“Notre Valérie Nationale”: The *films de fesses* as a catalyst of socio-cultural transformation during Quebec’s Quiet Revolution and beyond

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A thesis in the
Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Film Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2017

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: The *films de fesses* as a catalyst of socio-cultural transformation during Quebec's Quiet Revolution and beyond

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Film Studies)

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ABSTRACT

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The *films de fesses* are a cycle of French-language sexploitation films produced in Quebec in the late sixties and early seventies. They were an unforeseen consequence of the vast social and political changes that occurred in the 1960s. During this period, Jean Lesage's Liberal government commenced a period of secularization in the province that became known as the Quiet Revolution. At the same time, the sexual revolution was challenging norms in most of the Western world, including Quebec. Between 1963 and 1967, Quebec went from having the most draconian, punitive censorship regime in Canada to the most liberal and relaxed. The end of this period also marked the creation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), which financed "commercially-calculated" projects, including sexploitation films.

Firstly, I will examine how the first of these films, *Valérie* (Denis Héroux, 1969), became a sensation upon its release and invoked sentiments of national pride. The director bragged that he wanted to "*déshabiller la petite québécoise*," and one television personality started referring to its beauty contest-winning star, Danielle Ouimet, as "*Notre Valérie nationale*," a sex idol that Quebec could call its own. The film follows the titular character as she is "rescued" from a Catholic orphanage by a man on a motorcycle, until she arrives in Montreal and becomes a sex worker. Promoted as an allegory for Quebec's maturation, both sexually and politically, the film stoked controversy as conservative members of the press criticized it for its overtly commercialized sexuality. Nevertheless, it was followed by a cycle of films that followed the same narrative and thematic template, pitching young against old, metropolitan against rural, secular against religious.

Secondly, I will explore the high-profile censorship case that emerged in 1971 when a priest from Quebec City filed criminal complaints against *Après-ski* and *Pile ou face*, two *films de fesses* that both featured full frontal nudity (both male and female). These affairs pitched the authority of Quebec's provincial Bureau de surveillance du cinéma against the federal criminal code, and put fear into the hearts of exhibitors and distributors. Still, it provoked a public debate in Quebec's tabloids and media which I argue normalized anti-censorship opinions in the province. Overall, I hope to show how seemingly marginal works of art, such as the *films de fesses*, had an outsized effect on the socio-cultural fabric of the province.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Thomas Waugh, for his kindness, patience, and helpfulness during this long and sometimes maddening process. It was Tom who first put me on the subject of *films de fesses* almost three years ago in his class on Quebec cinema during the sexual revolution, and he has helped guide me on this journey every step of the way. I would also like to thank Catherine Russell, Luca Caminati and Marc Steinberg for helping to guide my thesis research in its early stages, along with all the other members of the Mel Hoppenheim faculty who have provided support for me, including Pierre Véronneau (who is cited extensively in its pages). I would also like to thank my peers, especially Jake Bagshaw, Lisa Aalders, and Julia Higgins, who provided a structure of support and feedback in the early stages of thesis writing. I would also like to thank fellow students Alyssa Shore, Duda Gueiros, Patricia Ciccone, Nikola Stepic and Joaquín Serpé for their friendship during the cold and sometimes lonely winters of Montreal. I would also like to thank my partner, Samantha Henman, for putting up with me for these last few years, asking her to help me translate things. Likewise, I would like to thank my roommates Natalie Greenberg and Thomas Kirk for letting me vent when necessary. Lastly, I would like to thank Greg Dunning, son of Cinepix co-founder John Dunning, for his unfettered support during this process, and for providing me with invaluable materials from the Cinepix archive.

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INTRODUCTION

In the opening minutes of the 1969 Québécois sexploitation film *Valérie* (Denis Héroux), a leather jacket-clad biker breaks into Catholic orphanage and absconds with the title character (Danielle Ouimet) on the back of his motorcycle. He takes her to Montreal, the big city, where she first finds a job as a go-go dancer, and then as a sex worker. John Dunning, who co-founded the Canadian production company Cinepix and produced *Valérie*, dismisses any claim that his film is an allegory, preferring to say that it's "a sweet, softcore film about a hooker with a heart of gold."[1] Yet, the story alone manages to invoke a multitude of conflicts and fissures within the Quebec of both the Quiet and sexual revolution, between the forces of Catholicism and secularism, between rural conservatism and urban cosmopolitanism, and between older and younger generations. Denis Héroux, the film's director, infamously claimed that his intention was to "déshabiller la petite Québécoise."[2] Michèle Garneau says that this is "the main slogan of a period marked by a nationalistic current that sought both to sexualize the nation and to nationalize sexuality."[3] In the midst of the film's controversy-courting release, television personality and tabloid columnist Michel Girouard began referring to the film's star, Danielle Ouimet, as "Notre Valérie nationale,"[4] directly invoking role that the new film was playing in the national imaginary.

Over the next few years, *Valérie* was followed by several more *films de fesses*, which all courted publicity by promising a spectacle of sexuality. Danielle Ouimet re-teamed with Cinepix

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[1] John Dunning with Bill Brownstein in *You're Not Dead until You're Forgotten*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 72.
[2] Qtd. in Luc Perreault in "Denis Héroux: jouer le jeu de la mythologie," *La Presse* (Montreal), May 3, 1969.
[3] Michèle Garneau in "Les rendez-vous manqués d'Éros et du cinéma québécois, de la Révolution tranquille à nos jours." *Une histoire des sexualités au Québec au XXe siècle*. Ed. by Jean-Philippe Warren. (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 2012). Print. 213.
[4] Michel Girouard in "Danielle Ouimet décide de sortir ses griffes." *Le Nouveau Samedi*. June 21, 1969.

and Héroux for *L'initiation* (1970), which was released the following year. *L'initiation* was another film about youthful sexuality and loss of innocence that could easily be interpreted as an allegory for the province. More films followed, including the über-successful *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier 1970), which shifted focus from the young virgins of *Valérie* and *L'initiation* to two disillusioned, petit-bourgeois housewives in suburban Brossard. Fournier's film functions as both an example of *films de fesses* and as a clever parody of the genre, while also providing a framework for the class-based comedies that would characterize Quebec's popular cinema. The financial success of these films cannot be overstated. To put this number into context, *Valérie* earned an estimated $1 million in Quebec in 1969.[5] *L'initiation* pulled in an estimated $2.5 million[6] while *Deux femmes en or* broke records with about $4 million.[7] In comparison, *Les 3 P'tits Cochons 2* (Jean-François Pouliot 2016) earned about $2.9 million dollars at the Canadian box office, and it was the highest-earning Canadian film of last year.[8] The cultural penetration of a $4 million grosser in 1970, by comparison, would have been much more prominent, especially when inflation is taken into consideration. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will argue that *Valérie*, along with the *films de fesses* that followed, captured the imagination of Quebec and helped to form a class-based identity for the fledgling "nation" and its inhabitants.

In the years that followed, the *films de fesses* would continue to populate Quebec screens and become a dominant part of the domestic film production landscape. Cinepix alone produced and released *L'amour humain* (Héroux 1970), *Ah! Si mon moine voulait…* (Claude Pierson 1973), *La pomme, la queue et les pépins* (Claude Fournier 1974) and *Tout feu, tout femme* (Gilles

[5] Paul Corupe in "Sin and Sovereignty: The Curious Rise of Cinepix Inc.," *Take One*, March 2005. 19.
[6] Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 305.
[7] Ibid., 80; Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 306.
[8] Jordan Pinto in "Les P'tits Cochons 2 wins Golden Screen Award." *Playback*, March 6, 2017.

Richer 1975) along with the English language Canadian sexploitations *Love in a 4 Letter World* (John Sone 1970) and *Loving and Laughing* (Sone 1971). Meanwhile, their competitors produced films like *Finalement…* (Richard Martin 1971) and *Les chats bottés* (Claude Fournier 1971). Even as early as 1971, however, fatigue was visible in the market for homegrown skin flicks, but two films featuring full frontal nudity sparked a new wave of controversy that dominated tabloids and received coverage in mainstream newspapers.

Pile ou face (produced by Cinepix and directed by Roger Fournier) and *Après-ski* (directed by Roger Fournier) were subject to criminal complaints by a Catholic priest for their "undue exploitation of sex,"[9] further intensifying the media coverage of the *films de fesses* as their distributors went to court. Though both films had been approved by the provincial *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma*, they were seized under federal law, putting into place a jurisdictional conflict that threatened the reformed and liberal Cinema Act of 1967. Though many people in the media couldn't bring themselves to defend the films in question, there was also a widespread fear of the kind of moral legislation that typified the so-called Great Darkness in Quebec. In the second chapter of my thesis, I will argue that public debate that occurred in the wake of these seizures helped to normalize anti-censorship opinion in the province.

Necessary Developments

Before examining the *films de fesses* and their reception, it is necessary to position the films within the unique political and cultural context of Quebec of the late 1960s. There were three key events that allowed sexploitation to develop as a common production trend in Quebec

[9] "La police saisit Pile ou face et Après Ski" *Montreal-Matin*, April 24, 1971.

cinema at the time. First, Quebec's censorship regime was reformed and liberalized. Second, the federal government created a public agency devoted to the financing of commercial feature-length films. Third, a Montreal-based production company called Cinepix produced *Valérie* without federal aid, and it provided a template for further entries into the genre.

In Quebec, the period between 1936 and 1959 is called the "Grande Noirceur," or Great Darkness, which refers to the policies of premier Maurice Duplessis and his *Union nationale* governments between 1936-1939 and 1944-1959. During this time, the Catholic clergy had a large degree of power in the province, and wielded its influence over the government's censorship policies.[10] The Censorship Board of Quebec was known as the most draconian censorship body in the country, to the point where French filmmakers sometimes shot special "Canadian endings" in order to get their films screened in the province.[11] While censorship had always been present in Quebec, "During this post-war period and up to 1959, new points of legislation reinforced the state's censorial priorities, while the Catholic Church gave itself new tools to convey its own vision of cinema."[12] In 1959, Duplessis passed away while still in office. Unable to find its footing, the *Union nationale* was swept out of office in 1960 by the Liberal Party of Quebec and incoming premier Jean Lesage, who came to power with a broad mandate to reform and secularize public institutions.[13] This was the beginning of what became known as the "Révolution tranquille," or the Quiet Revolution. This era of reform coincided with a renewed interest in Quebec nationalism and the gradual realignment of Quebec politics along the lines of

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[10] Pierre Véronneau in "When Cinema Faces Social Values: One Hundred Years of Censorship in Canada," in *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World*, ed. Daniel Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2013), 52.
[11] Ibid., 54.
[12] Yves Lever in *Anastasie, ou la censure du cinéma au Québec*. (Quebec: Septentrion, 2008), 134.
[13] John A. Dickinson and Brian Young in *A Short History of Quebec*, 4th ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 305.

federalism versus independence;[14] it lasted until approximately 1976, with the election of the sovereigntist *Parti québécois* and premier René Lévesque.

After a commission on the role of censorship in the province, Quebec placed André Guérin in charge of the Censorship Board, with a mandate to be more liberal than his predecessors.[15] Guérin led the Board during a four year transitional period in which Quebec's notoriously restrictive, Jesuit-influenced censorship practices were pared back significantly. A key component of the Quiet Revolution was the reduction of Catholic morality in public, and the reduction of censorship played a large part.[16] Over the next few years, censorship battles occurred over Canadian productions such as Jean-Paul Bernier's *La terre à boire* (1964) and Larry Kent's *High* (1967), but they also occurred when foreign sexploitation films came to town. For example, the 1963 decision by the Board to classify films by the appropriate age of its audience came about when the acceptance of *Strip-tease* (Jacques Poitrenaud 1963), a French film about a stripper who falls in love with a wealthy playboy, ignited a public battle between Guérin and Lucien Labelle, the director of the national Catholic Office.[17] *Strip-tease* had its seal of approval removed after three months of pressure from religious groups, but it was one of the first films to push Quebec towards a broader acceptance of sex in cinema.[18]

In 1967, the passage of the Cinema Act in the Quebec National Assembly replaced the Censorship Board with the *Bureau de surveillance de cinéma* (BSCQ), which had a much more

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[14] Ibid., 321.
[15] Pierre Véronneau in "Censure et discours de la critique." *Cinéma et sexualité*, ed. Claude Chabot and Denise Pérusse. (Quebec: PROSPEC Inc., 1988): 168. Print.
[16] Pierre Véronneau in "When Cinema Faces Social Values" 55-56.
[17] Boisvert, Nicole M., and Telesforo Tajuela in *La saga des interdits: la censure cinématographique au Québec*. (Montreal: Éditions Libre Expression, 2006): 146-151. Print.
[18] Yves Lever in "*Strip-tease.*" *La dictionnaire de la censure au Québec*. Pierre Hébert and Kenneth Landry. (Montreal: Editions Fides, 2006): 630. Print.

liberal mandate than its predecessor. The *Bureau* also began the practice of classifying films by appropriate age groups ("for all till 14 years," "for teens and adults till 18," and "adults only").[19] During this period, Quebec's censorship laws went from being the most restrictive in Canada to being the most liberal.[20] Despite the reforms of the Cinema Act, various forces tried to reassert a form of censorship by using the federal Criminal Code to attack sexploitation films of this era, including those produced in Quebec as well as those imported from elsewhere. Apart from the Québécois films discussed in this thesis, a print of the Danish film *I, a Woman* was seized by Montreal police force's morality squad in 1968,[21] while another Danish film, *Quiet Days in Clichy*, had its permit revoked by the BSCQ, who was under pressure from the provincial government (and possibly, Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau).[22]

Before 1969, Cinepix had taken advantage of the recent liberalization of censorship laws to distribute exploitation movies in Quebec, including several European genre and sexploitation films, which had begun to find their way onto Quebec screens throughout the Sixties. According to Dunning, "We had the Italian horror and action fare, the hard-edged German police dramas, and French and English sexy farces and drama."[23] He also cites films such as *Lana, Queen of the Amazons* (Cyl Farney and Géza von Cziffra 1964) and *Cinq filles en furie* (Max Pécas 1964) among the films released by Cinepix in Quebec during this time. Sexploitation and softcore were becoming internationally prominent in this period, and increasingly so in North America. After Vilgot Sjoman's sexually explicit 1967 film *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, which faced various seizures

[19] Véronneau, "When Cinema Faces Social Values," 57.
[20] Ibid., 55-57.
[21] Yves Lever in "I, a Woman." *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*. 323-325.
[22] Yves Lever in "Quiet Days in Clichy." *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*. 566-569.
[23] Dunning and Brownstein, 54.

and legal challenges,[24] became the highest grossing foreign film of all time in the United States (it held the record until the 1990s),[25] production of American sexploitation escalated quickly, with anywhere from 135-150 sexploitation films getting released in the United States in 1969.[26] Many independent film theatres began to take up the demand for sexploitation and genre films, with art house theatres sometimes converting to full-time adult programming for economic reasons.[27] In Montreal alone, several downtown theatres rebranded and began showing adult films in this period. As Dane Lanken puts it, "nothing in the TV era saved more theatres than the public appetite for smut."[28] Altogether, nine theatres became venues for sexploitation and softcore before eventually transitioning to hardcore in the Eighties.[29] Of those, only the Cinema L'Amour, formerly known as The Pussycat, and before that as The Globe, is still operating.[30]

They were also responsible for marketing those movies and, as fringe players in the Quebec film market, they had leeway to create publicity through lewd or controversial public spectacles, which weren't always centered on the movies themselves. Indeed, they seemed prepared to make money in any way they could. As a form of protest against the *Bureau de surveillance*, which was not yet allowing the depiction of bare breasts on screen, Dunning and his partner, André Link, organized a fashion show for the "monokini," a kind of topless female bathing suit, briefly popularized in the mid-1960s.[31] In another example of their taboo-busting

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[24] Ulf Jonas Björk in "Tricky Film: The Critical and Legal Reception of *I Am Curious (Yellow)* in America." *American Studies in Scandinavia*. 44:2, 2012. 122-132.
[25] Ibid., 115.
[26] Gorfinkel, 111.
[27] Gorfinkel, 111-112.
[28] Dane Lanken in *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938*. (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993): 166. Print.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Alan Randolph Jones in "Coming Attractions." *Maisonneuve*. Fall 2016.
[31] Dunning and Brownstein, 65-66.

marketing techniques, they brought a traveling "freak show" to Montreal to publicize a re-release of Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932).[32]

As with the "classical" American exploitation filmmakers at the center of Eric Schaefer's *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, Cinepix engaged in a kind of marketing that emphasized the "spectacle" of their product through "extrafilmic practices" and a carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding the exhibition of the film itself.[33] These types of cinematic exhibition practices go back to the late 19th Century, in which audiences came to the "cinema of attractions" to bask in the glory of a new technology rather than to "escape" into the plot of a well-told story.[34] Around 1906, American narrative cinema began to gain prominence in the industry, and the cinema of attractions "goes underground,"[35] eventually surfacing in the form of exploitation movies.[36] These low-budget films often avoided the ire of local censors by posing as educational, and offered audiences the titillating promise of seeing things (like the nude female figure, or depiction of drug use) that were normally censored in Hays Code-approved studio films.[37] In Quebec, Cinepix thrived by promising audiences the thrills and pleasures that the province's draconian Censor Board had deprived them of for decades.

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[32] Much of this information comes from Dunning's memoir, which doesn't include dates and can seem unreliable at times. However, the gist of his business practices seem plausible and I can confirm, at the very least, that there was a "freak show" in Montreal during that period ("Freaks: A Collector's Edition of Nature's Human Oddities, Past and Present" promotional booklet, (c. 1960s); Cinepix Archive.)

[33] Eric Schaefer in *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

[34] Tom Gunning in "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, no. 3-4 (1986): 65-66.

[35] Ibid., 64.

[36] Gunning says the "cinema of attraction" resurfaced in both the avant-garde and in various forms of mainstream cinema, particularly the musical. However, the "low," déclassé social nature of early cinema suggests, to me, that exploitation movies might be a more appropriate parallel.

[37] Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 105.

Given the fly-by-night, anything goes exhibition practices of Cinepix in the late 1960s, the distance between putting on a live "monokini" show and producing a "skin-flick" wasn't all that far. Both of these types of entertainment, after all, can be held up as examples of "low," "popular, or "vulgar" culture.[38] This is because, by promising a sexy spectacle, they decline to create a distance between the audience and the art that is deemed necessary for the objective criticism, according to the bourgeois, "Kantian aesthetic" which often acts as a standard for more legitimate forms of criticism. According to Pierre Bourdieu "the 'popular aesthetic' ignores or refuses the refusal of 'facile' involvement and 'vulgar' enjoyment."[39] Compare, for example, the exhibitionist nudity of *Valérie* to the subtle glimpse of a naked breast in Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971). While *Valérie* is coy about representing actual sex or the even explicit, full frontal view of a naked woman, it *revels* in the nude figure of its leading lady, Danielle Ouimet, while Jutra's film places a layer of interpretation between the audience and the image of a naked breast by using it as a symbol of its protagonist's coming-of-age.

One major difference between popular and bourgeois entertainments, according to Bourdieu, is the participation of the audience,[40] and so Dunning and Link, at the margins of the industry, couldn't afford to simply produce and distribute films, they had to create spectacles and ask the audience to take part. Or, as Dunning put it: "Sensationalism could work for us, largely

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[38] It may be tempting to assume that these words -- "low," "popular," and "vulgar" -- correlate with an oppressed working class in the province, but the working class did not necessarily make up the audience of the *films de fesses*. Indeed, Elena Gorfinkel's analysis of audience responses to sexploitation films in the United States suggests that they appealed to young people, rather than the trench-coat-wearing older man that had been introduced to the public imagination by films like *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (Elena Gorfinkel, "'Indecent Desires': Sexploitation Cinema, 1960s Film Culture and the Adult Film Audience" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 351). The signifiers of "vulgar" and "low" culture are more complex than a simple assignment of taste according to class, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

[39] Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 4.

[40] Ibid., 487.

because no one else was working it. It was an open playing field. Sure, critics could say we were kowtowing to the lowest common denominator of audience taste. But we were intent on succeeding."[41] This broad, inclusive quality of popular culture — which extends back from exploitation movies to Punch and Judy shows, wrestling, circuses, soccer matches and "even the old neighbourhood cinema"[42] — is also present in Bakhtin's concept of carnival, which "does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators."[43] Dunning and Link would be able to succeed, ostensibly, because they were able to capitalize on an interactional relationship between the film and its audience: a carnivalesque, rebellious quality that was absent from Quebec cinema of the time. That is to say, until *Valérie* came along, there was very little *popular* cinema that was distinctly Québécois.[44]

The change in censorship policies that allowed *Valérie* to find success also coincided with an unprecedented level of support for feature filmmaking from the federal government. The Canadian Film Development Corporation, under the direction of Michael Spencer, was created in 1968 as a means to kickstart Canada's private sector film industry. In contrast to the National Film Board, the CFDC was created to support commercial filmmaking, beginning with a $10 million budget and a mandate to provide high-risk investments for suitably "Canadian" productions in the private sector.[45] The CFDC also provided funding to a number of "culturally

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[41] Dunning and Brownstein, *You're Not Dead until You're Forgotten*, 55.
[42] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 487.
[43] Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7.
[44] I should clarify that *Valérie* wasn't the first Québécois film to find commercial success. One-off domestic productions such as *La Petite Aurore, l'enfant martyre* (Jean-Yves Bigras, 1952) and *Tit-Coq* (René Delacroix and Gratien Gélinas, 1953) had previously found receptive audiences in Quebec, but the confluence of federal funding, censorship reform, and industrial circumstance allowed *Valérie* to be the first film in a wave of such "commercially-calculated" filmmaking that has existed as an industry, in ebbs and flows, until the present day. Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001): 65, 110.
[45] Wise, Wyndham in "Canadian Cinema from Boom to Bust: The Tax-Shelter Years." *Take One* VII.22 (1999): 18. Print.

relevant" films that are canonized in Canadian cinema today, including *Goin' Down the Road* (Don Shebib 1970) and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Ted Kotcheff 1974).

Those films, however, may have earned critical acclaim but they only returned modest box office revenues (a recurrent theme in Canadian cinema). Enter *L'initiation*. A year after the release of *Valérie*, Cinepix followed up its success with its second *film de fesse*. Made with the same director and the same star (although Ouimet was relegated to a supporting role while Chantal Renaud - the future wife of Quebec premier Bernard Landry - was given the lead), Cinepix was obviously attempting to cash in by giving their second film the same qualities as the first: copious nudity and sex, the veneer of a story about changing social mores and a light humorous touch.

For financial reasons, the CFDC supported Cinépix and its competitors in a wave of softcore *Québécois* sexploitation pictures, beginning with *L'initiation* (Denis Héroux 1970) and *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier 1970) and continuing into the early 1970s with films like *Pile ou face* (Roger Fournier 1971) and *Les chats bottés* (C. Fournier 1971).[46] Though the *films de fesses* were a politically contentious topic—people didn't want their taxes spent on smut—Spencer justified the funding of *L'initiation* with the runaway success of the privately financed *Valérie* the year previous. Financially, Spencer's gamble paid off. In Montreal alone, *L'Initiation* earned back half of its $200 000 budget in four weeks. It became the first CFDC-financed production to pay back its initial investment.[47]

[46] Corupe, 19. Web. 1 Dec. 2014.; Dunning and Brownstein, 74.
[47] Peter Desbarats in "The Walt Disney of Sexploitation," *Saturday Night*, November 1970, 30.

Literature Review and Methodology

Though relatively little has been written on the *films de fesses*, one important source has been John Dunning's memoir, *You're Not Dead Until You're Forgotten: A Memoir* (co-written with Bill Brownstein 2014), which is highly unreliable in terms of factual information, but provides Dunning's unique perspective on censorship and the use of sensationalism as a commercial tool.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* has helped me to parse the nuances of class and representation within the films, particularly in the way that certain *films de fesses* form the prototype of the "class-based" comedy, which has been a highly visible part of Quebec popular cinema since the 1940s. I have also used articles by Gilles Blain, on the role of laughter in Claude Fournier's *Deux femmes en or* (1971) and other *films de fesses*,[48] and André Loiselle, on the history of popular Quebec cinema, to contextualize Bourdieu's theories within the culture of Quiet Revolution-era Quebec and its relationship to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque.[49] Likewise, some of Paul Corupe's articles on the history of "canuxploitation" have come in useful for situating Cinepix within Canadian film history.[50]

Because my project is concerned with sex, censorship and Québécois identity, Bill Marshall's *Quebec National Cinema* (2000) and Thomas Waugh's *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (2006) have helped me contextualize the *films de fesses*, particularly their depictions of sex, politics, and national identity, as a part of the broader history of Québécois cinema. I will be referring to the

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[48] Gille Blain in "La place du sexe et la fonction du rire dans le film *Deux femmes en or*," *Cinéma et sexualité*, ed. Claude Chabot and Denise Pérusse. (Quebec: PROSPEC Inc., 1988): 102. Print.
[49] André Loiselle in "Subtly Subversive or Simply Stupid," *Post Script* XVIII, no. 2 (1999): 75-84. Accessed December 1, 2014, FIAF.
[50] Corupe, 16-21.

Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec (2006) by Pierre Hébert, Yves Lever and Kenneth Landry in order to understand the state of censorship during the Quiet Revolution. I have also made use of Lever's *Anastasie ou la censure du cinéma au Québec* as well as the work of Pierre Véronneau in reading about Quebec's censorship of the cinema.[51]

Eric Schaefer's *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* serves as an important basis for understanding the economic and political history of exploitation films within a broader context. Although we think of them as "marginal" in terms of their industrial qualities, they often became central to public discourse on censorship and morality. In terms of placing the *films de fesses* in a more international context, Elena Gorfinkel's PhD dissertation, "'Indecent Desires': Sexploitation Cinema, 1960s Film Culture and the Adult Film Audience," has been very helpful in contextualizing the social impact of sexploitation in North American society. David Andrews' *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* has helped me place the sexploitation within its specific historical context. Another model for examining the history of popular cinema in Canadian cinema will be Peter Urquhart's dissertation, "1979: Reading the Tax-Shelter Boom in Canadian Film History," which explores the often-ignored films of Canadian cinema's tax-shelter era and reveals some of them to be more consciously "Canadian" than is assumed by many.[52]

Most importantly, I have relied on press clippings and promotional materials for *Valérie*, *L'initiation* and *Pile ou face* that currently belong to Greg Dunning, son of Cinepix founder John

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[51] Pierre Véronneau in "Censure et discours de la critique." *Cinéma et sexualité*, ed. Claude Chabot and Denise Pérusse. (Quebec: PROSPEC Inc., 1988): 168. Print; Pierre Véronneau in "When Cinema Faces Social Values: One Hundred Years of Film Censorship in Canada." *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 49-62.

[52] Peter Urquhart in "1979: Reading the Tax-Shelter Boom in Canadian Film History," (PhD diss., McGill University, 2004).

Dunning, who has graciously made much of his father's collection of Cinepix-related ephemera available to me. I have also made the most of the microfilm holdings at Montreal's *Bibliotheque et Archives national du Québec*, using them to find contemporaneous reporting and reception pieces from Quebec's major daily newspapers - the *Gazette*, the *Montreal Star*, *La Presse*, and *Le Devoir* - as well as various French-language tabloids such as *Photo Journal*, *Photo-Police*, *Echos-Vedettes*, *Nouvelles Illustrées*, *Télé-Radiomonde* and many more.

This thesis will take special interest in the reception of the *films de fesses* in the Quebec print media at the time. On the one hand, I am hoping to perform a rather straightforward history of the *films de fesses* and the ensuing censorship cases, but on the other hand, I also want to demonstrate how reception to these films signalled, and even created, a shift in popular opinion about sexuality in cinema and the necessity of censorship. My hope is to demonstrate how historically marginalized objects, such as the *films de fesses*, have a tangible effect on social attitudes and opinions. It is worth noting here that Sacha Lebel's expansive thesis, "Vulgaire! Pervers! Dégradant!: le film d'exploitation et le cinéma québécois," also covers the *films de fesses* in some detail, particularly in how the exploitation cinema of Quebec acted in resistance to Hollywood norms. In contrast, my thesis will include primary research on the reception to these films, particularly in the French-language press of Quebec.

In order to narrow my field of study, I have limited my focus to four specific films. In the first chapter, I will focus on *Valérie* and *L'initiation*. As the first example of a *film de fesse*, the former is necessary for discussing the phenomenon. I also look at *L'initiation* because of its continuity with *Valérie*. Both films were produced by Cinepix, directed by Denis Héroux, and starred Danielle Ouimet. Focussing on these two films will allow me to shine some light on

Cinepix, one of the most historically significant production companies in the history of both French and English Canadian cinema, whose focus on exploitation and genre fare has perhaps prevented their place in Canadian cinema from being fully explored. In the second chapter, I will focus on *Pile ou face* (also a Cinepix film) and *Après-ski* because of their relevance to the censorship trial. Hopefully, this collection of in-depth case studies provides a representative sampling of the genre as a whole.

For each film, I provide a textual analysis that reveals how the narratives and styles of these film embrace and reflect ongoing political social debates in Quebec and in western democracies as a whole. This should reveal how the films reinforce certain ideas of social progress (such as secularization and broader sexual freedoms), while remaining stubbornly reactionary on others (such as their treatment of homosexuality and feminism). Then, I examine the types of coverage given about these four films, which broadly fell into three categories: a) the filmmakers and producers using the press to insist on the films' artistic and political relevance, b) Quebec nationalists and conservatives alike decrying the vulgarity of such films, and c) other commentators asserting the *films de fesse*'s right to exist, often in spite of their lack of "redeeming social value." I will exam these three kinds of responses to reveal how the filmmakers and the film's opponents engaged in existing conflicts within Quebec and how other commentators put forward a common anti-censorship opinion that elided debates on the "acceptability" or "vulgarity" of the *films de fesses* by turning it into a matter of individual freedom and choice.

With this thesis, I will examine how commercial cinema can actually *affect* ongoing discourses on social values, using the *films de fesses* as a case study. An analysis of these

materials will be necessary to prove that the the *films de fesses* were not just reflective of the ongoing secularization of the province, but also played a role in pushing Quebec towards liberalization. Through this research, I aim to provide a vital historical look into the factors that cause shifts in popular opinion, and to potentially open up the field of Canadian film studies to more of its "commercially-calculated"[53] cinematic history.

[53] A somewhat crude and inexact term borrowed from Peter Urquhart to differentiate so-called "popular" films, or films created to have a wide audience appeal, from art cinema, even when the "popular" films are not actually all that popular. This is a particularly important distinction in English Canadian cinema, especially during the tax shelter. Urquhart, 3.

CHAPTER ONE

On May 2, 1969, *Valérie* opened at the Le Parisien Cinema in Montreal to a flurry of publicity. It was the first of its kind: a Québécois sexploitation movie, produced by a local production company for a local market. Its posters promised "tendre sensualité,"[54] while its director, Denis Héroux, turned heads by telling the press that his intention was to "déshabiller la petite Québécoise."[55] Given the then-recent relaxation of censorship in the province, it was predictable that the conservative corners of the Quebec press would pillory the film for its frank depictions of sexuality, but it was perhaps less predictable that *Valérie* would become a lightning rod for public discourse about Québécois national identity. *Valérie* may have attracted publicity by tapping into widespread anxieties about the sexual revolution and the Quiet Revolution, but it attracted mainstream audiences by being *fun*, in a rebellious, purposefully anti-intellectual manner which differentiated it from the contemporary Quebec cinema of NFB-bred auteurs like Claude Jutra and Gilles Carles. 'As André Loiselle describes it, *Valérie* and its descendents in popular Quebec cinema were "films that ignore social problems [and] reject artistic pretension."[56] Sacha Lebel even goes so far as to say "It is quite clear that the director's intention ... was not to make art cinema, but rather a profitable commercial product."[57]

Valérie was so "fun" it even kickstarted a popular film industry in the province,[58] which would soon be flooded by federal funding, as the newly-created Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) provided money for the production of various "commercially-calculated" movies, including the films of the sexploitation trend that would form in Quebec over the next

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[54] Cinepix, "Valérie," advertisement, *Le Devoir* (Montreal), May 8, 1969. 14.
[55] Qtd. by Luc Perreault in "Denis Héroux: jouer le jeu de la mythologie," *La Presse* (Montreal), May 3, 1969.
[56] Loiselle, 75.
[57] Lebel, 108.
[58] Bill Marshall in *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 65.

few years.[59] Films like *L'initiation* (Héroux 1970) and *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier 1970) would pick up where *Valérie* left off, stripping down and revealing a sultry, populist side of Quebec that the newfound nation was only beginning to recognize as itself. Cinepix, the production company behind *Valérie*, became known for this type of film, and its co-founder John Dunning was dubbed the "Walt Disney of Sexploitation."[60] André Loiselle claims that the *films de fesses* won over popular audiences by presenting its Québécois protagonists as heroes and winners, and that this tradition continues well past the era of sexploitation and even into the nineties with broad comedies like *Les Boys* (Louis Saïa 1997).[61] Thomas Waugh adds to this by suggesting that Quebec popular culture (using *Les Boys* as an example) is premised on a "class-based populism" that is unique to the province, at least in terms of cultural output.[62] *Valérie* and the domestically-produced sexploitation have generally been left out of the Canadian cinematic canon, perhaps because they reject the "socially-responsible, 'artsy,' tradition of Canadian cinema."[63] This chapter will explore their importance to Quebec film production and to Quebec culture. I will show that *Valérie* and the early *films de fesses* (specifically: *L'initiation* and *Deux femmes en or*) helped to form that class-based Québécois identity, and not simply profit from it. *Valérie* and its successors created the figure of the "petite Québécoise" that entered the public imaginary and complicated any idealized visions of nationhood that might have been bubbling up underneath the Quiet Revolution.

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[59] Wise, 18.
[60] Peter Desbarats, 29.
[61] Loiselle, "Subtly Subversive or Simply Stupid," 76.
[62] Thomas Waugh in *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 209-210.
[63] Loiselle, 75.

In this chapter, I will use the first two films produced by Cinepix (*Valérie* and *L'initiation*) for one very practical reason: because Greg Dunning, son of Cinepix founder John Dunning, has graciously provided me with a wide array of primary materials from Cinepix records (mostly press clippings, but also some press kits, promotional materials and censorship records). But more than that, these two Cinepix films kickstarted the *films de fesses* trend, and made a mark on Quebec culture. In fact, they made such a mark that the films themselves are explicitly mentioned in Claude Fournier's *Deux femmes en or*, an arguably more sophisticated and self-aware *film de fesses*, which I will use to demonstrate the cultural impact of these films in a short, two-year period. I will argue that these films contributed to the public discourse about Quebec's national identity by creating a vulgar, sexualized, and rebellious version of Quebec that successfully entered the public imagination. As with American sexploitation movies, the *films de fesses* allowed a vision of scandalous youth culture to enter public consciousness and threaten the social mores of the petite bourgeoisie, but the *films de fesses* carried themselves with an extra, specifically Québécois attitude, allowing for a national rebelliousness to surface within the popular culture.

The Conflicted Politics of *Valérie*

If you take John Dunning at his word, there were no political motivations behind the production of *Valérie*.[64] Rather, he was inspired to make a softer sexploitation film as counterprogramming to the edgier output currently coming in from Europe. Indeed, Elena Gorfinkel has helpfully divided the American sexploitation into three eras: the "nudie cutie"

[64] Dunning and Brownstein, 72.

films of the late fifties, the harder-edged "roughies" and the "kinkies" of the mid-sixties and later the "swinger and counterculture exposés" of the late sixties and early seventies.[65] *Valérie* would combine qualities of the "nudie cuties," in that it would be light and playful, with the "roughies," which would often depict the plight of the sex worker (albeit with more brutal consequences than *Valérie* can muster).

Valérie begins in an orphanage, in which the titular character (Danielle Ouimet) struggles to conform to the rigorous demands of the severe Catholic nuns who run the institution, earning rebukes for taking "evil pleasure in disregarding all the rules of this institution." Without any narrative explanation, however, a biker barges into the school on his motorcycle. Valérie jumps on the back of it, and he takes her away from the convent. Over the credit sequence, the couple ride through rural Quebec, stopping briefly to allow Valérie to purchase a new, more revealing set of clothes, and then he stops at a lake, allowing her to strip out of her school uniform and go for a swim in the nude. After that, they meet up with the rest of the biker's gang and drive into Montreal, where she soon takes up with a group of hippies within the city.

This opening scene is playful, set to a jaunty rock tune, and it emphasizes the youthful *jouissance* of its protagonist, as she waves her arms in the air on the motorcycle and celebrates her newfound freedom. But the playfulness of the scene belies the loaded imagery that it presents, particularly as it came in the late stages of the Quiet Revolution. The opening scene finds itself straddling over three faultlines of Quebec society: the conflict between the religious and the secular, the rural and the urban, and the older generation versus the younger generation

[65] Elena Gorfinkel in "'Indecent Desires': Sexploitation Cinema, 1960s Film Culture and the Adult Film Audience" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 156.

of the counter-culture. The film is openly revealing itself to be a product of the Quiet Revolution, and setting the character of *Valérie* up as an allegory of sorts for the new generation of Quebec.

Following her entrance into urban life, Valérie quickly finds herself disillusioned with the poverty of her hippy friends and finds a job as a topless go-go dancer. As she enters this new profession (depicted through psychedelic music and cinematography), she finds herself befriending two sex workers. This particular scene embodies some of the qualities, identified by Elena Gorfinkel,[66] of the sex worker-focussed "roughies," with a scene in which the three girls meet up with a middle-aged, female social worker, who records the conversation and seems both scandalized and titillated by their stories of being sex workers, lesbians, and survivors of childhood sexual assault. Yet the characters hardly seem traumatized by their histories (although there is some ambiguity about their tales and whether or not they're simply entertaining the easily-scandalized social worker), which might explain why Valérie soon joins the other women as a sex worker herself. This transition into sex work, while motivated by economic circumstances, is not motivated desperation so much as opportunity. It allows her to fully embody the mid-sixties single independent female archetype of Helen Gurley Brown's "Single Girl," in which

> Sexual expertise replaces virginity as the privileged object of exchange outside the law of family. The seeming contradiction between sex as pleasure and sex as capital is not addressed. For the Single Girl, sex as pleasure, her practice, is her capital.[67]

[66] Gorfinkel, "'Indecent Desires,'" 228-229.
[67] Qtd in Ibid., 228.

Indeed, whereas the American "roughies" tended to thematically "punish" their female subjects for seeking sex, Valérie's initial sexual encounter (and her loss of virginity, to a young artist) is presented as pleasurable: "the reaction shots are on her pleasure and not the client's."[68]

In the midst of Valérie's transition from schoolgirl to sex worker, we also see her form a romantic relationship with Patrick (Guy Godin), an artist, and a maternal relationship with his young son, François (Hugo Gélinas). After running into François, playing with a boat in Montreal's Beaver Lake, Valérie is introduced to his father, who is painting a landscape in an open-air setup up the hill, amidst several abstract sculptures. This scene sets in motion the dichotomy that Bill Marshall describes as the "woman as whore or mother/angel" by contrasting Valérie's maternal instincts against the "Single Girl" persona she embodies as an empowered sex worker.[69]

In a later scene, Valérie poses for a nude drawing by Patrick. Patrick's intentions seem noble (indeed, it is an oft-used strategy of exploitation filmmakers to situate nudity within "natural" contexts, right back to the Production Code era "nudist" films),[70] but this nude painting scene is intercut with *another* nude painting scene; in which the artist is a client, and Valérie sleeps with him after the painting session, contextualizing the art as a kind of foreplay for sex. This "corruption" of the act of painting is a reflection of social attitudes toward artists. In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that "starving" artists, particularly those who create morally or politically transgressive works of art, are often derided by the moralizing, declining segments of the petite bourgeoisie.[71] Bourdieu even quotes French philosopher and anarchist

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[68] Marshall, 65.
[69] Marshall, 65.
[70] Gorfinkel, 168-169, 331. Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!,* 290-325.
[71] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 48.

politician Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as someone who embodied that perspective: "the artist, *depraved* in his reason, *dissolute in his morals, venal and without dignity,* is the impure image of egoism. … of all the classes of society, the artist class is the poorest in strong souls and noble characters."[72] In this dual scene, which contrasts the figurative, natural art of Patrick with the vulgar art of the john, Valérie plays both "angel" and "whore," a dichotomy which reflects Valérie's internal conflict within the movie.[73]

The *films de fesses* were not products of this "vulgar" class of artists or intellectuals, but they did exploit public perceptions of such groups in the interest of titillating their audiences. While Valérie's love interest, Patrick, is both innocent and noble, a later scene (at a *vernissage* for his paintings) reveals that Valérie's first client (to whom she lost her virginity in an earlier scene) is a member of Patrick's social circle. This representation of artists as ethically indifferent places *Valérie* at the faultline of Quebec society that divides an older, religious, segment of agrarian, "old stock" population of Quebec and the younger, openminded and metropolitan members of the intellectual class and counterculture.

For all of its sexuality, however, the film resolves itself in a rather conservative manner: Valérie, after being raped by a particularly grotesque and wealthy client in one of the film's few *negative* portrayals of sex, decides to give up her profession. However, Patrick discovers from his friend (and Valérie's former john) that his new lover is a sex worker and breaks off their relationship in an angry and distraught voice message. Valérie decides to move back to rural Quebec, but returns to Beaver Lake, where she first met Patrick and François, to say goodbye to

[72] Qtd. in Ibid., 48.
[73] Marshall, 65.

the child. After saying her goodbyes, however, François runs to Patrick to tell him Valérie is nearby. Patrick chases after her and takes her back.

By reconciling the film's narrative with a heterosexual, monogamous relationship, the film can be read as reactionary, or as a "moral tale."[74] Indeed, Valérie is "punished" by the plot for her sexual adventures, both when Patrick breaks off her relationship and when she is raped and beaten by a john. She is "rewarded," in contrast, by renouncing her life of prostitution and accepting the life of a mother. As Loiselle states, "a good argument could ... be made in defence of the idea that any subversive qualities the films might have are undermined by features that display unflinchingly conservative tendencies."[75] Sacha Lebel reads the final scene in a way that sums up its seeming contradictions,

> This finale is very similar to the "Sex Hygiene" films of the 1930s and Forties that restored morality to the film in order to legitimize in front of the authorities. Perhaps Denis Héroux had foreseen that the Quebec public was not ready for another less virtuous end? Despite the goodwill of the director, it was not because of his social message that *Valerie* was successful, but because it was possible to see several nude women from Quebec.[76]

However, Bill Marshall offers a slightly more generous reading of this resolution, suggesting that the film offers a middle ground between Valérie's oppressive surroundings at the convent and the moral relativism of the youth culture that surrounds Valérie when she arrives in the city. The film can be situated within a tradition of media texts that chart "a woman's

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Loiselle, 82.
[76] Sacha Lebel in "Vulgaire! Pervers! Dégradant!: Le film d'exploitation et le cinéma québécois" (MA Thesis, Université de Montréal, 2009), 122.

progress/process" within a newly discovered, modern setting, which is, in this case, the city of Montreal, acting as an allegory for newly forming, modern nation of Quebec during the Quiet Revolution.[77] Christian Poirier observes that "her view of the places she frequents (the subway, the streets, Lafontaine Park) is positive and confident, unlike most Quebec films, in which characters regard the urban territory as a constant threat to their personhood and as a place devoid of collective fulfillment."[78] In addition to the fact that Valérie, Patrick and François come together to form a blended family, rather than a traditional nuclear one, Marshall observes that...

> the ending … does not mark a return to the Catholic values and morality of the orphanage. Valérie loves sex, and the marriage with Patrick will not mean a renunciation of her enjoyment. Moreover, through his painting – and his open-air artistic practice – Patrick belongs to the worlds, seen as non-contradictory, of both modernity and nature which have been a source of enjoyment for Valérie.[79]

Just as Patrick's open-air artistic practice bridges the faultline of rural and urban Quebec, this resolution bridges the divide between Catholic and secular Quebec, and old and new Quebec. Within Marshall's reading of the film, the transition from old Quebec to new is not constituted as a "crisis."[80] Indeed, as a figure between the two worlds (nuns of the older generation on the one hand, lesbian flatmates of the younger generation on the other), Valérie signifies a coming-to-be of Quebec's new "consuming, secular middle class that values most highly individual choice and the aesthetic."[81]

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[77] Marshall, 66.
[78] Christian Poirier in *Le Cinéma québécois: à la recherché d'une identité? - Tome 1: l'imaginaire filmique*. (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2004), 109-110.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 67
[81] Ibid.

This intertwining of both reactionary and progressive themes reflects the complex politics behind the production of the *films de fesses*. Although *Valérie* appropriates and exploits radical sexual politics of the 1960s youth counterculture, it avoids affirming them, and instead finds a middle ground between the radical "free love" of the hippies and the repressed sexuality of the convent. As Marshall says, when the film uses the radical politics of the counter-culture to narratively motivate the undressing of Valérie, the film "can be seen to partake of those very 1960s constructions of sexual liberation as a greater availability of stimulation and relief for heterosexual men,"[82] but it also reflects the confusing morass of political motivations involved in the production of *films de fesses* and sexploitation more generally.

As Elena Gorfinkel and David Andrews have determined, sexploitation films may have starred young people and been produced for a young audience, but they were largely produced by middle-aged white men, and thus reflect (to some degree) the politics of their creators.[83] Sexploitation films are able to adopt a "prefeminist" ideology while also marking the progress of women at the time and even showing signs of the influence of second-wave feminism (which can be seen with the use of the "Single Girl" archetype in *Valérie*). The Cinepix *films de fesses* were especially noteworthy in that regard, as they were not only produced by middle-aged white men, but by anglophones, revealing a layer of colonial residue to go along with the film's contradictory gender politics. As Cinepix-founder Dunning says "*Valérie* was perceived as something of a trailblazer in Quebec cinema. And the irony was that an anglophone [Dunning], an allophone [Link], and a francophone [Héroux] had collaborated to make this landmark movie

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[82] Ibid., 65.
[83] Gorfinkel, 147-148. David Andrews in *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 46.

which was credited with kick-starting the Quebec cinema industry."[84] Later *films de fesses*, like *Deux femmes en or* and *Les chats bottés*, would take the counterculture politics of *Valérie* further by critiquing the presence of anglophone business and governance in Quebec. Even with the genre, there was a push-and-pull between various axes of power involved in Québécois film production. Nevertheless, for a province whose censorship policies had been radically liberalized, *Valérie* would be a first toe in the waters of popular cinema.

Valérie and *la petite Québécoise*

Regardless of the political content actually contained within the film, *Valérie* became a lightning rod of controversy, igniting debates within the Quebec media for both its sexual content and for its representation of Quebec. Fueled by director Denis Héroux's claim that he wished to "déshabiller la petite Québécoise", *Valérie* became the focal point for a public discourse on Quebec's national identity. Curiously, producer John Dunning denies that there is any political subtext to the film, claiming it was a ruse concocted by Héroux, in which he would say that the character of Valérie was a metaphor for Quebec, a province that "prostituted" its resources for the sake of English Canada. "Clearly, this was not the underlying theme to the film," according to Dunning, "but it proved to be a dynamite ploy with the more serious media."[85] Whether or not Dunning is being honest with his readers (or whether or not Héroux was being honest with Dunning), this claim to social relevance is typical of exploitation films, which have to both prove their social worth to censorship boards and public institutions while luring in audiences with the promises of nudity and titillation. Though the *films de fesses* were far

[84] Dunning and Brownstein, 73.
[85] Ibid., 72.

removed from the classical exploitation movies of Production Code-era United States, their producers carried a similarly two-faced attitude towards morality, offering with their films "spectacle in the form of education and titillation."[86] Yves Lever suggests that the ensuing controversy was a masterful use of publicity:

> Héroux understood the massive importance of marketing: he played the star-system game, flattered nationalist pride, created a scandal with the film's eroticism and a bit of anticlericalism, while he sheltered behind the sociological studies of Vance Packard; he recruited the best publicists and made himself charming in countless media interviews and debates, notably with feminists.[87]

By invoking a political spectacle, Héroux ingeniously conflated the social and the sexual, arguably turning the striptease of the *petite Québécoise* into the "redeeming social value" needed to justify the film's existence.

The *Bureau de surveillance* was not sold on this idea, but they approved the release of *Valérie* anyway. In its classification of the film, the jury president says "Following the criteria set by the American Catholic Office, nudity on screen is acceptable provided: 'that it be unselfconscious and that it be brief.' If the Bureau recognized the validity of these criteria, the film would refusable." But the board passed the film "with certain reservations," in defiance of the Catholic Office, stating that "ideally a film of this genre (a non-aggressive sexploitation) shot in Quebec should be submitted to the *Bureau* in an unfinished version, which would allow the *Bureau* to suggest a reduction of exhibitionist elements." They also suggested they were

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[86] Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 105.
[87] Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 305.

attempting to avoid controversy because a "formal refusal would only generate undesirable publicity for a product that is not worth the trouble."[88]

Possibly to the dismay of the *Bureau*, who had hoped not to generate publicity for the film, *Valérie* became an enormous success. On a budget of approximately $85,000, the film grossed approximately $1 million and ensured the production of many more *films de fesses*.[89] In particular, the film was able to exploit the local tabloid market with its use of Quebec stars. Danielle Ouimet herself was the winner of a Miss Quebec competition in 1967 while Guy Godin, who plays her love interest Patrick, was also of notable interest, as a well-known television actor, singer, and TV host.

During the film's first month of release, star Danielle Ouimet appeared on the covers of several tabloids, which usually touted both aspects of her personal life and the revealing nature of her role in *Valérie*. On a May 10, 1969 issue of *Nouvelles Illustrées*, the front page headline reads "While Danielle Ouimet appears nude in the film *Valérie*, her mother doesn't mind."[90] On the cover of a May 21 issue of *Photo-Journal*, on the other hand, the headline proclaims that "Her parents dare not see her film - Danièle (Valérie) Ouimet confides to our two reporters."[91] For other tabloids, she appeared as a part of a feature spread. On May 10, *Échos Vedettes* ran a full page feature with the headline "Une bombe nommé 'Valérie'" and an accompanying interview with Ouimet.[92] The next day, above an article full of testimonials from the film's audience,[93] *Le Petit Journal* ran an interview with Ouimet in which she bemoaned that her press

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[88] *Fiche d'examen: Valérie*
[89] Paul Corupe, 19.
[90] *Nouvelles Illustrées*. May 10, 1969, 1.
[91] *Photo-Journal*. May 21, 1969, 1.
[92] "Une bombe nommé 'Valérie'" *Échos Vedettes*, May 10 1969, 10.
[93] Roland Verrette, "'Valérie' n'est pas un film trop osé," *Le Petit Journal* (Montreal), May 11, 1969.

duties for the film had prevented her from seeing Montreal Canadiens goaltender Rogatien Vachon, though she maintains that the relationship "[is] not serious, he is free and so am I."[94]

The tabloid publicity for the film played into the existing celebrity and tabloid culture, which existed in the realm of talk shows, popular music and beauty pageants, and reframed it in the context of a Quebec popular cinema. As Emmanuel Cocke, film critic for *Le Petit Journal*, described it: "What is *Valérie* -- the film by Denis Héroux showing at the Parisien -- worth? It is worth gold, because when it's all done and over, Québécois cinema in particular and Canadian cinema in general will be able to reveal its breasts."[95] Indeed, this sentiment, of Quebec finally revealing itself, would repeat over the next few months. This tabloid-driven spectacle surrounding the film supports André Loiselle's claim that the *films de fesses* offered a Bakhtinian celebration of Quebec popular culture, in contrast to the contemporaneous auteur-driven films that were being released in Quebec at the time, such as Gilles Groulx's *Entre tu et vous* (1969) and Claude Jutra's *Wow* (1969).[96] Indeed, Cocke's review more or less fashions this point itself when he claims "There is the cinema of the *auteur*, OK, but there is also the cinema of distraction,"[97] clearly believing *Valérie* falls into the latter category. Of course, this binary distinction between "highbrow" auteur-driven filmmaking and "lowbrow" commercial filmmaking is a false one. Like the aforementioned directors, Denis Héroux also began his career directing documentaries, including *Seul ou avec d'autres* (1962) with Denys Arcand and Stéphane Venne. And while *Valérie* may not be particularly sophisticated, the satirical *films de fesses* of Claude Fournier, *Deux femmes en or* (1970) and *Les chats bottés* (1972), both tackle

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[94] Qtd in Colette Chabot, "A cause du film, j'ai eu peur qu'on m'empêche de voir Rogatien," *Le Petit Journal* (Montreal), May 11, 1969.
[95] Emmanuel Cocke, "'Valérie', ça vaut quoi?," *Le Petit Journal* (Montreal), May 11, 1969.
[96] Loiselle, 80-81.
[97] Cocke, "'Valérie.'"

social issues and political debates in clever, if problematic, ways. Meanwhile, on the other side of the high/lowbrow divide of the period, you can find a movie like Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's *Jusqu'au coeur*, a satirical comedy starring mainstream pop musicians Robert Charlebois and Mouffe. Even in terms of box office, this binary isn't really true. As Lever points out, "Some years, we have seen Quebec productions appear in first place at the box office: not only *Valérie*, *Deux femmes en or* or *L'initiation*, but also *Les Ordres* (Michel Brault 1974), *Bingo* (Jean-Claude Lord 1974), *La Vraie Nature de Bernadette* (Gilles Carle 1972), *Mourir à tue-tête* (Anne Claire Poirier 1979)…"[98] Nevertheless, if we have to use Loiselle's metric to decide where *Valérie* lands on this scale, it would "lean much more on the side of stupidity than intelligence."[99]

Valérie wasn't simply popular, however, it was also controversial (though perusing through the tabloids can lead one to wonder how much of the controversy was fabricated for the sake of publicity). In a May 5 issue of *Le Grand Illustré*, columnist and television personality Michel Girouard (who would become a frequent defender of both the film and Ouimet) lambasted those critics that would deny Ouimet the right to bare her body on screen while accepting nudity in foreign film, "as if we French Canadians don't belong on the same level as any other country when it comes to cinema."[100] While it's not clear which "critics" Girouard is referring to, a very real controversy would end up following as the film courted rebukes from figures within the Catholic Church and faced threats of police action. By the end of May, the Archbishop of Montreal, Jean-Guy Dubuc, had publicly complained about the movie, claiming "I have nothing against nudity, but scenes of undressing like in *Valérie*, I find them disgusting."

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[98] Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 416-417.
[99] Loiselle, 75.
[100] Michel Girouard, "On jalouse déjà les 'seins' de Danielle Ouimet," *Le Grand Illustre* (Montreal), May 5, 1969.

[101] Dunning, fearing the worst, had earlier sent André Link a letter claiming "There is a lot of nervousness at the present time as to whether the City of Montreal might grab the print… This program has all the earmarks of an *I, a Woman* scandal … (sic)"[102] The previous year, the Danish sexploitation film *I, a Woman* had been seized from two Montreal theatres by the Montreal Police Morality Squad, and its sequel was set to be released in Montreal about a month after *Valérie*.[103]

The more intellectual corners of the Quebec press also played into the controversy as the film began to lodge itself into public consciousness. In *Le Devoir*, film critic André Major challenged the film, not just because of its content, but because of what its popularity said about his province or nation:

> [W]e must ... take into a detail about the film that demands our attention: the record-size crowd that pushes their way in through the doors of Le Parisien every day. For this, we should look at the film for what it is: not a witness to reality, but a consumer product full of signs about the reality from which it originates. Of course, the first thing to report is the film's sexuality. *Valérie* is not an erotic film. Rather, it is for the voyeur. And, in what it gives us to see, it perfectly reveals the Quebec environment: nothing but breasts. Buttocks, hips, backs are carefully banished. It is easy, here, to recognize the persistence of an old, sensual fixation to the height of the breasts, directly related to the persistent Oedipus complex that forms the basis of our popular culture.[104]

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[101] Qtd. in "'Je n'ai rien contre la nudité, mais des scènes de déshabillage comme dans Valérie, je trouve cela dégueulasse.'" *Le Nouveau Samedi* (Montreal), May 31, 1969.
[102] "Valérie Is Booming along," John Dunning to André Link, May 7, 1969, Montreal.
[103] "Une nouvelle vague de films de sexe déferle sur montréal," *Le Nouveau Samedi* (Montreal), May 31, 1969.
[104] André Major, "Un cinéma de la chair: de la gloutonnerie à la plénitude," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), May 17, 1969.

There is a palpable fear in Major's review that the vulgar, developmentally stunted underbelly of Quebec popular culture has been made visible by the film. According to him, the film wasn't a critique of this underbelly, but rather a product of it that was so unaware of its own base role that it could be considered "a sociological case study, a chapter of the collective psychology."[105]

Within the public imagination, sexploitation films have long been associated with the voyeur-as-spectator -- specifically, the lone male audience member -- but Elena Gorfinkel has noted that in addition to the "connoisseurs" of sexploitation, there were other types of audiences as well. Given the overlap homegrown exploitation films and foreign art films in independent theatres, the so-called "erotic films," especially those that had gained a bit of notoriety could sometimes cull an audience of curious middle class spectators.[106] In other contexts, "interloper" young audiences would swarm the theatres on evenings and weekends, leaving the "normal" audience of older men to come in during weekdays.[107]

While it would be difficult to determine the exact audience of *Valérie*, two tabloids surveyed its audience during the first week of release, and suggest that instead of the lone male voyeur, it consisted largely of young Québécois spectators. In *Photo-Vedettes*, the interview subjects are men and women between the ages of 18 and 25 and most of them defend the film as if it should never have been controversial in the first place. Although headlines declared the film "bold," 18-year-old Marie Meunier disagreed, claiming "the film has done nothing too bold or out-of-line and I enjoyed it from start to finish."[108] For Guy Benoit, a transit employee interviewed in *Le Petit Journal*, "There is nothing reprehensible in this film. And nothing new

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[105] Ibid.
[106] Gorfinkel, 307.
[107] Ibid., 363.
[108] Qtd by Guy Pothier in "Le film Valérie: est-il trop osé??" *Photo Vedettes* (Montreal), May 24, 1969.

either."[109] Though the reactions are mixed, the sentiment between the surveyed audience members seems to be that the film was "no big deal" when it came to sexual content. In other words, *Valérie* seemed to be attracting young, open-minded spectators rather than the heavy-breathing male voyeurs suggested by Major.

Interestingly, the critics at the English-language Montreal newspapers (who might have been thought to have less stake in the national project of Quebec), were much kinder to the film than André Major and other Québécois intellectuals. Martin Malina at the *Montreal Star* said "This fairy tale will not go very far to emancipate 'la petite Québécoise,' but there's something entirely healthy … about seeing her as we generally see 'la petite suédoise' or 'la petite italienne' — making love on the screen."[110] Meanwhile, Dane Lanken at *The Gazette* actually endorsed Héroux's ideas, proclaiming that "there's a mind full of serious ideas and ideals behind them. Héroux's speech is full of references to sexual and political revolutions and the changing face of Quebec."[111]

One thing that remained constant throughout the coverage, however, was an assumption that something was at stake for the identity of Quebec. For Major, the film was representative of the "underbelly" of Quebec culture, while more positive coverage treated Valérie as a national symbol. In an article for *Le Nouveau Samedi*, Michel Girouard[112] even referred to Danielle Ouimet as "notre *Valérie* nationale."[113] Whether it was intentional on the part of the filmmakers

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[109] Verrette, "'Valérie' n'est pas un film trop osé."
[110] Martin Malina in "Quebec Film Industry Breaks into Sexploitation Market." *Montreal Star*, May 5, 1969.
[111] Dane Lanken "Héroux: Pop Films For Politics." *The Gazette* (Montreal).
[112] In terms of his political leanings, it is worth noting that Girouard was, in 1969, an openly gay public figure and an outspoken advocate for liberal causes related to sexual freedoms. In 1972, he even staged a well-publicized same-sex wedding to his partner, Réjean Tremblay, in Toronto. "A Legal First in Canada? Talk About Gay Weddings…" *The Advocate* (Los Angeles), March 29, 1972. 1.
[113] Michel Girouard in "Danielle Ouimet décide de sortir ses griffes." *Le Nouveau Samedi*. June 21, 1969.

or not, Valérie (the character) had become a metaphor for Quebec, at least in terms of the role she played in the public discourse. A large part of her metaphorical appeal, however, came in terms of her *déshabillage*, or undressing.

Five years prior to the release of *Valérie*, Quebec filmmaker Denys Arcand critiqued Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre* (1964) for pairing its protagonist (Jutra himself) with a Black woman (Johanne Harelle), even as the former character struggled with his repressed homosexuality:

> Why can Claude have a valid relationship only with this foreign Johanne whom he wants to make even stranger? There are after all "everyday" Québécois women all around him … both on-screen and psychologically. *À tout prendre* doesn't succeed in getting close in tenderness and satisfaction to real everyday women. And in that, the hero is like lots of 30-year-old French Canadians, sensitive and cultivated, who have to have women who are black, yellow or red, in any case "foreign," in order to have their intoxicating affairs. There is here, it seems, an unconscious refusal to coincide with his collective self, at the same time as an unquenchable thirst to perfect oneself in a mythic exteriority that arises from the global situation of our people.[114]

This is undoubtedly a bigoted criticism, made all the more troublesome by Arcand's insistence that Johanne is "foreign." In the film, Johanne is a Canadian who sometimes pretends to be Haitian, partially because she feels that Québécois identity, as constituted by the people who surround her, doesn't necessarily extend to Black women. Arcand pretty much endorses that

[114] Waugh, 88.

feeling by separating her from "everyday" Québécois women, suggesting that his idea of Québécois identity is both racially and ethnically specific.

Though ignorant, Arcand's suggestion that French Canadians were refusing to "coincide with their collective self" by carrying on relationships with "foreign" women complements Denis Héroux's claim that his most revolutionary decision, as a director, was to feature a nude *pure laine* Québécois woman as opposed to an exotic "other" ("Here, you look in the nightclubs, and they find it necessary to call the girl 'Chiquita Tetrault,' even if she's from l'Abord-à-Plouffe"[115]). Thomas Waugh observes that *pure laine* heterosexual couplings were rarely seen in Quebec films of the period, apart from softcore "hetero stampeders" like *Valérie*.[116] But, although there weren't all that many *films de fesses*, their popularity meant that they were perhaps a more prominent example of what the Québécois were actually watching at the time. And part of this was Cinepix and Héroux's appeal to popular Québécois audiences rather than the "sensitive and cultivated" audiences of the auteur-driven cinema that Arcand criticizes.

This sentiment, echoed in aforementioned articles by Martin Malina in the *Montreal Star* and Michel Girouard in *Le Grand Illustré*, suggests that by sexualizing the Quebec woman, *Valérie* acted as an initiation of sorts for the Québécois identity. Valérie's coming-of-age within the film (or the *déshabillage* of the *petite Québécoise*) acted as an allegory for the maturation of Quebec as a nation. The representation of a nude Québécoise provided evidence of a unique Québécois identity — there she was, right there on the screen. *Valérie* offered a mirror for "everyday" Québécois audience members to see themselves as they wanted to be seen: "what they wanted was to see themselves not as troubled young intellectuals in search of an identity but

[115] Qtd by Jean Chabot in "Denis Héroux: un iconoclaste?" *Le Devoir* (Montreal), May 3, 1969. L'Abord-à-Plouffe is a neighbourhood in the Montreal suburb of Laval.
[116] Waugh, 90.

as *bons vivants* enjoying the many pleasures of life."[117] André Major and other critics within the intellectual corners of the press may not have liked what they saw, but they saw *Valérie* as a marker of Quebec's sexual development as well, though they saw it as less of a symbol for Quebec's coming-of-age than a symptom of its arrested development.

L'initiation of a New Generation

Eight months after the release of *Valérie*, Denis Héroux and Cinepix released a spiritual sequel, *L'initiation*, close enough in content and subject matter that one article referred to it as "Valérie 2."[118] In this film, Cinepix cast pop star Chantal Renaud as the virginal Victoire, a college student with romantic fantasies that cloud her judgement of sex, and French actor Jacques Riberolles as Gervais Messiambre, a French novelist known for his erotic literature and sexually permissive philosophies. Danielle Ouimet returns as supporting character Nadine, a mentor and friend of Victoire who acts as a sort of sexually matured version of Valérie, without any hang-ups or internal conflicts about her beliefs (a *petite Québécoise* already undressed, if you will). *L'initiation* was also the first *film de fesses* to use funding from the Canadian Film Development Corporation, a federal agency created to spur development of a commercial film industry in the country.[119] Between the success of *Valérie* and the new funding source, *L'initiation* features considerably higher production value than its predecessor and was even filmed in (gasp!) colour.

In the first scene, we see Victoire lying in bed. Héroux begins with sensual close-ups of Renaud's lips before showing her wake and pick up an erotic novel, also called *L'initiation*, from

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[117] Loiselle, 82.
[118] Pierre Brousseau in "Valérie 2: La beauté du diable," *Photo-Journal* (Montreal), January 12, 1970.
[119] Desbarats, "The Walt Disney of Sexploitation," 30.

the bedside table. Riberolles narrates this in a Parisian accent, detailing a sexual encounter between a man and a woman in grandiloquent detail ("His thrusts burst upon her like waves on a shore!") while Victoire fondles her exposed breast. This gives way to a sepia-toned fantasy sequence of Victoire and Pierre (Gilles Chartrand), an acquaintance that we'll get to know later in the film, having sex. After the fantasy, Victoire wakes up and wanders down to the pier in front of her Laurentian waterfront residence to go skinny-dipping, reminiscent of Valérie's nude swimming at the beginning of the previous film.

As with Valérie escaping the convent and "liberating" herself from religious oppression, this opening scene creates a simple allegory for nationhood that will be used throughout the film. Victoire, a virginal, innocent *petite Québécoise*, begins to explore her sexuality with the help of an intellectual writer from continental Europe. Thus, her sexual awakening is due, in part, to her willingness to shed her provincial Québécois morality in favour of the cosmopolitan, intellectual worldview of the continent.

In the scene following the credits, Victoire arrives at the home of Nadine (Ouimet), who is lounging naked in her parents pool. Victoire chides her state of undress, suggesting Nadine's parents might see, Nadine responds that she doesn't care: "We have to educate these part time bourgeois parents, huh? This is my protest!" Shortly after, Nadine's mother arrives and forces her to cover up. This scene succinctly sets the story within a bourgeois world of well-to-do families with summer homes in the Laurentians and plenty of leisure time. This is emphasized by the following scene, in which Victoire and Nadine head to a nearby dock with some friends, some of whom are water-skiing, some of whom are jetskiing, and none of whom seem to be divided from the "new Quebec" by social class or material discomfort. Though Nadine chides

her mother's "bourgeois" morality, she is likely misidentifying a generational divide as one of class. Nadine, well-educated and raised in the hopeful era of the Quiet Revolution, has very different ideas about sexual mores than her mother who, in her brief time onscreen, symbolizes an older, more traditional morality. This squabble allegorizes the conflict between the older, "declining" petite bourgeoisie and the younger, "new" petite bourgeoisie. The former, coming from declining professions and industries, harbour "regressive" dispositions to modern aesthetics, including their "resentment against the new morality, its showy pretension, its laxity in matters of money (use of credit), child-rearing or sex."[120] In contrast, the younger "new" petite bourgeoisie has "liberated" and individual tastes that are "opposed on almost every point to the repressive morality of the declining petite bourgeoisie whose religious or political conservatism often centres on moral indignation at moral disorder, and especially the disorder of sexual mores."[121]

Later that day, Nadine invites her friends to a party at her now-empty house (her parents leave on vacation shortly after her mother scolds her). The party is marked by champagne-drinking, rock music and a youthful *jouissance*. The film's depictions of youthful, hippy counter-culture are dominated by the decadence and leisure of alternative sexuality rather than political convictions and activism. Though the *films de fesses* were produced during a period of great social change in Quebec, and radically challenged the existing social mores of the province, *L'initiation* and its ilk tended to appropriate the youthful exuberance and liberated sexuality of the 1960s counter-culture without embracing the radical politics and social

[120] Bourdieu, 350.
[121] Ibid., 367.

movements that spawned it. Yet, this is reflective of the film's audience itself, the new petite bourgeoisie who...

> ...are inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost; in the name of the fight against "taboos" and the liquidation of "complexes" they adopt the most external and most easily borrowed aspects of the intellectual life-style, liberated manners, cosmetic or sartorial outrages, emancipated poses and postures, and systematically apply the cultivated disposition to not-yet legitimate culture (cinema, strip cartoons, the underground), to everyday life (street art), the personal sphere (sexuality, cosmetics, child-rearing, leisure) and the existential (the relation to nature, love, death).[122]

For Nadine, this disposition leads her to adopt the free-love attitude of her favorite Parisian intellectuals, which grants her permission to use her body for social gain (akin to the previously discussed "Single Girl" archetype) and also fight against taboos (which, in this case, means that she can annoy and frustrate her mother by acting out sexually).

As the party winds down, the characters couple up. Nadine takes the sexually adventurous Richard up to her parent's bed for sex (another taboo busted!). Victoire and Pierre also head for a bedroom, where they initiate sexual contact. The foreplay features a voiceover narration from Gervais Messiambre's erotic novel, as with Victoire's self-pleasure scene from the beginning of the film. But, before they have intercourse, Victoire gets cold feet and walks away. Later, she peeps on Nadine and Richard, envious of their carnal activities, but still unwilling to engage in them herself. Still, she is presumably on the cusp of a sexual awakening,

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[122] Ibid., 370-71.

but it won't be brought about by the inexperienced Pierre, it will come by the way of the older, cultured Parisian intellectual, Gervais Messiambre.

As a character, Messiambre is introduced arriving at the Montreal airport and charming the customs agent, a middle-aged woman who recognizes him and immediately falls under his spell. He has arrived in the city as a guest of the *Université de Montréal*, and will be conducting small living-room style seminars with students, including Victoire. The first seminar sets up a debate of ideas, making explicit the moral tension of Victoire's internal conflict. This seminar uses Messiambre as a symbol of European virility in the face of Quebec's provincial sexual hangups. With the collapse of the Production Code in the United States, European art films began to gain prominence in urban centres throughout the fifties and sixties. In addition to their intellectual appeal, they also offered North American audiences more sexually charged themes and imagery than they were used to from the studio system.[123] In North America, they would also share space in independent grindhouse theatres, free from the restraints of the Production Code, where the European films would often be presented in a way that accentuated their sexual appeal. As Schaefer describes, "by the early 1960s, the terms art theater and art film had become synonymous with nudity."[124] Sexploitation producers like Radley Metzger and Joe Sarno began exploiting the "European" arthouse look to give their films some artistic credibility without sacrificing their erotic appeal.[125] Metzger, who made his name importing sexy art pictures with Audobon Films, forged his directorial career by actually producing his sexploitation films in European locations, with European technicians, sometimes in European languages. This allowed him to approximate the "look" of a European art film. "Commercially," says Bart Testa, "he

[123] Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 335-6.
[124] Ibid., 336.
[125] Gorfinkel, 198-200.

elevated the sex exploitation film a few notches at a time just so he could venture ahead in erotic content while still booking his movies in comparatively reputable theatres."[126]

By the late sixties, European sexploitation movies like the previously mentioned *I, a Woman* had also began filtering into North America (many of which were distributed in Quebec by Cinepix, according to Dunning).[127] And thus, *L'initiation* presents Gervais Messiambre as a manifestation of European sexuality, whose high-minded philosophies about "sensuality" justify the film's own sexual preoccupations. In the seminar, he gleefully engages in a debate with a young, uptight campus conservative, ironically portrayed by Michel Girouard, the liberal-minded tabloid columnist and TV personality who publicly defended *Valérie* from its critics. The young man, who satirically embodies the residual moralities of the Great Darkness, suggests that spirituality and sexuality can't go together, saying "I believe in spirituality." An adjacent professor counters that "I think we should get out of the dark ages when it comes to human relations," and Messiambre replies with "Most of the young generation see things in the same fashion." Once again, the films invokes the generational divide in Quebec, and the opportunity for young people to overcome the restricting morals of their parents. Meanwhile, Victoire observes the debate, transfixed by Messiambre, but held back by her own ideals.

Denis Héroux was very familiar with political debates on campus, having built his directorial career on projects related to student life. In 1962, he co-directed the documentary *Seul ou avec d'autres* along with Denys Arcand and Stéphane Venne. The film explores the beginnings of a sexual liberation on the *Université de Montréal* campus, even as it's constrained under a repressive moral institution. In 1965, Héroux directed a pseudo-documentary, *Jusqu'au*

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[126] Bart Testa in "Soft-Shaft Opportunism: Radley Metzger's Erotic Kitsch." *Spectator* 19, no. 2 (1999): 45.
[127] Dunning and Brownstein, 52-54.

cou, on behalf of the student association at the university. This time, it dealt with the growing nationalism on campus, not long after the *Front de liberation du Québec* (FLQ) began its terrorist activities (which initially invoked some sympathy on university campuses) and three years before Liberal cabinet minister René Levesque formed the sovereigntist *Parti Québécois*. *L'initiation*, however, limits its own debate to sexual mores, reducing the radical politics of campus life to the titillating subject of sexual behaviours. As with *Valérie* posing nude for a painting, the campus setting allows Héroux to situate his sexualized bodies in a "natural" milieux, presenting them not only as a spectacle but as a sociological phenomenon.

This would become apparent, again, in a later scene, in which Victoire, Nadine, and two of their friends (Céline Lomez and Louise Turcot) strip down and enter a sauna. Once again, Victoire finds herself in the middle of a philosophical debate that reflects her inner conflict. Christine (Lomez), another virgin in the group, says "I love Eric, and I won't compare him with anyone else. What's more, we believe in virginity until marriage, and then it's love." To this, the sexually experienced Nadine responds "Christine, you're adorable but you're living in another age. Why not enjoy it? I enjoy it with anyone… I sleep with whoever I want. I recommend it." As with the seminar, this scene dramatizes Victoire's inner conflicts about her own sexuality, but this time she gets a chance to respond, finding a middle ground between Christine's virginity and Nadine's promiscuity. "I suppose it's a question of education in the family. My parents are old-fashioned. If we could only get rid of our hang-ups." Once again, Victoire invokes the generational divide, and its residual force in her quest to form her own opinion.

Interestingly, Victoire then turns the conversation onto the subject of cultural sexism, focussing on popular second-wave feminist debates of the time: "The fact is, there's always been

two moralities: one for the boys and one for the girls. A man never risks anything. He has all the rights, he can do anything. He's allowed mistakes."[128] Judith (Turcot) then admits she's on birth control, citing her mother's shotgun marriage. "I suppose I should do like my mother. She got married because she had to. Her *obligation* people said in those days." This scene demonstrates the contradictory morality of the *films de fesses*, and sexploitation pictures more generally, most clearly: allowing the characters to opine about sexism while also lounging in the nude for the male audience.[129] *L'initiation* thus offers itself as a treatise on the younger, less sexist generation, yet remains committed to the objectification of women's bodies.

This tension can also be found in the relationship between Messiambre and Victoire, in which her thoughts and feelings are validated by the approval of an older, intellectual Frenchman. Allegorically, this can be read as a validation of Quebec by its lost parent nation. On their first "date" Victoire takes Messiambre to Montreal's "underground city," an interconnected pathway of shopping centres in the city centre, where they engage in the bourgeois, consumer delights that reflect the economic growth of the Québécois in the post-war decades. "Hotels, cinemas, bars… we could be lost down here for weeks without seeing the sun," Victoire observes. For their second date, Messiambre invites Victoire to see *Z*, the 1969 Costa-Gavras thriller, possibly introducing her to some continental culture, but he cuts it short and invites her to his hotel room, where they consummate their fling. Finally, with the help of a paternal figure from the homeland, the young *Québécoise* is able to overcome her sexual "hang-ups" and embrace the act of sex.

[128] All translations of dialogue come from English dubs or subtitles of the films, unless otherwise indicated.
[129] Gorfinkel, 146-7.

And then comes the denouement of Victoire's sexual journey. As with Valérie, Victoire comes to realizing that a life of sexual discovery is not as fulfilling as she may have expected. After spending a short honeymoon period with Messiambre, travelling Quebec and neglecting her friends to be with him, she becomes disillusioned. Messiambre, too, becomes disillusioned with the relationship, particularly after reading a letter from his wife. They both express their love for each other, but go their separate ways. "You taught me the meaning of beauty. I always doubted it so much," says Victoire as they part. In the final scene, she walks off into the sunset and is joined by Pierre, her boyfriend from the beginning of the film. After being spurned by Victoire, Pierre ended up in a short-lived sexual romance with Nadine, but grew disillusioned when he walked in on her with another man. Together, in the final scene, Victoire and Pierre find a middle ground, reconciling the radical sexual philosophies of the day with more traditional and idealistic accounts of sex and love. Though the film's young couple reconciles itself into a conservative, monogamous, heterosexual coupling, little judgement is cast on Messiambre, who spent his time in Montreal cheating on his wife, or Nadine, who breaks Pierre's heart by sleeping with other men. Instead, both characters are given a chance to explain themselves, without being vilified for their sexual activities.

A Shift in the Conversation

Publicity in the wake of *L'initiation*'s release relied on tabloid sensationalism, similar to that of *Valérie*, though outrage over the actual film was comparatively muted. Even the *Bureau* passed the film without much of a fuss, saying that

> All sexual episodes are integrated naturally into the frame without doing harm to an audience that wants to consume a product clearly identified at the outset about its intentions. Only those not in the habit of watching contemporary cinema will be surprised by the film's content. There is nothing that exceeds anything shown in other films.[130]

Regardless, outrage or not, the film was remarkably successful in Quebec, earning over $2.5 million.[131] All four female stars (Chantal Renaud, Danielle Ouimet, Celine Lomez and Louise Turcot) were given publicity by Montreal's tabloid industry.[132] Renaud received extra attention due to her split with musician Donald Lautrec, with some papers reporting that she had taken up with her onscreen co-star, Jacques Riberolles.[133] Danielle Ouimet and Celine Lomez also appeared on the front pages of *Nouvelles Illustrées*[134] and *Photo-Vedettes*,[135] respectively, usually in relation to their sex appeal. The 16-year-old Lomez appeared in a cover photo shoot for *Photo-Vedettes*, which ran with the headline "Sex in the life of Céline Lomez," and the accompanying interview featured questions like "Are you an easy girl?"[136] Coverage of Ouimet seemed to recognize that her celebrity had grown since *Valérie*. It was less sexual, and often noted the relevance of *Valérie* to Quebec cinema, or focussed on her new ambitions.[137] One

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[130] *Fiche d'examen: initiation (L')*
[131] Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 305.
[132] As an aside, it is worth mentioning that many of the stars of the *films de fesses* went on to have long careers in show business. Céline Lomez became a prominent actress in both French- and English-language Canadian cinema, starring in films like Denys Arcand's *Gina* (1975), Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore* (1976) and Daryl Duke's *The Silent Partner* (1978). In addition to acting, Chantal Renaud came to fame as a yéyé singer and built a post-fame career as a screenwriter. In 2004, she even married former Quebec premier Bernard Landry. All of this suggests that the pseudo-pornographic nature of the *films de fesses* did not have a particularly detrimental effect on their careers or their stardom. They were definitively a part of the mainstream.
[133] *Le Grand Journal Illustre*, January 12, 1; January 19, 1. "Chantal Renaud de 1947 à 1970," *Photo-Vedettes* (Montreal), January 25, 1970.
[134] *Nouvelles Illustrées*, January 3, 1970, 1.
[135] *Photo-Vedettes*, February 28, 1970, 1.
[136] Paul Haince in "Céline Lomez, 16 ans: "Je ne ferai plus de nu pour la plaisir d'en faire" *Photo-Vedettes* (Montreal), February 28, 1970.
[137] Michel Girouard in "Je n'arrive pas à oublier André Laurence!" *Nouvelles Illustrées* (Montreal), February 21, 1970.

article even praised her for doubling her salary on the new film.[138] Still, Michel Girouard continues to refer to her as "our national Valérie," continuing to symbolize the previous film's relevance to Quebec's national identity.

As with *Valérie*, Québécois sexuality was used as a selling point for *L'initiation*. The cover of the January 12 edition of *Photo Journal* features a topless Lomez, covering her breasts with her hands, and the headline: "Céline Lomez no longer reads Cinderella stories. She has become the new symbol of sex in Quebec."[139] In the accompanying interview, she echoes some of the Europhilic themes of the film, emphasizing the relative immaturity of North Americans and betraying (or attempting to betray) a wisdom beyond her years:

> In America, men are simply obsessed by mammary glands, so that sexuality has to do with nothing but the size of a woman's breasts. Because the breast is the best part -- the most vulnerable and most obvious of a woman's body -- the North American male tends to isolate and consider it as a synonym for sex.[140]

She follows this up by citing European sex symbols like Brigitte Bardot, Ursula Andress and Michèle Mercier as precedents for appearing nude in films: "Nudity has become the most in-demand commodity in the international market and everybody is going there: it's normal that artists respond to public demand."[141] In *Le Nouveau Samedi*, a headline states "*L'initiation*, or the Québécois discover love."[142] above a glowing review of the film. "We like to say Denis Héroux undressed *la petite Québécoise* with his first film *Valérie*. In his second film, he shows

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[138] Guy Pothier in "Danielle Ouimet, cessez de vous plaindre, s'il vous plait!" *Échos-Vedettes* (Montreal), February 28, 1970.
[139] *Photo Journal*, January 12, 1970, 1.
[140] Brousseau, "Valérie 2: La beauté du diable."
[141] Ibid.
[142] Jacques Letendre in "'L'initiation' ou la Québécoise découvre l'amour!" *Le Nouveau Samedi* (Montreal), February 7, 1970.

us the true meaning of those words by providing us with those delicious bedtime scenes 'in living colour'!"[143] As with *Valérie*, this association of national identity with a sexual awakening invoked some fairly strong responses. In an *Échos-Vedettes* articles titled "Do you believe in Quebec cinema?"[144] the author lists a variety of recent and upcoming Québécois films, including *L'initiation*, Gilles Carle's *Red* (1970), and the upcoming *Aprés-ski* (Roger Cardinal 1971).

> All these films have one thing in common, to a different degree, of course: the exploitation of sex. But is that not the goose that lays the golden egg? *Valérie* has been accepted because it was innovative for Quebec, but all of these films are the same thing dressed in different outfits to make a profit. But here it involves the entirety of Quebec cinema. Will that which has been surpassed in almost all other countries (the exploitation of sex) really succeed to giving us our own cinema? Can we believe in a strong and thriving industry of Quebec cinema? This is what we demand of some of our artists.[145]

While this article fails to differentiate between the *films de fesses* and the auteur-driven films by filmmakers like Jean-Pierre Lefebvre and Gilles Groulx, it gives voice to a growing concern that Quebec cinema is revealing an infantile obsession with sex. Likewise, a negative review of the film in Photo-Journal calls *L'initiation*

> … [a] product of amateurs without talent that we would never speak of if it were not the beginnings of Quebec cinema that might otherwise disappear ... It is time to realize that Cinepix and Mr. Héroux are merely making the same "skin-flicks" as the Danish and Swedish, and that this is not, in fact, a marginal cinema, nor is it national.[146]

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[143] Ibid.
[144] "Croyez-vous au cinéma Québécois" *Echos-Vedettes* (Montreal), January 31, 1970.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Pierre Brousseau, "'L'initiation': c'est pourri!" *Photo-Journal* (Montreal), February 9, 1970.

The sentiment of both critiques is the same: that Quebec cinema should not be reduced to the sexual, and that more films need to be made that represent Quebec.

La petite Québécoise in the Public Imaginary

Within the media coverage of these two films, there is a growing association between the sexual and the national. This is the product of the films themselves, both of which were quite popular, but also through the tabloid coverage. Héroux's scandalous comments ("déshabiller la petite Québécoise") and Michel Girouard's reference to Danielle Ouimet as "notre *Valérie* nationale" both posit the *films de fesses* as symbolic of Quebec's identity. Benedict Anderson has shown how important common media coverage has been to the idea of a nationhood, suggesting that "the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even 'world events' into a specified imagined world of vernacular readers."[147] With *Valérie* and *L'initiation*, the Quebec of this imagined community of filmgoers and tabloid readers became sexualized. Thanks to the heightened debate surrounding the films, the *petite Québécoise* became a part of the public imaginary surrounding Quebec identity: a rebellious, young, sexual figure that runs counter to both the bourgeois morality of the Great Darkness and the stuffy intellectual pretenses of cultural critics in the public sphere, who would demand higher standards for Quebec cinema, and for Quebec nationhood.

Still, this rebelliousness suggests a more class-based national identity than is present in *Valérie* or *L'initiation*. After all, Quebec's nationhood is premised on the shared suffering of French-speaking people at the hands of the British, and not on the generational divide at the heart

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[147] Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*(London: Verso, 1991), 63.

of the sexual revolution. While Valérie and Victoire are both rebellious in their own way, neither of Héroux's films are quite "carnivalesque political statements against oppression,"[148] which is how André Loiselle describes much of popular Quebec cinema.

But the effect of these films on Quebec identity is shown in *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier), which arrived in theatres later in 1970 and became the most successful film of the genre, attracting over two million ticket-buyers and earning over $4 million at the Canadian box office.[149] This was roughly a *third* of the Quebec population, and possibly about *half* of all adults in Quebec. Rather than a cheaply-produced sexploitation film for younger audiences, *Deux femmes* works as both a parody and an example of the *films de fesses*, with a more satirical nature. As Gilles Blain writes, *Deux femmes…* "was not the type of vulgar sex film that was in style at the time,"[150] but rather a reaction to them. The two women of the title are a pair of housewives (Monique Mercure and Louise Turcot) in Brossard, a south-shore suburb of Montreal, who are unhappy with their lives and, in particular, their cheating husbands. They respond to this malaise and alienation by engage in a variety of sexual adventures with various men that they seduce into their beds, most of whom are played by well-known figures in Quebec pop culture, all while their husbands are at work or carousing with mistresses of their own. If *Valérie* was an example of the *la petite Québécoise*, then these women are *les femmes Québécoises*. Bored by their everyday lives, they rebel by taking on their husbands' behaviours as their own. With this film, sexuality is not framed as a generational divide but rather as a rebellion against the strictures of a petit bourgeois suburban lifestyle.

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[148] Loiselle, 82.
[149] Ibid., 80; Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, 306.
[150] Gilles Blain in "La place du sexe et la fonction du rire dans le film *Deux femmes en or*," *Cinéma et sexualité*, ed. Claude Chabot and Denise Pérusse. (Quebec: PROSPEC Inc., 1988): 102. Print.

Along with suburban lifestyles, Fournier also uses satire to target the anglophone ruling class of Canada. While the two women watch the Grey Cup on television,[151] they spot then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on the screen. Fernande (Mercure) runs to the screen and says "He's so handsome!" but after Violette (Turcot) remarks that it looks like Trudeau's mother made his toque, Fernande's tone changes. She purses her lips and declares that "it looks English." In a later subplot, Fernande's husband, Yvan (Marcel Sabourin) is sent to Toronto by his English bosses and rewarded with a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. When Fernande and Yvan's son asks what her crown is, Fernande responds with an indignant "That lady won the Queen of England contest." Marshall suggests the film's "preoccupation is… with English Canada and federalism as Other to the community of the Quebec comic audience and as the butt of its jokes."[152] Contained within the satire is thus a soft nationalism of the "everyday Québécois," and "the film constructs its content and audience as in process and incomplete in terms of national identity but also gender and sexual roles."[153] Nevertheless, the film also offers a template for appealing to the "Quebec comic audience" through references to a shared experience of oppression under anglophone power structures (as well as the shared experience of mocking such oppressors through the use of stereotypes and caricatures).

Loiselle offers a Bakhtinian reading of the film, built from the premise that it flattens social hierarchies, between men and women, and between English and French. Even more indicative of its rebellious qualities, Fournier

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[151] The Grey Cup game itself was contentious at the time, and Fournier shot these scenes at the actual 1969 match between Ottawa and Saskatchewan. Due to concerns about the FLQ, riot police surrounded the Autostadt. Unlike *Valérie* or *L'initiation*, *Deux femmes en or* directly addresses the politics of the day when Violette's husband, Bob (Donald Pilon), says the cops are "worried about the separatists — Quebec loves sports. The cops get a holiday."
[152] Marshall, 177.
[153] Ibid.

> ...even goes as far as to give us his own version of the subversive "boy-bishop" reversal by putting the well-known foul-mouthed union leader, Michel Chartrand in the role of a judge. When the two housewives are brought before the law because of their scandalous behavior, the judge refuses to serve an oppressive legal system and sets them free, proclaiming them "two golden women" (hence the title of the film).[154]

But the biggest indicator that the class-based comedy of *Deux femmes en or* draws from the success of *Valérie* and *L'initiation* comes during an encounter between Violette and a plasterer whom she seduces. Played by Paul Buissonneau, known as the star of the children's television show *Picolo*, the plasterer frets about the degrading morals in Quebec, saying "When you have these hot and curious girls like in *Valérie* and *L'initiation*, it's disgusting! Disgusting!"[155] before himself giving into temptation when faced with Violette's exposed breasts. By referencing Héroux's two films, Fournier asserts their place in the public discourse, reinforcing the amount of tabloid coverage they received and holding them up as a disputed element of Quebec's identity. With this scene, Fournier folds the sexual rebellion of Denis Héroux's *films de fesses* into the class (and language)-based rebelliousness of his own piece of pop culture, which, as Loiselle puts it, becomes "a compendium of the most effective devices of popular Quebec cinema."[156] Reinforcing this point is Michèle Garneau's claim that the film draws from burlesque in its use of "the scandalous situations, the imbroglios, the back and forth, the misunderstandings, the unexpected and explosive coincidences" of the genre to please its audience.[157]

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[154] Loiselle, 81.
[155] Translation mine.
[156] Ibid., 80.
[157] Garneau, 214

In an article in *Relations* magazine in July 1970, Yves Lever refused to accept these films as even trivial amusements, let alone political statements:

> Movies like *L'initiation* or *Deux femmes en or*, without speaking a word of politics, are playing a totalitarian game of production and consumption that protects itself by providing beautiful distractions from everyday reality and anesthetizing viewers against awareness of real problems. While offering easy satisfaction, these films contain the implicit ideology that all is well in our society and that it is sufficient to enjoy an increase in consumption for everyone to be happy.[158]

This reads as an example of the "comfort and indifference" argument that Loiselle suggests can be used to claim the *films de fesses* "represent nothing more than mere escapism offered to the masses as a means to get away from social issues"[159] (referencing Denys Arcand's *Le confort et l'indifférence* - an NFB documentary exploring the "Yes" side's defeat in Quebec's 1980 sovereignty referendum). But while *Deux femmes en or* never makes an explicit political statement, it is still rooted in the malaise of everyday life in Quebec and makes a mockery of the social and economic structures that produce such malaise. Gilles Blain isolates its appeal as such:

> In short, the function of laughter in a film with sexual content is twofold: on the one hand, to demystify or destroy the mythical (sacred) character that this content might possess — namely the traits, desires and behaviours of characters, their sexual activities and situations, the seductive or magical appeal of the star, the ideas that underlie the story - on the other hand it also defuses the eroticism of the bodies, objects and sexual acts, rendering them inoperative in terms of seduction and pleasure.[160]

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[158] Yves Lever in "Une saison du cinéma Québécois,"*Relations*, July 1970, 218.
[159] Loiselle, 76.
[160] Blain, 109.

One key element of Loiselle's argument is the prominence of "winning" in popular Quebec cinema. As opposed to the "losers" of art cinema, films like *Deux femmes en or* produced winners. This comes in the form of the two women who, on trial for their indecency, end up being rewarded for their infidelities with a Broadway show. It also reveals itself in the way that several "unattractive, middle-aged and sexually unattractive"[161] men (played by Québécois celebrities like Gilles Latulippe or Yvon Deschamps) are seduced by the women, thereby coming out on top "as sexual winners."[162] Compared to Yvan, who grovels before his anglophone superiors, those who reject the social norms that are forced upon them succeed within the logic of the film. In Poirier's opinion, the women "play the game of the capitalist system, using it to their advantage rather than suffer the consequences."[163] This rebellious logic challenges not only the traditional social mores of the province, but also the dogma of the sovereigntist movement. It is a rebellion of behaviour and attitude rather than political will, but it still serves to reinforce Québécois identity as something in opposition to the regular forces of capitalism. As Poirier puts it, "These 'popular' films constitute an exception in the Quebec film corpus. At first, the characters encounter difficulties, then they succeed, through a series of actions, to gain their independence and to strengthen their identity."[164]

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[161] Ibid., 80.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Poirier, 110
[164] Poirier, 111.

While none of these aforementioned films had trouble with censorship, they did court controversy with their frank depictions of sex. The makers and distributors of these films did this, partially, by asserting their sexual content as a national concern, exploiting insecurities about Quebec's national identity and turning it into a marketing ploy. While tabloid coverage happily covered the movies, which starred familiar figures and exploited the province's healthy celebrity culture, more intellectual corners of the press responded with concern, afraid that the films represented an ugly part of their national identity. The films also garnered rebukes from religious figures, who objected to their morally transgressive attitudes toward sex. These films, and *Valérie* in particular, sexualized the identity of Quebec within public discourse, which either symbolized the nation's coming-of-age, or its arrested development, depending on perspective. These earlier *films de fesses* also set the scene for a much more divisive debate about censorship and the government's role in protecting the public, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO

While *Valérie* and *L'initiation* certainly stoked controversy in Quebec for their frank depictions of sexuality, they avoided any acts of censorship in the province. Indeed, their very existence was premised on the relaxation of censorship that culminated in the replacement of the draconian Censorship Board with the more liberal *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma* in 1967.[165] Indeed, Loiselle describes *Deux femmes en or* as "an expression of victory of freedom over oppression as it owes much of its existence to the fact that the conservative censorship bureau of Quebec had been disbanded just a couple years before its production."[166] Yet the relaxation of the censorship board did not coincide with a universal shift in opinion in the province. Indeed, the more religious districts of the province, particularly in rural and working class areas, felt left behind by the rapid secularization of the Quebec government, and former power brokers of the Catholic clergy used the controversial *films de fesses* to reassert the church's dominance in the province.

As previously mentioned, the Danish-Swedish *I, a Woman* was seized by the Morality Squad of the Montreal police in 1968 and its theatre/distributor was charged with obscenity under the federal criminal code in 1970, despite being approved by the *Bureau de surveillance*, whose mandate came from the provincial government.[167] In 1971, a Catholic priest from a working class parish near Quebec City filed a legal grievance about the exhibition of two Quebec-made sexploitation movies: *Après-ski* (Roger Cardinal) and *Pile ou face* (Roger Fournier). Like *I, a Woman*, these two films had been approved by the provincial *Bureau de*

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[165] Pierre Véronneau, "When Cinema Faces Social Values," 56-7.
[166] Loiselle, 81.
[167] Yves Lever in "I, a woman," *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*, 325.

surveillance,[168] setting up a debate over shared values in the province, and the jurisdiction of a federal criminal court over a provincial agency. This debate was poured over by both tabloids and mainstream press, culminating in a public discussion about the merits of censorship.

While the makers of *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski* couldn't publically admit to any pornographic intentions with their films, lest they open themselves up to legal recriminations, certain intellectual corners of the press did that for them. Figures in the media echoed common anti-censorship opinions available from public intellectuals in American media[169] and also adopted a general attitude of indifference towards representation of sexuality in media. In addition, all players of the public debate, including those in the clergy, conceded that a return to the Great Darkness of the Duplessis-era was unwarranted. Pierre Véronneau observes that "One could even say that some [critics of the *Bureau du surveillance du cinéma*] pined for the past, when censorship did its work and the virginity of the screens was not threatened by the triumph of eroticism."[170] This sentiment reveals that, by 1971, a noticeable (and possibly irreversible) shift in public morality had already occurred, and that attitudes on censorship were continuing to change. This chapter will argue that the discussion of censorship in the context of Quebec allowed for the normalization of anti-censorship opinions by the media, even though the subject remained a third rail for politicians and filmmakers. Despite the eventual fine levied on the exhibitors of *Après-ski* for obscenity (*Pile ou face* was acquitted),[171] this chapter in Quebec history marked an important turning point in the evolution of public opinion about freedom of expression.

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[168] *Fiche d'examen: Pile ou face*; Yves Lever in "Après-ski," *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*, 43.
[169] Gorfinkel, 43-44
[170] Pierre Véronneau in "Censure et discours de la critique," 169.
[171] "Le film Après-Ski est jugé obscène" *Le Droit* (Ottawa), July 11, 1973.

The *films de fesses* that Crossed the Line

As with the *films de fesses* that preceded them, both *Après-ski* and *Pile ou face* were sold with the implied promise of nudity and sex. While *Après-ski* presents the type of phallocentric, class-based fraternal bonding that would become common in popular Quebec movies, *Pile ou face* centers on a cast of high society figures, and like *L'initiation*, uses their "new petite bourgeoisie" acceptance of alternative lifestyles to motivate the characters' sexual escapades. Still, both films evoke the same rebellious quality as their predecessors. Take, for example, the first scene of *Pile ou face*, in which Suzanne (Diane Arcand), one of the jet setters, is driving through downtown Montreal. When a police officer chides her for using her car phone while driving, she suggestively crosses her bare legs for him. The officer changes his mind and writes his phone number on the ticket instead. Then she drives off and flings the ticket behind her, using her femininity as a weapon against male authority figures.

The poster for *Pile ou face* features several illustrated naked bodies, both male and female, in a bacchanalian embrace while one man overlooks the proceedings with a pair of binoculars and a fully-dressed woman in front holds her arms across her chest. The original press kit describes the plot as such:

> Four couples form a group; they are of different nationalities and live in the major cities of the world. They are the "Jet Set": among them are, a popular painter, a much sought after cover girl, a pop singer. When their work obliges them to travel to a city where one of them lives, they share not only their living quarters but also each other's partners.

The city is Montreal (although the "Jet Set" meets up at a cottage in the Laurentians), but the premise sets up a few familiar tropes. Montreal's status as a "major city" is validated by its

inclusion in the group, which is otherwise made up of members of high society from other "major cities" like Rome and Los Angeles. Like *L'initiation*, *Pile ou face* uses its European characters to evoke a sense of continental sexuality. As with *Valérie*, the characters are associated with the arts, and as such are symbolic of moral transgression among artists and the cultural élite. The "free love" philosophy of the characters evokes the more radical sexual ideas of the era (not unlike Nadine's ideas about sexual freedom in *L'initiation*), and like the *films de fesses* before them, *Pile ou face* uses radical philosophies to motivate the disrobing of women on camera for the consumption of men. Once again, there is a tension between the film's radical challenge to social mores and the rather conservative resolution of the text's narrative. However, this film distinguishes itself from earlier *films de fesses* by its inclusion of full-frontal nudity — both male and female — motivated by the "free love" philosophies of the Jet Set, and their propensity toward nudism even in non-sexual contexts. Indeed, the actual sex scenes are often dimly lit (and almost impossible to make out on the faded VHS copies of the film that are still available). In contrast, most of the characters lounge naked in front of the cottage by day, exposing everything for the camera.

The film follows the main jet setters to a Laurentian cottage, where they engage in (heterosexual) sexual relations with the others' partners. The fly in the ointment is Francesco (Georges Carrère), who had previously been barred from the group, but is permitted to come along with his new partner Stéphanie (Nathalie Naubert). When the time comes, Francesco sends Stéphanie without arriving himself. Stéphanie, however, is unaware of the "free love" arrangement, and the men fall over themselves attempting to seduce her into bed. Meanwhile, Gunther (Jean Coutu), the figure with binoculars from the poster, is a voyeur who, like the

audience, gains scopophilic pleasure from spying on the other couples. Gunther is a figure that troubles the light, easygoing tone of the film, as he watches the other couples copulate from secretly installed cameras. He also peeps at the women occasionally with a pair of binoculars, which is represented through a circular frame that isolates the female bodies akin to L.B. Jefferies' voyeurism in *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954). The character literalizes the voyeuristic images that are present in the older *films de fesses* and, as Laura Mulvey puts it, "the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude."[172] Whatever commentary is intended by the inclusion of this character doesn't get too far, however, as Stéphanie soon learns of Gunther's fetish and comically cuckolds him by tossing a dress over the hidden camera in her room.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of a voyeur suggests a level of self-consciousness on the part of the filmmakers. Additionally, the plot of the film resolves itself in a manner that overtly critiques the "free love" philosophies of the characters, making it an explicit commentary on such alternative lifestyles. The women of the group, upset at the men for chasing Stéphanie, admit to themselves that they only participate in the "Jet Set" group to please their husbands. When it comes time for Stéphanie to leave the cottage, she is also meant to decide which man she would "choose" to take with her. All men are willing to leave, regardless of the disdain of their respective partners. Instead, Stéphanie rejects all of them, allowing the men to wallow in their shame.

In his memoir, Dunning claims the film was the brainchild of screenwriter Gérald Tassé, a Radio-Canada scriptwriter who he describes as "a respected writer with much intellectual

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[172] Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 62.

influence in Quebec's high-end literary world."[173] Indeed, Tassé's literary credibility would be a feather in the distributor's cap when it came time to present *Pile au face* to the censors. According to Dunning, "[w]e warned [Tassé] that there was no way the bureau would ever stand for this. But he insisted that the nudity would not be part of any sexual actions, that the characters would be simply naked while using dialogue to move the story along."[174] Though the film was still cheeky and rebellious, the claims of intellectual cachet are not without basis.

Indeed, if you reduce the nudity, replace the characters with university professors, the plot becomes remarkably similar to that of Denys Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986). In Arcand's internationally successful film (which won nine Genie Awards and a Best Foreign Language Film nomination at the Academy Awards), a group of university professors arrive at a dinner party, where they split into a group of men and women. In each group they discuss their sexual lives, with anecdotes revolving around infidelities, orgies, and various kinks. In the case of Claude (Yves Jacques), the group's lone homosexual, it involves his concern over his urinating blood, which may be related to his reckless sexual behaviour. Thematically, the conversations hinge on Dominique's new book, which predicts the collapse of the symbolic "American empire" based on people's selfish desires and pursuit of pleasure, reflecting Arcand's thesis from *Le confort et l'indifférence*, a 1981 documentary that places the responsibility of the "Yes" campaign's loss in the 1980 sovereignty referendum on the "comfort and indifference" of the Québécois people.

The "decline" of the title manifests itself when Dominique reveals to Louise (Dorothée Berryman) that she had slept with her husband, Rémy (Rémy Girard), in an orgy along with

[173] Dunning and Brownstein, 76.
[174] Ibid.

Pierre (Pierre Curzi), another member of the dinner party. Much has been made about Arcand's seemingly reactionary political stance, which can appear quite contradictory in a film that posits its appeal on the voyeuristic details of the characters' sex lives. As one American critic put it, "[t]he laughs come easy in *Decline*, but also a bit guiltily when you recognize that this hip sex comedy is actually a reactionary tract."[175] This perhaps most apparent in the fate of Claude, who is unable to revert to a "traditional" heterosexual coupling like the others when the drama has unfolded. In both *Déclin* and *Pile ou face*, traditional morality and sexuality is asserted as a cure for the harmful emotional effects of polygamous couplings. Ironically, both movies resolve themselves in a much more conservative manner than many other *films de fesses*, perhaps *because* of their intellectual pedigree rather than despite it.

One scene of note occurs early on in the film, when Suzanne picks up a middle-aged woman from a poor, francophone neighbourhood of Montreal and brings her back to a swanky downtown apartment to pose for a nude painting. "Anybody understand somebody paying my wife to have a look at her?" asks her husband as they drive away, "Stupid!" Then, the woman strips naked for Bruno to paint, declaring that "if it weren't for the money, [she] wouldn't do it" and later admits to taking welfare. This scene would become a lynchpin for critics of the film latched on to this scene for its potentially offensive depiction of the working class Québécois.[176] Unlike *Deux femmes en or* or the class-based comedies that populate the history of Quebec cinema, *Pile en face* separates its characters from the "everyday" Québécois people and instead situates itself among a cosmopolitan élite, emphasized by its multi-national cast of characters.

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[175] Peter Keough in "The Decline of the American Empire" *Chicago Reader*, October 26, 1985. Web. http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-decline-of-the-american-empire/Film?oid=1073530

[176] Luc Perreault in "M'as-tu vu nu aux vues?" *La Presse* (Montreal), February 12, 1971.

The closest the film comes to revealing its immediate national context comes when the woman marvels at Bruno's ability to talk to someone in Rome over the telephone. In doing so, she reveals her ambivalence toward the Church, declaring that "someone said that in Rome the Pope's against the pill. So what's the difference? He's got no kids. What does he care?" Bruno proceeds to shock her by suggesting that many Popes have had various mistresses, suggesting that the figure of the morally transgressive artist extends to that of the "ethically" conservative members of the working class. In examining surveys of working class French citizens and their opinions on both "political" and "ethical" matters, Pierre Bourdieu determined that members of the working class, and particularly uneducated manual labourers and farmers, were likely to support left-wing or "revolutionary" political opinions when they are framed in a political context, but also right-wing or "authoritarian" opinions when they are framed in terms of the "moral order."[177] The depiction of the scandalized working class woman in *Pile ou face* works on both levels. She is dismissive toward the Pope's opinion on birth control -- a politicized issue amid the secularization of Quebec -- but alternately scandalized by the suggestion that various popes had committed adultery.

Après-ski was released just a few months after *Pile ou face* and lacks even the small overtures toward social commentary of the other films I have discussed. Instead, it presents itself as a ribald, male-centric comedy, with very little plot but a whole lot of sex and nudity. Lebel claims that "The film does not, like *L'initiation*, pretend to offer a sexual education for the population. Rather, it is focused on pure and simple amusement."[178] The setting of the film is a ski resort in Quebec's Laurentian mountains, populated mostly by the young and horny, and the

[177] Bourdieu, 432-437, 451-453
[178] Lebel, 112.

film revolves around the various sexual hijinks they get themselves into. A recurring joke has a naked woman standing in the resort elevator every time the door is opened, which is a fairly representative example of the film's sense of humour as a whole. The main characters are a trio of male ski instructors who challenge each other to sleep with four out of the five women they'll be teaching. The plot, though barely sketched out, revolved around the character of Philippe (Daniel Pilon), who pines after Terry Lopez (Céline Lopez), a movie star, and Karin (Mariette Lévesque), a magazine cover girl, the two most desirable women at the resort. His pursuit of Terry is dropped after he finally sleeps with her after being rejected twice (although Terry gets one more scene, in which she experiments with both marijuana and homosexuality, in that order). But in the film's final scene, Karin rejects Philippe the morning after sleeping with him, and leaves the resort with her other romantic interest, Bob. At first, Philippe is distraught, and follows her onto the highway by car, but when he sees two girls on the other side of the road, he pulls a U-turn and picks them up, asking "Do you want some skiing lessons?"

Like *L'initiation*, the main characters of *Après-ski* a young people enjoying the material and sexual comforts of a younger generation (revolving around skiing, a favored activity of the European élite), but unlike *L'initiation*, the film isn't grounded in any kind of generational conflict. For Lebel,

> Sex, sex, skiing and sex. These are the main themes of the film, which never forgets its primary objective: to present an innumerable number of young naked women. None of them seem to be interested in wearing clothes. The director accumulates these wacky

> sexual situations one after the other without the least coherence, though he is careful to integrate other vogueish taboos: drugs, lesbianism and prostitution.[179]

Instead, the ski resort is positioned as a "carnivalesque" heterotopia, in which sexual and moral transgressions are permitted, much like André Loiselle's Bakhtinian description of popular Québec cinema.[180] This is perhaps best exemplified by an early scene in which a pair of newlyweds arrive at the resort. After taking a seat with skiing instructors at the resort bar, they begin to drink and the wife is led away by Tony (Robert Arcand), one of the instructors, for some wedding night adultery. When her intoxicated husband returns to the table, they pair him with an older, "undesirable" woman.

However, unlike the transgressive rebelliousness of *Deux femmes en or*, in which sexual power was seized and wielded by two alienated suburban housewives, the politics of *Après-ski* are rather phallocentric, and at times quite mean-spirited. In one scene, Philippe's friends hire an "exotic" black prostitute for him. Apropos of very little, he convinces her to follow him onto a balcony, naked, and then pushes her into a snowbank below. The film's attitude toward homosexuality is similarly toxic, which is made particularly apparent in a self-contained comic set-piece starring René Angélil[181] and Pierre Labelle, members of a then-popular French-language Beatles cover band called Les Baronets. In a fairly recent write-up of the film

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[179] Lebel, 111.
[180] Loiselle, 80.
[181] Since the release of the film, René Angélil remained relevant (at least in Canada) as the manager and then husband of famed Québécois *chanteuse* Céline Dion, and *Vice* actually published an article about *Après-ski* on the occasion of his death.

for *Vice*, Patrick Lejteny aptly sums up the scene as an example of homophobic humour[182] that dates the film:

> Sitting in a bar, Angélil is teaching Labelle, a virgin, how to pick up chicks, and arranges a rendezvous with a stranger's friend spotted across the room. Labelle rushes upstairs after getting the go-ahead, only to be greeted by... a gay dude! He fends off the gay dude's pawing and flees, terrified. Hilarious, no? (No, it's really not.)[183]

Likewise, the film demonstrates a "prefeminist" attitude towards sexual consent.[184] As David Andrews has detailed, the nonconsensual and "semi-consensual" rape scenes are a fixture of sexploitation movies, which "delay consent and complicate the fantasy."[185] In *Après-ski*, however, the lack of consent isn't demonstrated through rape fantasies, but rather as a matter of course. In an early scene, housekeeper is assaulted by Tony and Paul, who grab her, hold her arms back, and grope her against her wishes. "Everyone loves everyone," declares an amused Philippe, who observes from the door to his room. Later in the film, a drunken Philippe stumbles into Terry's room and removes the blanket from her naked torso. He proceeds to touch and kiss her naked body until she wakes up, unconcerned with this violation. Philippe falls asleep on the floor beside her, but has sex with Terry (who previously rejected his advances) when he wakes up the next morning.

Unlike *Valérie* and *L'initiation*, these regressive depictions of sexuality are not balanced by female protagonists who mark the progress of women in the Quiet Revolution. However,

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[182] It's worth noting that Claude Fournier's *Les chats bottés*, which is comparatively sophisticated in terms of its humour, is also guilty of exploiting homophobia, including a scene, played for laughs, in which two cops beat a gay character.
[183] Patrick Lejtenyi in "The Forgotten Raunchy Flick That Introduced Quebec's Sexual Revolution To The World," *Vice*, February 10, 2016.
[184] Andrews, 65.
[185] Ibid., 64.

Philippe's two objects of desire, Terry and Karin, are both given power in their ability to thwart Philippe's libido. When Philippe takes Terry to a secluded area by snowmobile and makes a move on her, she informs him that she's "not that kind of girl." More suggestively, when Karin leaves the ski resort at the end of the film, she tells Philippe that "a girl can do the same thing a man does," suggesting a transgression of the sexual expectations of women (although this ability to disappoint men seems restricted to movie stars and cover girls in the film). Still, *Après-ski* points away from the female-centric narratives of the sexploitation films and previous *films de fesses*, and towards the fraternal bonding and irreverent humour of later popular Québec films like *Cruising Bar* (Robert Ménard 1989) and *Les Boys* (Louis Saia).

Les films de cochons[186]

In early 1971, Cinepix released *Pile ou face* to Quebec theatres in much the same way it released its other films. Promotional material highlighted the humour and sexuality of the film, and after several *films de fesses*, many probably doubted this one would cause an uproar. The *Bureau de surveillance* noted that while the film's premise was tired, "the new element is the male nudity of the group, seen from every angle and in every detail," but they also conceded that "the presence of this factor cannot, however, justify a refusal of the film under law" and passed *Pile ou face* with a classification of "18 ans."[187] According to Dunning,

> Guérin was faced with a dilemma. He couldn't refuse it on the grounds of indecency, since the romance scenes were mild. If he refused it on simple nudity, he would be

[186] Another synonym for the Québécois sexploitation features was *films de cochons*, which was perhaps even more common at the time than *films de fesses*. "Cochon," it should probably be mentioned, is the French word for "pig."
[187] *Fiche d'examen: Pile ou face*

> moving back from his enlightened position on movies. So, he passed it and raised the bar up another notch. (76-77)

Gerald Tassé's credibility in the literary world also came in handy for publicity. Tassé was often brought up in the press as a creative force behind the film along with director Roger Fournier.[188] The tabloids were particularly interested in his marriage to Nathalie Naubert, the star of the film, with *Nouvelles Illustrées* even devoting a cover page to a supposed affair between Tassé and Naubert's co-star, Jacqueline Fellay.[189] The film's other stars, like Diane Arcand and Jean Coutu, also got their own tabloid spreads,[190] and the premiere was once covered by variety pages who fawned over the celebrities.[191]

In short, the release of *Pile ou face* was treated much like the release of the previous *films de fesses*, and that is perhaps why it failed to make as much of a cultural impact at first. The novelty of the homegrown sex film had worn off and the techniques the Cinepix used to turn *Valérie* and *L'initiation* were not as effective as they once were at generating publicity. Nevertheless, the film was still a box office success, but according Dunning it was "never the blockbuster [he] thought it would be."[192] Likewise, the reviews were considerably worse than for their predecessors. In *La Presse*, Luc Perrault recognized the film's depiction of male nudity, but found considerable fault in the film's depiction of working class Montrealers:

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[188] Jean-Pierre Nicaise in "L'érotisme dans le cinéma Québecoise," *Tele-cinema* (Montreal), March 18, 1972. 11-13. Christiane Berthiaume in "Pile: un réalisateur. Face: un scripteur. Les deux: 'Pile ou face'" *Dimanche-Matin* (Montreal), February 7, 1971. "Jean Coutu: 'Je suis prêt à recommencer.'" *Le Grand Illustré* (Montreal), February 15, 1971, 8.
[189] *Nouvelles Illustrées*, February 20, 1971, 1.
[190] Lisa Lapierre in "Diane Arcand: Une comédienne qui se permet toutes les audaces." *Photo-journal* (Montreal). February 15, 1971. 79-80. "Jean Coutu: 'Je suis prêt à recommenser.'" *Le Grande Illustré*, 8.
[191] "'Pile ou face': De la 'cochonnerie' pour petit écran" *Echos-Vedettes* (Montreal), February 20, 1971, 5-6.
[192] Dunning and Brownstein, 77.

> Not content to exploit the bad taste of a public which will likely go into mass watch this masterpiece of banality and vulgarity, *Pile ou face* shamefully ridicules the disadvantaged people of east Montreal. In one of the most disgraceful scenes of the film, a woman who is found in the most dilapidated building possible, poses nude for a painter who is a member of the group. Hearing the coarse laughter that burst out in the theatre during this scene, we understand that the makes of this film have achieved their goal.[193]

In the *Montreal Star*, Martin Malina attacked the film's lack of cultural specificity, comparing the film unfavorably to *Valérie* and *L'initiation* and declaring that the film "belongs to a certain faceless category of skin flicks that is common to many countries but citizen of none." He also takes the film to task on a technical level, claiming that his time had been spoiled by "Gérald Tassé's witless dialogue… ; the uniform inadequacy of the acting; substandard color camerawork by René Verzier; unmemorable music by Stéphanne Venne and an embarrassing lack of direction from Fournier."[194] Even Michel Girouard, who defended *Valérie* from its critics, provocatively suggested that "it could easily interest the mentally retarded" and criticized the actors for showing off "their penises and buttocks."[195] Overall, however, despite strong ticket sales in Quebec,[196] *Pile ou face* failed to capture the zeitgeist in the way that Cinepix's previous films had.

In contrast *Après-ski* would go on to perform very well at the domestic box office, possibly aided by the publicity that surrounded its seizure and trial. The film also left quite an impression on Quebec filmgoers, and its notoriety in recent years has been buoyed by a

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[193] Luc Perreault, "M'as-tu vu nu aux vues?"
[194] Martin Malina in "Hijinks in the Laurentians" *Montreal Star*, April 1, 1971, 23.
[195] Michel Girouard in "'Pile ou face': Un cours d'éducation sexuelle pour les rétardes mentaux," *Tele-Radiomonde* (Montreal), February 27, 1971.
[196] "'Pile ou face' un record d'assistance" *Le Petit Journal* (Montreal), March 14, 1971.

retrospective screening at Montreal's Fantasia Film Festival in 2014.[197] In a 2016 interview with *Vice*, director Roger Cardinal, now a film teacher, says that he once asked his students "to go home and ask their fathers or grandfathers—and nearly all of them said they'd seen it."[198]

Despite its eventual success and reputation, however, *Après-ski* initially failed to attract as much publicity as its predecessors when it was released on April 2, 1971. Like *Pile ou face*, it was passed by the *Bureau de surveillance* without incident. Before the film's release, it was publicized in various tabloids, though it lacked the front page saturation of *Valérie* and *L'initiation*. The coverage often focussed on stars Daniel Pilon and Mariette Lévesque[199] or the usual star-studded premiere event.[200] Céline Lomez, however, was waylaid by an eyesight problem; as one article put it, "Celine, who is gazed upon by thousands of men, lost the use of her eyes for a few hours."[201]

As with *Pile ou face*, *Après-ski* faced lackluster reviews. While Martin Malina at the *Montreal Star* called it "harmless, dirty fun,"[202] that faint praise didn't come across from other outlets. In *La Presse*, Guy Robillard says "'Après-Ski' follows a slope that is certainly not ascending, erotically speaking, in spite of all the ski-lifts in the film."[203] *The Gazette*'s Dane Lanken said "Apres Ski is of a formula that becoming (*sic*) a little wearying these days."[204] Outside of the dailies, a review in *Tele-Radiomonde* declared *Après-ski* to be "the most piggish

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[197] Marc Lamothe in "Après-ski" *Fantasia Festival Internationale de Films*, accessed December 17, 2016, http://www.fantasiafestival.com/2014/fr/films-et-horaire/86/apres-ski
[198] Patrick Lejtenyi in "The Forgotten Raunchy Flick That Introduced Quebec's Sexual Revolution To The World," *Vice*, February 10, 2016.
[199] "Mariette Lévesque amoureuse de Daniel Pilon" *Echos-Vedettes* (Montreal), April 3, 1971, 3; Christiane Laurine, "La rêve de Mariette Lévesque: 'tourner un film avec Donald Pilon'" *Tele-radiomonde* (Montreal), April 3, 1971, 3.
[200] "Le tout-Montréal artistique à la première d''Après-ski'" *Echos-Vedettes* (Montreal), April 10, 1971, 10; "Ce sera bientôt le temps de 'Après-ski'" *Tele-radiomonde* (Montreal), March 27, 1971, 6.
[201] "Céline Lomez perd la vue" *Echos-Vedettes* (Montreal), April 10, 1971, 3.
[202] Martin Malina in "Apres Ski has little plot and lots of human scenery" *Montreal Star*, April 1, 1971, 25.
[203] Guy Robillard in "Raté, ce slalom" *La Presse* (Montreal), April 3, 1971, D9.
[204] Dane Lanken in "Aprés Ski: More Quebecoise (sic) skin" *The Gazette* (Montreal), April 3, 1971, 42.

film ever presented in Quebec" and claimed that, of the actors, "the only aspect of their talent that they showed involved undressing and kissing."[205] Overall, the press seemed to express a lack of enthusiasm toward the now entrenched sexploitation genre.

Still, *Tele-Radiomonde*'s dismissal of the film signalled a moralizing critique of the *films de fesses* which would soon threaten the new subgenre. *Photo-Police*, another tabloid, would join *Tele-Radiomonde* in its critique of the "films de sexe." On March 27, in the week before *Après-ski* was released, *Photo-Police* published an alarmist front page headline declaring "Montreal is going further than New York" (the first commercially-released American hardcore feature, *Mona* [Michael Benveniste], was released in 1970). This was accompanied by an article claiming that Quebec's *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma* "desires to rival or even surpass the Americans" in its permissiveness.[206] Ironically, *Photo-Police* published nude still photographs on many of its pages, demonstrating both an obsession and condemnation of sexuality. These moralizing gestures, of questionable sincerity, resemble the faux-educational sex films of the classic exploitation era, but also Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality, which holds that sexually repressive mechanisms of Western society actually had the effect of producing "a multiplicity of discourses" on sex. In other words, by trying to restrict sexuality, *Photo-Police* wallows in it. Not only did the tabloid regularly advertise for nude models,[207] but in the week of April 3, they even published an editorial denouncing "pornography in all its forms." This same editorial defended the publication's right to use nude photographs in order "to denounce the excess and to demonstrate that evil is deeply rooted in our home, in our dear province we call Catholic and in

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[205] "'Aprés-ski': Le film le plus cochon jamais présenté au Québec" *Tele-Radiomonde* (Montreal), April 10, 1971, 11.
[206] "Au cinéma la virilité mâle prend la vedette" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), March 27, 1971, 12-13.
[207] "Attention amateurs de photographie" *Photo-Police*, (Montreal), March 27, 1971, 13.

our city, pretentiously nicknamed the 'city with a hundred steeples.' **We detest the hypocrisy**."[208] Both of these publications would become instrumental in stirring up controversy over the impending obscenity case surrounding *Après-ski* and *Pile ou face*.

"La guerre aux films de sexe"

In the words of Pierre Véronneau, "Since the censorship regime became more broad-minded and relied on the judgment of consenting adults, only one way remained for the opponents of these [sexploitation films]: criminal charges."[209] On April 15, 1971, Father Raymond Lavoie of Saint-Roch (a working class parish in Quebec City) released a statement to the press requesting the intervention of Quebec's Minister of Justice, Jérome Choquette, to take action against both *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski*, declaring that "we continue to believe that intervention of the state is preferable to the initiative of a simple citizen when it is the most fundamental values of our civilization that are at stake."[210] As the director of the Centre UNEV (Univers-Évangile), a Christian advocacy group, Lavoie had previously attacked *Pile ou face* in an expansive press release that touched on many corners of Quebec society, including class, religion, government, and censorship:

Roger Fournier's film, *Pile ou face*, is:

1. A revolting outrage to the people who live in the poor neighbourhoods of [Quebec City].

[208] "Photo-Police et la pornographie" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), April 3, 1971, 16, the bold text is left intact.
[209] Véronneau, "Censure et discours de la critique," 169.
[210] "Le cinéma obscène… L'UNEV poursuit les producteurs des films 'Après Ski' et 'Pile ou Face'" *L'Action* (Quebec), April 17, 1971, 3.

2. An injury to Québécois youth who find something to admire in the orgies of Jean Coutu or the foolishness of the ditzy girl played by Nathalie Naubert.
3. A blasphemy that attacks Catholics and protestants and everything they hold sacred.

We accuse the *Regie du cinéma du Québec*, directed by André Guérin, of perverting and insulting the public. Mr. Guérin deserves to be promoted to pencil-pusher in a harmless department, such as the license plates, for example. [211]

Though this screed did not gain much traction in itself, it perhaps illuminates the faultlines in Quebec. Lavoie invokes both class and religion, and complains that the reformist Liberal government of Robert Bourassa "has accepted until now that the escalation of film eroticism will reach a peak that will not be surpassed unless cinemas are officially transformed into brothels," imploring them to change course before voters take things into their own hands. He also invoked the poorer neighbourhoods of Quebec City, one which was home to his parish in St-Roch, once again invoking the perception of artists and intellectuals as morally transgressive. *Pile ou face*, with its scene that mocks the working poor of east Montreal, makes for a particularly potent target in this regard. This line of attack also situates the Quiet and sexual revolutions as less of a revolt of the people against an oppressive ruling class than both a generational divide (between an older, more religious generation and their ascendant baby boomers, raised in the era of Jean Lesage's secular reforms) and a regional divide (between rural or working class regions and cosmopolitan, bourgeois areas like downtown Montreal). That said, Lavoie is a member of the clergy, whose social and political power in the province had declined precipitously in the wake

[211] "Le curé Lavoie s'attaque au film 'Pile au face'" *Le Soleil* (Quebec), March 20, 1971.

of the Quiet Revolution. He certainly did not speak for the entirety of working class Quebec, though his claim to represent the poor complicates the notion that Quebec's Quiet Revolution was a class-based affair, as does an article from the *Journal de Québec* that claims he received 2000 letter from people who support his actions.[212]

A few days later, the *Federation québécoise de l'industrie du cinéma* announced that they "categorically and anonymously reject the allegations made by Father Lavoie … for the simple reason that these two films obtained certification from the *Bureau de surveillance*, the only organization with the ability to make decisions of this matter in the name of the Quebec government."[213] On April 23, both films were seized by police from two theatres in Quebec City. The complaint that Lavoie swore out about the film was made under Section 150 of the Criminal Code, which forbids the "undue exploitation of sex,"[214] which was the same obscenity charge levelled at the Danish film *I, a Woman* in 1968. Journalists cited that case in their write-ups on the seizures, as well as the *Bureau de surveillance*'s decision to retract its approval of *Quiet Days in Clichy* (Jens Jorgen Thersen) in late 1970.[215] In the case of *I, a Woman*, the Montreal morality squad had seized the film and charged its exhibitors with obscenity, though a verdict would not come down until April 1972 when a municipal Montreal judge declared the film not obscene.[216] That case was notable for staging a jurisdictional conflict between the draconian municipal police force of mayor Jean Drapeau and the reforming provincial *Bureau de surveillance*. The case of *Quiet Days of Clichy* is a bit more complicated, as the *Bureau de surveillance* revoked the film's permit, claiming they had changed their mind independently after

[212] "L'UNEV espère recevoir 10,000 lettres d'appui" *Journal de Québec*, April 17, 1971.
[213] "L'affaire d''Après-Ski' fait boule de neige" *Montreal-Matin*, April 20, 1971.
[214] "La police saisit Pile ou face et Après Ski" *Montreal-Matin*, April 24, 1971.
[215] "La police saisit Pile ou face et Après Ski" *Montreal-Matin*, April 24, 1971.
[216] Lever, "I a Woman," 323-325.

an "energetic presentation" on the matter from the provincial government, though journalists speculated that Drapeau was once again behind the action. Yves Lever writes that then-current Minister of Cultural Affairs François Cloutier had expressed concern to *Bureau* chief André Guérin, positing that the film might run into trouble with "certain circles of police" (which could be construed as a hint that Drapeau's morality squad was planning some action). Journalists at the time also speculated that Drapeau was behind the retraction of the permit.[217] The seizures of *Après-ski* and *Pile ou face* near Quebec City, however, expanded the debate beyond Montreal and created a jurisdictional conflict between the provincial *Bureau de surveillance* and the federal criminal code.

These seizures were followed by an outcry from several groups within the Quebec film industry. Pierre Véronneau writes that "The resistance to censorship believed that these reactionary elements wanted to bring back Quebec before the Quiet Revolution. They believe that the majority of the population supports the attitude of the *Bureau de surveillance*, so they opened their columns to various speakers on the subject."[218] Joining the *Federation* in their criticism of the police action, the *Association des propriétaires de cinémas du Québec*, the *Association des producteurs de films du Québec*, the *Union des artistes de Montréal* also protested the possible criminal charges.[219] These actions would set off a firestorm in the media, igniting a public debate about the state's role in censoring depictions of sexuality. *Photo-Police* even referred to the case as "Le guerre aux film sex," or "the war of the sex films," and tabloids covered a growing feud between feud between Father Marcel-Marie Desmarais, an anti-pornography radio and television pundit, and *Valérie star* Danielle Ouimet, who came out in

[217] Yves Lever in "Quiet Days in Clichy." *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*. 566-569.
[218] Véronneau, "Censure et discours de la critique," 170.
[219] "Un déluge de télégrammes de protestations" *Montréal-Matin*, April 26, 1971.

support of a person's right to view the *films de fesses*.[220]

There appears to have been a conflict in Robert Bourassa's Liberal government at the time, as Cultural Affairs Minister François Cloutier insisted there would be no altering of the Cinema Act, which gave the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma* its power, though he did leave the door open to alter the law and prevent a conflict between provincial and federal jurisdictions.[221] He also invoked heckles from the opposition in the National Assembly when he defended "a sane eroticism." In response to Raymond Lavoie's complaint, however, Justice Minister Jérôme Choquette initially declared that he would pursue criminal charges against the films and work with Cloutier on making the laws more strict.[222] Later on, however, he said he would "certainly fight to defend the Cinema Act," as long as he could manage to reconcile it with the Criminal Code.

Around the same time, the Canadian Film Development Corporation — and by extension the Liberal federal government of Pierre Trudeau — came under fire for financially supporting the production of sexploitation. Georges Valade, a Conservative MP from Montreal lambasted the CFDC for providing funding to films without "artistic value," claiming that "The fact that you see naked Canadians isn't really a Canadian value."[223] It is worth noting that later in the year, the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada passed a resolution that denounced the federal government for helping to fund "the production of Canadian movies exploiting

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[220] Marcel-Marie Desmarais in "Le père Desmarais répond à Mme Ouimet and Danielle" *Dernière Heure* (Montreal), April 25, 1971; "Danielle Ouimet déclare que le public est le seul juge" *Télé-Radiomonde* (Montreal), May 1, 1971.
[221] Qtd. by Dan Pottier in "No film censorship--Cloutier" *The Montreal Star*, April 28, 1971.
[222] Paul Roux in "Choquette annoncerait demain un durcissement de la loi sur le cinéma" *Le Soleil* (Quebec), April 20, 1971.
[223] "Il ne faut pas financer des films comme 'Pile ou face' - Georges Valade" *La Presse* (Montreal), May 7, 1971.

violence, immorality, and sex,"[224] although the influence of the Presbyterian Church on Quebec cultural politics is fairly small. In response to Valade's comments, Gérald Tassé appeared before a federal parliamentary committee to defend his film, claiming that *Pile ou face* was not actually exploiting sex, but inserting nudity into a film about the explosion of the nuclear family unit. He also claimed that his personal and professional integrity had been attacked in Valade's comments. Interestingly, he also attested that the film was in the process of being sold to Germany and Japan, using the films purported commercial success or popularity as a symbol of its legitimacy.[225]

Within the press, the face of the anti-pornography fight was taken by the Catholic clergy, led by Father Raymond Lavoie and the *Centre UNEV*. *La Presse* ran a feature on Msgr. Raymond Lavoie, giving him an outlet to explain his views. In this far-reaching interview, Lavoie differentiates his anti-pornography activism from that of Fr. Marcel-Marie Desmarais, a frequent Catholic critic of "pornographic" films in Montreal, by taking legal action against the exhibitors rather than simply denouncing them. Lavoie claims that his opposition to the *films de fesses* stems from…

> [f]irst, the honour of God. He can not accept public blasphemy. Also, the honour of the poor, which he sees flouted, especially in *Pile or face*. Then, the honour of man, who loses his dignity. And finally, he adds, the honour of prostitutes, who have more discretion in their actions than the stars of these films.[226]

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[224] Qtd. in "Sex, Evidence, Dope And China Fare for Presbyterian Assembly" *The Standard* (St. Catharines, Ontario), June 12, 1971.
[225] Elie Lalancette in "'Pile ou face' a été produit pour 'illustre une réalité nouvelle'" *Le Droit* (Ottawa), May 12, 1971.
[226] Jean-Guy Dubuc in "Un 'monseigneur' créditiste qui veut sortir de sa paroisse" *La Presse* (Montreal), May 8, 1971.

Once again, Lavoie invokes the poor and working class members of his parish, and this concern extends to other parts of the interview as well. Citing abuses of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he suggests that the federal government should expropriate it and encourages his parishioners to throw garbage on its tracks.[227] But rather than invoking socialism with his working class populism, he muses about potentially running for office with the federal *Ralliement créditistes* party, which was nominally founded on the principles of monetary reform, but became a voice for conservative, rural, working class populism in the late Sixties and early Seventies, especially as the *Union Nationale* began to crumble.

Meanwhile, a priest from Montreal who hosted a popular radio program, Fr. Marcel-Marie Desmarais, called for a public boycott of *Après-ski*, *Pile ou face* and other "films de cochons." Although his own anti-pornographic sentiments had gained traction with the legal actions of Msgr. Lavoie, Desmarais had invoked the wrath of *Valérie* star Danielle Ouimet a few weeks earlier by suggesting that Ouimet had spent Christmas alone, abandoned by her family. This was denied vehemently by both Danielle Ouimet and her mother.[228] An article in the tabloid *Tele-Radiomonde* facetiously declared Desmarais the "No. 1 publicist" of the *films de fesses* for his sensationalist rebukes of the genre, declaring that "obviously, the filmmakers and stars of the *films cochons*, including Danielle Ouimet, have rallied and reaffirmed their right to creative freedom, stressing that the public must remain the sole judge of what he likes or does not like" before discussing the commercial success of the film.[229] *Pile ou face* director Roger Fournier responded to the criticisms of Desmarais and others against his film in an letter to the editor for *La Presse*, saying "Fr. Desmarais accuses certain films of being works of voyeurism. I have

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[227] Ibid.
[228] "Danielle et sa mère en guerre contre le Pére Desmarais…!" *Derniere Heure* (Montreal), April 18, 1971.
[229] "Danielle Ouimet déclare que le public est le seul juge"

never heard such a ridiculous claim…, for one of the essential characteristics of cinema is voyeurism. The camera, thanks to its objectivity, is a window to the intimate lives of certain characters." [230]

For *Photo-Police*, the scandal offered a chance to further sensationalize the topic of pornography. On May 1, half the front page was taken up by headline that screamed "The *films cochons*: Battle to the death!"[231] Inside the fold, a full page feature titled "They're waging war on sex films," which profiles Lavoie, Desmarais as well as some other opponents of the *films de fesses* by invoking military terms. At one point, the article refers to Lavoie and Desmarais as the "generals of morality" and at another refers to their loose coalition as the "Front de Libération de la Moralité,"[232] referring to the then-present threat of the militant, sovereigntist *Front de libération du Québec*. The article also takes credit for "opening the eyes of Mayor Jean Drapeau" during the *Quiet Days in Clichy* controversy, which (according to their logic, anyway) resulted in the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma* revoking the film's permit. In addition to this profile, the May 1 issue of *Photo-Police* also included a four-page supplement on the "war." The many articles here include an "inquiry" into the issue of pronography, which comes to the conclusion that citizens should "make good use of their freedoms,"[233] a summary of the running feud between *Après-ski* co-writer Pierre Brousseau (also a journalist for *Photo-Journal*) and director Roger Cardinal,[234] an excerpt from a speech given by André Guérin about censorship (in which he suggests that "no subject should be forbidden"),[235] along with various opposing viewpoints on

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[230] Formatting from original, Roger Fournier in "Le Sexe, et saint Thomas" *La presse* (Montreal), April 24, 1971, D4.
[231] *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 1.
[232] "Ils font la guerre aux films de sexe" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 3.
[233] "Commission d'enquête.. Faire bon usage des libertés" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 15.
[234] "Pierre Brousseau et les films cochons" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 16.
[235] André Guérin in "Aucun sujet n'est interdit en soi" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 17.

the matter, one of which exposes that the two films behind the scandal were "paid for with your money!"[236] The most reactionary viewpoint came from Léo Bonneville, publisher of the Catholic film journal *Séquences*, who wrote that "[i]t must be said that Canadian cinema is at its lowest… *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski* are two recent works that combine vulgarity and pornography."[237] Incredibly, these articles sat right beside an advertisement for *Après ski* at the Capitol Theatre, along with two other sexploitation films playing in Montreal[238] and another advertisement for nude models.[239]

Three Patterns of Discourse

A few patterns of response emerge from the ensuing discourse on censorship. The first is an agreement from both sides of the debate that a return to the censorship of the "Great Darkness" would not be in Quebec's best interests, essentially endorsing the reforms of the Quiet Revolution, at least to some degree. Of course, that would be expected from the opponents of censorship, and particularly from the filmmakers. In his letter to *La Presse*, *Pile ou face* director Roger Cardinal states "one thing is certain: people, because they live in society, establish certain lifestyles, certain rules, called morals. Another thing is certain: these morals are essentially something that changes."[240] He is echoed by screenwriter Gérald Tassé, who spoke to parliamentary committee not only about the moral value of his film, but also "defended the right of the artist to freely express himself in his art, whoever he may be."[241] The *Union des artistes à*

[236] Jacques Francoeur in "Payé avec votre argent" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 17.
[237] Léo Bonneville in "'Au confluent de la vulgarité et de la pornographie…'" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 18.
[238] *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 17.
[239] *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 15.
[240] Roger Fournier in "Le Sexe, et saint Thomas," D4.
[241] "Gérald Tassé à la défense de 'Pile ou face' à Ottawa" *La Presse*, May 12, 1971.

Montréal protested the seizures with a statement declaring that the province needs to abide by the ruling of the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma*, and that "the alternative is a return to the Great Darkness, and artists from Quebec who work in the cinema, on stage and in other media cannot accept it without a strong fight."[242] By citing the "Great Darkness," the union revealed an awareness of the monumental social changes that had occurred in Quebec in the past 12 years, and so perhaps an awareness of the "Quiet Revolution" that was occurring, and maybe even a suggestion that the Quiet Revolution was not so quiet after all.

Less likely, however, was the concession by Fr. Marcel-Marie Desmarais that "We are not aiming for a return to old straight-laced style censorship." This sentiment came with the announcement that he had collected 52 000 signatures on a petition against "pornographic type movies." Desmarais declared at the time "We are not aiming for a return to old straight-laced style censorship. The censorship board is simply not applying the law as it exists. Permissiveness is being stretched beyond tolerable limits, surpassing anything allowed in the US or France where there is traditionally a reputation for largess in films."[243] Quebec had only begun to reform its censorship process in 1961, at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, meaning that Fr. Desmarais was acknowledging and accepting a significant decline in the power of the church. The clergy had been removed from the halls of power and were reduced to a voice from the outside. In scope, this aligned with the statements made by Cultural Affairs Minister François Cloutier, who said that reform would not be done "through censorship which would take us back 25 years, to an age in Quebec marked by Middle Age methods and obscurity," referring to the strict censorship of the Duplessis era. Cloutier seemed particularly passionate on this manner,

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[242] "La saisie des films 'Après-Ski' et 'Pile ou Face' soulève une violente tempête de protestations" *La Presse* (Montreal), April 26, 1971.
[243] "52,000 sign petition protesting skin movies" *The Gazette* (Montreal), June 29, 1971.

saying "I don't want to return to the days of my youth when there were book burnings, when you had to have friends in Europe in order to be able to read Baudelaire or Rimbaud."[244] Both sides of this debate thus acknowledge the stark changes in Quebec society that had taken place over the past decade, and are willing to work with a new set of parameters. The possibility that such a public debate could have occurred even a few years earlier is unlikely, suggesting that Quebec was coming to terms with a new reality rather holding on to an older one.

The second pattern to emerge is that neither the clergy, the Liberal government, nor the filmmakers themselves wanted to see "pornography" on their screens (at least in terms of their public statements). Of course, each group defined the word differently, but there was a consensus that pornography, as a concept, should not be permitted, and that it be considered obscene according to the criminal laws that remained in place. What counted as "pornography," however, changed, depending on who was speaking. Of course, Msgr. Raymond Lavoie and Fr. Marcel-Marie Desmarais believed the films to be pornographic. Desmarais termed the films "pornographic type movies" when presenting his petition to the press[245] while Lavoie, who filed the criminal complaint against the films, obviously did not believe that they met standards of public decency.

Cultural Affairs Minister François Cloutier's defence of the Cinema Act, however, differentiates between pornography and a "sane eroticism" that he would find permissible. Awkwardly, he couches his argument against censorship in a way that pays lip service to "finding the most efficient way to combat the spread of pornographic films."[246] Cloutier, in a sense, is admitting that the *films de fesses* and other sexploitation films deserve the label, but is

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[244] Qtd. in Pottier, "No film censorship--Cloutier"
[245] "52,000 sign petition protesting skin movies"
[246] Dan Pottier, "No film censorship--Cloutier"

not willing to take action against them unless he is sure that "legitimate" works of art won't also be caught in the net.

The filmmakers, on the other hand, did not argue about the permissibility of pornography, but instead defended their films as notable works of art. In front of a parliamentary committee, screenwriter Gérald Tassé insisted that the nudity in his film was "a function of the narrative," given that it was a story about people living outside the norms of society. Tassé also claimed his film "did not exploit the base instincts of man, but illustrated a new reality, with the explosion of the nuclear family and the questioning of marriage as a social value."[247] Fournier, in his letter to *La Presse*, insisted that *Pile ou face* was "a moral film, in the long tradition of moral films. If we don't see that, it's because we are blinded by the **costumes** on the actors."[248] Both creative partners felt the need to defend the film as art, rather than pornography.

For legal reasons, the filmmakers could not claim to be making pornography. Any such claim would be an admission of guilt on the public record, as long as the courts viewed pornography and obscenity to be interchangeable terms. For politicians, however, the stand against pornography is less practical and more of a reflection of public expectation. While Cloutier's distinction between pornography and a "sane eroticism" suggests that tastes were shifting in this period, the fact that he was reportedly heckled by the opposition for this distinction suggests that "pornography," in concept, was still politically impermissible at the time, even if society's attitude toward it was changing.[249]

The third pattern to emerge was the tendency of some journalists, media pundits and public intellectuals to sidestep the debate about whether these films were "obscene" and offer a

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[247] "Gérald Tassé à la défense de 'Pile ou face' à Ottawa"
[248] Emphasis from original, "Le Sexe, et saint Thomas"
[249] Pottier, "No film censorship--Cloutier"

broad anti-censorship argument, advocating for the freedom of personal choice as a new moral standard. Luc Perreault of *La Presse*, for example, refers to *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski* as "the least aesthetically defensible of all Quebec films," but nonetheless insists that "what is at issue is the principle of free distribution of films, once approved by the BSCQ, rather than the intrinsic value of these two works." Perreault doesn't need to be convinced that *Pile ou face* or *Après-ski* are works of strong moral fibre, but rather he believes in the liberal ideology of a film classification agency. In fact, he thinks such anti-pornographic arguments are "based on a fundamental confusion between concepts that are crucial in this context: that of eroticism, eroticism mixed with vulgarity, obscenity and pornography, all notions that can not be arbitrarily interchanged."[250] It follows that such sexually charged films should be permitted, as it is beyond the scope of the courts to determine the distinctions between such concepts.

An editorial by Paul Lachance in *Le Soleil* offered a similar rationale, although he stops short of advocating for the legality of pronography, and instead points to the problem of using the penal code and judicial system to define the word "obscenity," asking

> Would it be better or worse for the public good, on the part of the legislator, to give the green light to the manifestations of libido… or to attempt to to control them by rules which are difficult to apply? In other words, can a law purporting to define obscenity or pornography lend itself to abuse of interpretation?[251]

Instead of advocating for the permissibility of pornography, Lachance sees fit to pronounce its inevitability in the current debate, saying that "While some will fight in the name of morality or simple modesty, others will oppose them in the name of liberty, and it should not be surprising

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[250] Luc Perreault in "Sortira-t-on les ciseaux d'Anastasie" *La Presse* (Montreal), April 24, 1971.
[251] Paul Lachance in "Le problème de l'obscénité" *Le Soleil* (Quebec City), April 28, 1971.

when the law, lacking an adequate means of response, ends up bowing before liberty."[252] Whether intentional or not, Lachance's argument reflects the American anti-censorship argument of Paul Goodman in 1961. As a public intellectual, Goodman argued in his essay "Pornography, Art & Censorship" that pornography and obscenity should not be used interchangeably, and that Judge Frederick van Pelt Bryan's exoneration of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, on the merits of its "redeeming social importance,"[253] was in bad faith, and relied on an outdated definition of the word "obscenity." Instead, he claims

> [t]he notion that sexual impulse or stirring sexual impulse is a bad thing comes from an emotional climate in which it was generally agreed that it would be better if sexuality did not overtly exist … In our times such a notion cannot define obscenity. The pornographic is not *ipso facto* the obscene.[254]

In comparison, Lachance says

> While innumerable people vilify the obscene films, as long as they protest against pornography, while continuing to buy pornographic books, magazines and drawings "just to see," the "others" will continue to pocket the big bucks and wash their hands of it. … Nothing will have changed as long as one is legally wondering where obscenity begins and ends.[255]

He is repeating, in less overtly psychological language, the Freudian argument made by Goodman that by repressing sexuality, the state is actually creating a demand for more perverse sexual representation, that the "censorious attitude toward magazines and pictures is part of the

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[252] Ibid.
[253] Grove Press, Inc. v. Christenberry, 175 F. Supp. 488 (SDNY 1959), 21 July 1959.
[254] Paul Goodman in "Pornography, Art & Censorship" *Commentary* (New York), Mar 1, 1961; 31, 3, 204.
[255] Lachance, "Le problème de l'obscénité."

general censorious attitude that hampers ordinary sexuality and thereby heightens the need for satisfaction by means of the magazines and pictures."[256] Though Lachance doesn't wander into the vagaries of sexual repression or pathologize sado-masochism like Goodman does, his argument rests on a similar principle: the censorious nature of the state creates a higher demand for pornographic materials, by a matter of creating publicity and curiosity about the so-called "obscene" materials themselves.

Similar arguments also appeared in tabloids. Bernard Brisset des Nos in *Montréal-Matin* regards censorship as an issue of personal liberty, writing that after satisfying one's voyeurism by seeing one of the *films de fesses*, "there is very little chance that a spectator will leave the screening room and be transformed into a dangerous sexual maniac ready to assault the first person they see," and that while many teenagers are probably sneaking into these movies without being the requisite age, "we should not deprive a majority of adults" of this freedom.[257] The "War of the Sex Films" dossier in *Photo-Police* included 2 anti-censorship editorials. Radio host Pierre Pascau said "It is as ridiculous to denounce the ugliness or stupidity of 'skin films' as to denounce the bad taste of castor oil. In the background we do not see *Pile ou face*, *Valérie* or *L'initiation* to admire a masterpiece. We go there to let off steam." Thus, the artistic qualities are irrelevant to Pascau, who believes the films are a reaction to the type of puritanical censorship that characterised his childhood.[258] Actress Mia Riddez-Morisset also contributed to the issue, claiming that the public would soon tire of the *films de fesses* and move on to other kinds of movies. But she also suggests that the outrage is unwarranted, and that

[256] Goodman, 209-10.
[257] Bernard Brisset des Nos in "Sexe et fusils" *Montreal-Matin*, April 27, 1971.
[258] Pierre Pascau in "La purge de nos tabous sexuels" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 16-17.

> … the immorality of our time resides much more in the contempt that one has for life than in pornography. Is there anything more horrible than the contempt of life? And I hate, much more than a movie of sex, one of these films of slaughter, which we are saturated with all the time without regard for the age of the audience.[259]

With many of these commentators, the message seems to be the same: the negative or pornographic qualities of the films themselves are not as important as freedom from censorship and, for some commentators, freedom from religious oppression.

André Guérin, the president of the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma*, also voiced a similar position. Although he maintained that there was a distinction between "eroticism" and "obscenity," he also defends *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski*, specifically, saying "[t]hese films, sometimes referred to as 'sexploitation films,' are based on legitimate entertainment for adults and the Bureau ensures that these works cannot be viewed by spectators under 18 years old."[260] Once again, he does not bother to defend the films as works of art, but merely presents them as acceptable forms of entertainment for adults. He also criticizes his opponents in this public debate for "confusing bad taste with illicit spectacle" and claims that the majority of Quebecers, "although they may deplore the bad taste and complacency of certain directors, some less talented than others, they still clearly appreciate the 1967 Cinema Act that gives adults the freedom to chose their own entertainment."[261] Once again, freedom of choice is proffered as a more important principle than one that might keep works of "bad taste" out of cinemas.

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[259] Mia Riddez-Morisset in "Le mal n'est pas si grand" *Photo-Police* (Montreal), May 1, 1971, 16.
[260] Jean Laurac in "La censure fustige le Père Desmarais et Mgr Lavoie…!" *Derniere Heure*, (Montreal), May 30, 1971, 29.
[261] Ibid.

What About *le cinéma québécois?*

The renewed interest in *films de fesses*, spurred on by the controversy over these seizures, once again invoked a debate about the state of Québécois cinema. Even those journalists who defended the films against censorship did not seem to think that they reflected well on Quebec at large. In *Le Devoir*, for example, Jean-Pierre Tadros wrote an editorial titled "To battle erotic cinema, impose a cinema of quality":

> The existing anarchy that characterizes film production and distribution in Quebec is such that, in order to affirm itself, our cinema must absolutely be profitable. Apparently, no other ways have been found to fulfill this requirement other than to fall into erotic excess, and unless the filmmaker is a genius, this falls very quickly into pornography.
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> It is unthinkable, however, that a cinema can only develop if it is to be profitable at all costs. But to get rid of this burden, the government would still have to find another way to make these true films profitable. They would have to make the necessary arrangements to allow a film like *On est loin du soleil* by Jacques Leduc to be distributed widely, and not to to rot in some freezer as it does now.
>
> The public, then, would know that the Quebec cinema is not *Pile ou face.* It would then be up to the province, and the licensed educators, to help it succeed.[262]

Compared to public perception of Quebec cinema upon the release of *Valérie*, this editorial marks a considerable change. In an op-ed for *La Presse*, filmmaker Roger Frappier concurs with Tadros, saying "[i]t is not just these [sexploitation] films (*Après-ski* and *Pile ou face*) that are being made at this time… if we count the number of films that are made in Quebec, those films

[262] "Jean-Pierre Tadros, "Pour battre le cinéma érotique, imposer un cinéma qualité" *Le Devoir* (Montreal), April 17, 1971.

do not outweigh the others at a production level. Rather, it's an issue of distribution." Whereas writers like Emmanuel Cocke of *Petit Journal* praised *Valérie* on the grounds that it represented a change from the auteur-driven cinema of Quebec in the late 1960s (saying that "Québécois cinema in particular and Canadian cinema in general will be able to show her breasts" after the film's release).[263] It appears that the *films de fesses* may have been *too* successful for such authors, however, as a common complaint coming from this period is the lack of distribution for non-exploitation films.

Tadros might also be happy to know that, on various institutional, canon-defining "top ten" lists of the best Canadian films created around the turn of the 21st Century, "what might be called the intelligent, socially-responsible 'artsy' tradition of Canadian cinema" would be overrepresented at the expense of "films that ignore social problems, reject artistic pretension and lean much more on the side of stupidity than intelligence."[264] Indeed, André Loiselle's reevaluation of Quebec popular cinema is driven by a skewed perception of "Quebec cinema" among English-speaking critics and academics who are unaware of "the simplistic, unsophisticated but phenomenally successful movies that French Canadian spectators have consistently flocked to see."[265]

Nevertheless, Tadros's editorial reveals an anxiety about the perception of Quebec cinema, which is also present in comments from pro-censorship commentators such as Léo Bonneville, who proclaims that "It must be said that Canadian cinema is at its lowest" before detailing his complaints about the *films de fesses*.[266] Even tabloid regular Michel Girouard, who

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[263] Emmanuel Cocke in "'Valérie', ça vaut quoi?"
[264] Loiselle, 75.
[265] Ibid., 76.
[266] Bonneville, "'Au confluent de la vulgarité et de la pornographie…'"

had been a strong defender of *Valérie* a couple years earlier, said "I was far from imagining that the Canadian film industry was so sick" in one of his columns.[267] Likewise, a column by Richard Gay in *Maintenant Montreal* exclaimed that, while *Valérie* was "a necessary film" that "marked a certain liberation of the collective Québécois conscience," *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski* are "masterpieces of vulgarity and bad taste." He concludes that "[t]he victim is Quebec cinema itself, for it must be said that while these *films de fesses* are successful, they propagate a certain image of our cinema that unfortunately omits the best films, by [Arthur] Lamothe and [Pierre] Perreault, for example."[268] It is fair to assume that the perception of Quebec cinema, as an underseen, auteur-driven national cinema, had undergone a shift due to the massive popularity of these *films de fesses*, and that some commentators now felt a correction of sorts was in order.

Richard Gay's column was also included in a censorship-themed issue of *Cinéma/Québec*,[269] a magazine about Québécois cinema that began publication in May of 1971 under the stewardship of Jean-Pierre Tadros.Though in general, the magazine focuses on the more "artistic" quarters of the Quebec cinema industry (as one might guess, based on Tadros' aforementioned editorial in *Le Devoir*), the censorship case was newsworthy enough to become the focus of their second issue, titled "Cinéma/Censure." In addition to Gay's opinion piece, the magazine also published two documents on the issue by industry organizations. The first was a memorandum from the *Fédération québécoise de l'industrie du cinéma* that was sent to then-Premier of Quebec Robert Bourassa. In it, the *Fédération* calls on the provincial government to make censorship the sole responsibility of the *Bureau de surveillance*, suggesting that

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[267] Girouard, "'Pile ou face': Un cours d'éducation sexuelle pour les retardés mentaux"
[268] Richard Gay in "Le sexe au cinéma québécois: Une nouvelle aliénation" *Maintenant Montréal*, May 1971.
[269] Richard Gay in "Conscience d'une aliénation nouvelle" *Cinéma/Québec* I:2 (June/July 1971), 8-9.

> It would therefore suffice for the Minister of Justice to notify the municipalities and the general public that he intends to suspend and withdraw any proceedings that might be brought against films without his authorization and to ask them to refer any further complaints to the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma*, the only body mandated by the government to make decisions about cinema.[270]

The second document was an extract of the first Manifesto of the *Association professionnelle des cinéastes du Québec*, which was written in the wake of the *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski* seizures. In it, they claim that the Catholic clergy "has stupidly reacted to its own injured authority," and that it "defends its interests in peril, against the petit-bourgeoisie who has now detached itself from them to better establish their rule."[271] It also blames the federal government for providing money to *Pile ou face* and how that "delayed the birth of an authentic Quebec cinema."[272]

The fatigue that seemed to be cropping up around these films reflects John Dunning's own experience. Although *Pile ou face* wasn't the last *film de fesses* to be produced by Cinepix, the company began to shift its focus around this time. Dunning claimed it was due to saturation, "Everybody jumped on the bandwagon," he told Paul Corupe in an interview for *Take One*, "It got too competitive."[273] In his memoir, Dunning also speaks about the financial problems. Although *Pile ou face* was a hit in Quebec, where Cinepix distributed the film itself, "the full frontal nudity was a problem for foreign sales, so we suffered a setback there as well [as] in the US and the rest of Canada."[274] Though they produced two more French-language *films de fesses* (*La pomme, la queue et les pépins* (Claude Fournier, 1974), a co-production with rival company

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[270] "Memoire de la fédération" *Cinéma/Québec* I:2 (June/July 1971), 16-17
[271] "Manifeste de l'APCQ" *Cinéma/Québec* I:2 (June/July 1971), 18-19.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Qtd. in Paul Corupe, 19.
[274] Dunning and Brownstein, 77.

Mutual Films, and *Ah! Si mon moine voulait* (Claude Pierson, 1973), a religious farce about two horny monks), Cinepix gradually moved into English language exploitation films, which were more desirable on the international market (which included early David Cronenberg films like *Shivers* [1974] and less artistically relevant fare like *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* [1975]. It seems that while controversy is good for publicity (hence the runaway success of *Après-ski*), it isn't necessarily good for business, at least not when it spooks potential distributors.

The Fate of *Pile ou face* and *Après-ski*

After a late spring and early summer of publicity and outrage, "La guerre aux films cochons" came to a rather uneventful denouement. The courts would not decide either case until over a year later. In November 1972, *Pile ou face* was acquitted of obscenity, with the judge saying "Though daring *Pile ou face* allowed the spectator to make a choice between the sex of the group and true freedom."[275] Essentially, the judge agreed with the defense that that the film was moral. In July, 1973, Judge Yvon Sirois would make the opposite decision regarding *Après-ski*, judging it obscene and stating "A sense of morality remains essential in a society. We must hold people to a minimum standard if we do not want it to sink into moral pollution. And I do not believe that the film *Après-ski* has met this minimum standard."[276] So far, this remains the only Quebec film to be successfully convicted according to the Criminal Code. The judge also ordered copies of the film to be seized and issued a fine of $400 for Cinémas Unis, the company who owned the theatre from which the film was seized. *Après-ski* was only publically released

[275] "Le film Après-Ski est jugé obscène"
[276] "Après-ski est confisque" *Le Soleil* (Quebec City), July 11, 1973.

11 years later, on home video, with 20 minutes of additional footage. At that point, there was no censorship or classification for video releases.[277]

Despite the promises from politicians and controversy in the media, the next major revision to the Cinema Act in 1975 would do more to promote Québécois culture and specificity in domestic production than change the censorship rules.[278] In fact, this law was spurred on not by the censorship controversy, but by a protest that involved several important filmmakers occupying the *Bureau de surveillance* for ten days in late 1974, compromising the BSCQ's ability to classify films for the Christmas holidays.[279] The 1975 revisions did, in fact, include provisions to dismantle the *Bureau de surveillance du cinéma*, but it was unclear what would have replaced the BSC, and so it continued to exist until 1983, when the law was revised yet again to create the *Regie du cinéma* in its place, which performed much of the same classification duties.[280] Decades later, the *Regie* classified a version of *Après-ski* as "16+" (one classification lower than the highest "18+" rating) for a DVD release in 2007, saying "The jury restricts the film to an audience who has reached more than the beginning of maturity because of the erotically-focused themes."[281]

Despite the lack of concrete policy changes that occurred after the "Guerre aux films cochons," the controversy exposed many Quebecers to common anti-censorship arguments during a time of of great social changes in the province. The 1973 conviction of *Après-ski* marked one final victory for authoritarian Catholic forces in the province, even as the threat of

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[277] Lever, "Après-ski"
[278] Marshall, 135.
[279] Yves Lever in *Anastasie ou la censure du cinéma au Québec*. (Quebec: Septentrion, 2008), 263.
[280] Michel Houle in "Lois sur le cinéma," in *Le Dictionnaire du cinéma québécois*, ed. Michel Coulombe and Marcel Jean. (Montreal: Boréal, 1999), 411-412.
[281] *Fiche d'examen: Après-ski*

censorship grew increasingly smaller. At the very least, this censorship case spurred a public debate that normalized anti-censorship opinions and a *laissez-faire* attitude toward sexuality in cinema. Soon, the threat to Quebec cinema would not come from overt sexuality, but rather from the imperial influence of American cinema.

CONCLUSION

After the success of *Deux femmes en or*, director Claude Fournier made *Les chats bottés*, another *films de fesses* that employed a similarly satirical edge. The "cats" at the centre of the film are two roguish crooks (Donald Pilon and Donald Lautrec) who employ a gay housekeeper (Jacques Famery) and run various schemes that involve their numerous female romantic partners. After one of their partners befriends a young anglo from Westmount, the two hustlers find themselves in charge of entertainment for an English social club. They decide to dress a dancer as Queen Elizabeth II in a cake, and when "God Save the Queen" plays, she bursts out in nothing more than a skimpy two-piece and a Union Jack on the crotch. More than any other scene in the movies discussed, I think this striptease demonstrates the rebellious flattening of social hierarchies that drew audiences to these films. Within the boundaries of Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" spaces, there are no social hierarchies,[282] although there would sometimes be a "reversal" of social roles: "the jester was proclaimed king, a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected at the 'feast of fools,' and in the churches directly under the pope's jurisdiction a mock pontiff was even chosen."[283] In *Les chats bottés*, the two hustlers at the centre of the movie reverse the social hierarchy which put anglophones at the top and working class Québécois at the bottom. What the two "cats" lack in economic or cultural capital, they gain in social belonging. They also situate the English Canadians as "Other," and assert their own identities as a form of rebellion.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I set out to explain how the *films de fesses* and their reception in the media helped shift the perception of Québécois identity to the point where such

[282] Bakhtin, 10.
[283] Ibid., 81.

culturally specific humour can find an audience. The creation of the rebellious, sexualized Québécois was developed not just through the sexuality portrayed in *Valérie* and *L'initiation*, but also through the way these films were interpreted by the media as being *representative* of Quebec culture and society, such as one critic's claim that, thanks to the success of the film, "Québécois cinema in particular and Canadian cinema in general will be able to show her breasts."[284] Even those critics like André Major, who bemoaned the infantilization of Quebec's popular culture,[285] contributed to the perception of these films as rebellious and oppositional to the powers that be, even when the films themselves were not particularly radical. Using Benjamin as a framework, Marshal reads Valérie (the character) as a "*flânerie*" capable of reconciling the contradictions of Quebec society, and that "throughout the film, it is emphasized that the transformations of Valérie and of 'Quebec' … do not constitute a crisis."[286] Yet, Héroux's claim that he wished to "déshabiller le petite Québécoise" suggests an altogether more confrontational political stance, which was picked up by the media and eventually transformed into "Notre Valérie nationale," a manifestation of the character as a national representative. In this context, Dunning's claim that "clearly, this was not the underlying theme to the film, but it proved to be a dynamite ploy with the more serious media"[287] make a certain amount of sense. Although the narrative contains various allegorical qualities, the text itself never presents a revolutionary political or sexual theme. Nevertheless, its reception and interpretation by the Quebec media turned it into a symbol for Quebec's sexual maturity (or the lack thereof).

[284] Cocke, "'Valérie', ça vaut quoi?"
[285] André Major in "Un cinéma de la chair: de la gloutonnerie à la plénitude," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), May 17, 1969.
[286] Marshall, 67.
[287] Dunning and Brownstein, 72.

In the second chapter, I explored the media's coverage of the seizures of two more *films de fesses* in the spring of 1971. The ensuing public debate opened up the fissures of Quebec society that was being transformed. Prominent members of the clergy waged battle against the metropolitan figures of Montreal's entertainment community, claiming to represent the Catholic working class of Quebec, and municipal police forces (with the aid of the federal criminal code) were pitted against the newly secularized provincial censorship body. Meanwhile, commentators in the media came to the conclusion that progress on the issue of censorship had been made in the past decade, and that a reversion to the censorship regime of the "Great Darkness" was not desirable. Even the opponents of pornography conceded this point, and instead used their positions within the media to attack the laxity of the *Bureau de surveillance* and perceived issues with the Cinema Act of 1967.

This development, however, opened up a space for anti-censorship opinions to prevail. While the American supreme court came up with the much-quoted standard of "redeeming social merit" in their decision regarding *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, much of the Quebec media (intentionally or not) went one step further and argued that these films should be permitted regardless of their content. Intentionally or not, these figures echoed the remarks made by Paul Goodman about the inability of a state force to distinguish between pornography and art. Once again, Quebec's identity was at stake, and the public debate surrounding censorship came to the conclusion that a reversion to the Catholic mores and conservative governance of the Duplessis era was undesirable.

The question of vulgarity and its role in Québécois identity is still relevant to this day. When Xavier Dolan's *Mommy* was released in October of 2014, it sparked a great deal of critical

acclaim and national pride from Quebec's media, but it also brought out criticism in the form of a decades-old debate about the "proper" use of French language in Quebec. In a widely spread letter to the editor of *Le Devoir*, Jean Delisle of Gatineau criticized Dolan's use of *joual*, a dialect of French associated with working class residents of Montreal's south shore suburbs. Delisle praises the film, but criticized Dolan for engaging in a "larval speech," with a "frightening poverty of vocabulary and a wobbly syntactic structure." He goes on to explain that "the franglais that plagues some Quebec films leads us nowhere and pits us into tribalism" before quoting writer and translator Pierre Deviault as saying "If we participate in the greater culture, we need to have a language of high culture."[288] Delisle effectively asks for an erasure of vulgarity from Quebec's cultural exports. Given that the language of *Mommy*'s characters stems from their membership in Quebec's working class, Delisle is effectively asking for the working class to be erased from Dolan's representation of Quebec. Delisle doesn't claim that Québécois French has no place in Quebec cinema, but places *joual* low on the hierarchy of dialects, as a deformed representation of Quebec culture.

Yet, in popular culture, Quebec's identity is formed not just in its relationship to the various hegemonic cultures that surround it (including France, the United States, and of course, the "Rest of Canada"), but also according to its class. According to Marshall, "the embodiments of wealth and legitimate taste in Quebec have historically been the anglophones and an indigenous bourgeoisie which looked to France for its high culture."[289] Just as *joual* has a place in formations of Québécois identity, so does the vulgarity, or the "larvality" of the *films de fesses*. It if is true that popular films such as the *films de fesses* have been, as Marshall suggests

[288] Jean Delisle in "La pseudo-langue de «Mommy»." *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 14 Oct. 2014. Web.
[289] Marshall, 175.

"anathematized, ignored, or at best neglected by the Quebec critical apparatus,"[290] then my hope is that this thesis will help contribute to understanding the role of popular cinema in relation to Quebec's national identity.

[290] Ibid., 176

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Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

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