the language of the western, caper or buddy film, or whether their subject matter is hockey, opera, or personal and cultural memory. These cultural signs are highly adaptable to speaking to the audience about critical issues such as identity, subjectivity *and difference* in the generic terms of cinematic address, namely the pervasive mode of twentieth century cinema: melodrama. According to Homi Bhabha (1998), multiculturalism functions as a "'floating signifier' whose enigma lies less in itself than in the discursive uses of it to mark social processes where differentiation and condensation seem to happen almost synchronically" (31). Melodrama articulates the uneasy relationship between "model" and "modal" subjects in between myths of progressive and highly anxious states. It stages a dispute over the

changing terms of the ideal modern nation as multicultural, as well as the fantasy of diversity that it perhaps imagines and aspires to be.

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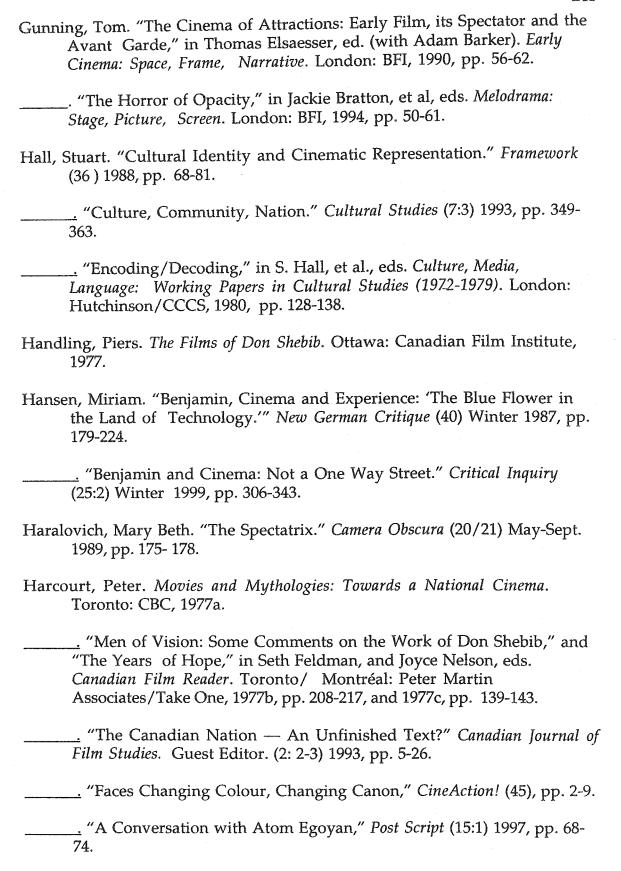_____. *Femmes Fatales*. New York/London: Routledge, 1991.

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