

**"Canadian and Quebec cinema:
A Critical Dialogue",
the first FSAC / AQEC
conference**



**THE SHAME
and
THE GLORY**

**Notes pour
une recherche
sur un cinéma
désincarné**

by Michael Dorland

"Tous les gens qui s'occupent du cinéma canadien et québécois en ont honte, honte du cinéma canadien"

– Jean Pierre Lefebvre

(All the people who are preoccupied with Canadian and Québécois cinema are ashamed of it, ashamed of Canadian cinema)

"Le froid ni personne ne tue un pays qui a du coeur, ni la tyrannie, ni les trahisons de tant de notables"

– Pierre Perrault

(Not cold nor anybody can kill a nation with heart, not tyranny, nor the treason of so many notables)

"Other than that, Mrs. Kennedy, how did you like the parade?"

– Laval student graffiti

It wasn't the Plains of Abraham, as nobody was conquering anybody, but for an encounter so charged with historical resonances, Quebec City was a more than appropriate venue for the first joint colloquium on Canadian and Quebec cinema organized by the two national associations that represent institutional film studies in Canada.

Instead of a battlefield where musket, sword or tomahawk once clashed, the conference was held within the analytical fields of the more modern forms of warfare befitting a deeply ideological age; namely, in the amphitheatre of a contemporary multiversity.

In the suburb of Ste-Foy, surrounded by shopping malls, and within walking distance of North American fast-food franchise outlets, Laval University has all the warmth of a Department of National Defence complex. Its architecture a blend of hi-tech hi-rise and the heavy granite style of fascist states, the campus forms a large rectangle in whose center sits what used to be the first and largest seminary in Quebec and is now a museum that belongs to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Named after the bishop (and since 1980 the saint) who founded the Catholic Church in Canada – a church whose distinguishing characteristic was its 'internationalism,' its direct links to Rome as opposed to the developing national Catholicisms – Laval University today sees itself as a developmental center for the formation of the new missionaries of the global technological society that operates under "the sign of realism, pragmatism and the will to efficiency."¹

In the driving rain and gusting winds of that week late in May during which the conference was held (May 21-24), participants, unable to traverse the campus above ground, were forced into the underground network of tunnels that interconnect the university buildings. Here, in this cement Alphaville, among the miles of grey concrete, insulated piping, and speeding electric carts of the university support staff, one encountered a very different set of signs: the human response to realism, pragmatism and the will to efficiency, in the postmodern Lescaux traces of contemporary existence. Here on the walls were etched all the images of human longing: laments in Arabic for homelands yet to be created; ruminations on the fragility of the ego; exhortations to faith, hope and charity; declarations of love; paintings of blackness, pastoral landscapes, desiring bodies; insults,

slogans and hieroglyphs in hot pink, silver spray paint, black, white and multi-coloured. "It may look like Agfa-color," commented one comment, "but it's beautiful."

Amphitheatre 3A of the Charles De Konnick building, where the conference took place, was described by one participant as "inhuman." A mix of formica against wood, linoleum and foam rubber, emblemized by a modern crucifix (nobody on it), the amphitheatre consisted of a tribunal that faced the semi-circle of seats with more the appearance of a court-room than a classroom, an effect heightened by a mysterious arrangement of tables and chairs at the base of the tribunal, either for witnesses or scribes. But as these were not used during the conference, they served only to establish a no-man's land of silent absence between the audience and the panellists at the tribunal or at the lectern in the right-hand corner from which hung a plastic *cartouche* naming the university.

To this, then, they had come – for the most part, in the case of the two linguistic communities, to meet for the first time; formally to present 26 papers; less formally to screen some 30 films²; to discuss, argue, exchange ideas, or partake of the subversive activity that Heidegger once termed listening. From Vancouver, Regina, Toronto, Downsview, Ottawa, Kingston, Hull, Montreal, Quebec City, and Paris, from universities, technical institutes, cegeps, and the Cinémathèque québécoise: 90 officially registered colloquants, including an independent scholar; a couple of journalists; cinema students from Laval as well as a contingent from the Toronto-area schools; an institutionally unaffiliated experimental filmmaker; and an Office national du film documentarian. But, principally, colloquants (68.88 per cent of them) were members of the two host associations: 33 from the 150-member Association québécoise des études cinématographiques (AQEC) and 29 from the 62-member Film Studies Association of Canada (FSAC), both of which primarily represent the *corps enseignant* of film studies in this country.

Despite the smallness of its official membership, the FSAC, founded in 1976, according to one of its press releases, is "composed of over 100 film teachers, students, archivists and administrators representing more than 30 institutions across Canada." For its part, the AQEC, founded in 1982, represents, according to current president André Gaudreault, "all the teaching institutions of Quebec – Laval, Concordia, UQAM, and over a dozen cegeps, just to give you an idea."

If it is not the object of this article to detail the structures of film teaching in Canadian higher education,³ an idea of the ratios between teachers and students might be useful, to establish the potential ramifications (and thus statistical importance) of the Quebec City conference. Using the example of the host university, which teaches cinema studies as part of the Department of Literatures, four full-time professors (A. Gaudreault, F. Baby, P. Warren and E. Pelletier) plus two part-time professors carry an annual course-load of between 16-20 courses on cinema. Though there is no degree in cinema at Laval, the university gives an undergraduate minor in

cinema to a student population of 240 (plus 20-30 students at the graduate level). Roughly, then, a conference such as this one could produce a teacher-student multiplier that might vary between 1:6 and 1:8.

Out of this corpus, it is even more difficult to establish Canadian content levels in what is taught. Again, using the example of Laval, the department formally offers only one course on Québécois cinema (Baby), but both Warren (political documentary) and Pelletier (screenwriting and cinematic creation) refer to Québécois examples in their teaching. Gaudreault estimates Canadian (in this case, Québécois) content within Laval cinema studies at around 20 per cent, which, he says, "is probably slightly higher than average."

On the English-Canadian side of film teaching, one of the founding members of FSAC puts Canadian content at "2-3% – and that's being generous." For purposes of mediumistic comparison, Canadian cinema occupies 3-5% of the country's movie screens: on television, Canadian content is at 50% overall (60% in primetime) on CTV, while CBC-TV is over 70%; on private francophone radio in Quebec, the CRTC recently dropped Québécois music content to 55% from 65%; and Canadian pay-TV, English and French, while licensed to 50% as of this year, are pleading for 20% or lower – which is equivalent to the space occupied by Canadian books and magazines in Canada. A recent opinion poll in Quebec, much referred to at the conference, gave Québécois cinema the *only negative rating* in an otherwise approving assessment of cultural production (or what, as Peter Morris reminded the conference, the American political philosopher Walter Lippmann in his 1920's book *The Phantom Public* called "the manufacture of consent").

In such a context, for the FSAC/AQEC to have organized a four-day colloquium devoted to aspects of what is called Canada's "national cinema," a first for the AQEC, a second for the FSAC⁴, is *significant*. How it was significant, and what it was a sign of, are what the following reflections stemming from the conference will be concerned with.⁵

The language of cinema/The languages of Canada's cinemas

On the other hand, cinema is also a language." With that offhanded phrase, André Bazin, the patron saint of film criticism, indicated that future discourses about what aspired to become the seventh art-form would take place under the sign of the linguistic paradigm (i.e., one language in a multiformalist, pluriparadigmatic techno-logos). Thus Babelized, discourse about cinema would become the fantastic production of meta-babble – from the iconologization of Hollywood, early university filmology, to the semiotic codifications of the languages of light particles alternating with darkness upon a blank screen. In the explosion of cinematic chatter that followed the formal penetration of an instrument of technological domination without precedent in human culture, the linguistic reduction to cinema-as-language operated as an ideological reversal that,

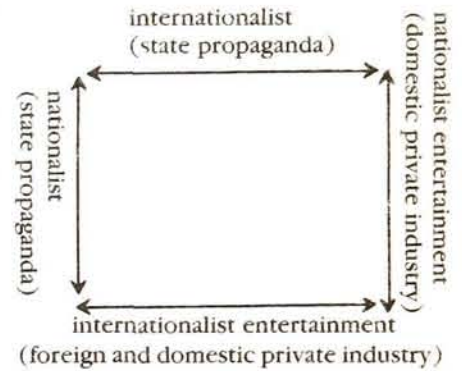
with great precision, masked what had been truly radical about Bazinian criticism before that fatal "On the other hand": namely, that cinema was a *dead form*. Indeed, with some of the easiness that comes with the privilege of being able to draw upon a 1000-year-old cultural tradition, Michel Marie of the University of Paris suggested at the conference that current technological development – essentially the video camera and the VCR – had condemned the film industries to inevitable death, that the corpus of great cinema had anyway always consisted only of marginal films, and that from the point of view of the future of film studies as an intellectual discipline it made no sense to commit its fate to the ups-and-downs of a productivism that was, in any event, doomed to collapse under the weight of its own irrelevance.

Which is not to say that cinema was formally dead, only death formalized – a Frankenstein machine.⁶ And it thus functioned (as Bazin understood and wore himself to an early grave from educative efforts to allay its worst effects) to exterminate all previous cultures, transforming them into a metaculture (of exterminism) that would as gleefully deconstruct the human body as those of whole peoples, civilizations, the stars or planets, given the infinitarian vantage of the phantom public. If Archimedes might have once threatened to topple the world with a lever, the camera and tripod actually did. In an age of totalizing systems (in science and industry), the cinema, as André Gaudreault suggested in his conference text about the massive research project on the European origins of the medium he is undertaking with Tom Gunning of the State University of New York, was their metacultural systematization.⁷

In Canada, however, the cultural origins of cinema are still barely known, in spite of Peter Morris's groundbreaking research. If Germain Lacasse's recent studies of the "historiographe"⁸ have made an important contribution in indicating that, in Quebec, religion and cinema were from the beginning intertwined, at the conference he presented a clever rendition of a chapter the French historian Georges Sadoul might have written about the early years of Canadian and Quebec cinema. But Sadoul's Marxism, even in Lacassian form, says little not already said, though unwittingly perhaps it mocks the equally simplistic reductionism of a later generation of Quebec film critics (around the short-lived *Champ Libre*).⁹

But, as Lacasse pointed out, in Canada the relations between cinema and nationalism are one of Canadian film history's intermittent constants: in periods of nationalism, Canadian cinema 'progresses'; in anti-nationalist periods, cinema in Canada goes internationalist. Yet the arrival of cinema to Canada in the 1890s came at a time of profound pessimism as to the future of what in the 1860s had been proudly called "the new nationality." A decade later, with the imperial patriotism of English Canada in full throat, the first developments of a Canadian national literature, and the first waves of the Canadian social gospel, came the early glimmers of interest by the Canadian state in the cultural-industrial potential of the new medium of cinema for nation-

building. In other words, the 'languages' of Canada's cinemas were dualistic and antinomic from the earliest years: internationalistically religious but nationalist historically in Quebec/internationalistically statist but static nationalistically in English-Canada, forming a foursided schema (to add a fourth dimension to Yves Picard's Dumézilean "trifunctional schema" in his brilliant conference text, "*Les succès du cinéma québécois: des rendez-vous réussis*") that could be represented as follows:



In Canada, the constitution of cinematic language was, like elsewhere, structurally trifunctional (medium, state, industry), but infra-imposed within the universalizing language of a developing techno-culture were Canada's internal micro-languages. The cinema in Canada would thus linguistically, culturally and institutionally be the site of a *stifling contradetermination*.

The state of the nation

And nowhere perhaps is this more readily discernible than in the contradictory discourses within Canadian/Quebec cinemas with respect to the nation/state. At the conference these emerged with remarkable clarity in the two keynote addresses on May 21: historian Peter Morris' outstanding FSAC Martin Walsh Memorial lecture, "Rethinking Grierson: the Ideology of John Grierson," and, for the AQEC, film director Jean Pierre Lefebvre on "Le concept de cinéma national." As Thomas Waugh would remark, not without exaggeration, in the concluding wrap-up session on May 24: "We demystified one of our great men; you sanctified one of yours" (with Laval's conferring a doctorate *honoris causa* upon Pierre Perrault).

Nevertheless the differences are striking: in English-Canadian ideology, the state is the nation abstracted; for French-Canada, the nation is concretized beyond the state. For English-Canada, as Morris put it: "...there must have been something...in Grierson's own ideology that meshed quite closely with something compatible in the socio-cultural climate of Canada." And though Morris kept his dissection of Griersonian ideology predominantly within turn-of-the-century European and American intellectual shifts to what could broadly be termed neo-conservative techno-fascism, Grierson also partakes of the internationalizing, imperial ideology that is institutionally as old as

classical Rome. As G.T. Denison, one of Canada's numerous imperial ideologues, would put it in 1909, referring approvingly to a maxim of Roman politics: "When none was for a party; when all were for the State."¹⁰ Or as Morris cites Grierson: "My view of the State, as you know, is that it is only through the State that the person and the will of the person can be greatly expressed." But for French-Canada, as Lefebvre stated it, "Un cinéma national est celui qui, issu d'une nation donnée, représente, exprime et intéresse cette même nation, qu'il soit géré par l'état ou pas."

In Griersonian ideology, cinema is an extension of the state and is unthinkable without the state. (Where that left the other side of cinema in Canada that Grierson contemptuously called "the movies" was, as Morris has shown elsewhere, if not in a knot of contradictions, then at least firmly under Hollywood control.)¹¹ In Québécois auteurism, cinema as a creative form is, as Lefebvre put it, born of the "milieu ambiant" that is by definition national: "Le concept de nation est celui du milieu ambiant (qui) se touche et se combine." In the latter case, cinema is generated from within the national body. In the former, cinema de-generates (into movies) without the iron hand or patriarchal rule of the state. One emerges from life/play/art; the other is imposed as function/order/technique. Or to put the difference more provocatively, national cinema is feminine; state-cinema is masculine.

Now there are other ways, as the conference also showed, to bring out the differences between the Canadian discourses on cinema. Considering that Morris is an intellectual and Lefebvre a technological artisan, one could, for example, polarize the two along the theory/practice dichotomy.

After Grierson left Canada, what remained of the Film Board idea was steadily outflanked by American industrial models of motion-picture production. English-Canadian filmmaking practices, abandoned to a marginalized fate, increasingly fell back upon an aesthetic formalism, as Pierre Pageau noted of Colin Low at the conference. Meanwhile, French-Canada, out of what Pierre Véronneau in his paper termed the "relative autonomy" of the Film Board on the one hand and Radio-Canada on the other, went on to develop an approximate but, by English-Canadian standards authentic, 'national cinema.' The relevant discourses thus split along aesthetic versus sociological lines.

Within each discourse, however, further fragmentations occur. The English-Canadian aesthetic-theoretical current is itself made up of at least four strands: Anglo-American cinematic and aesthetic avant-gardism; American translations of French Metzian semiotics; American translations and retheorizations of French feminism; and lastly a weak theoretical reflection upon Canadian experimental filmmaking or what a recent set of screenings in Kitchener rather perfectly termed "practices in isolation."

In Quebec the dominant sociological tradition in cinema-related discourses is differently but equally hybrid: strongly influenced by the empirical strains in American sociology and ethnography at one end, and the most mechanistically

deterministic end of the Marxist spectrum at the other, though, in mid-field, with an underused but richly original theorization stemming from the ideology critique and negative theology of culture of Fernand Dumont and the critical sociology of Marcel Rioux.¹² Quebec cinematic discourse, aside from its feminist component, has curiously been barely affected by French psychoanalytic-derivative film theory. Except for slender theorizations on *cinéma direct* (of which Claude Chabot's was an instance at the conference), the discourse tends predominantly towards an empiricism (Pageau, Lever and Véronneau) which, given its theoretical modesty so far, derives its intellectual substance from an isolated self-reflexivity upon Quebec film practices and the ideologies within Québécois political/institutional history.

However, to pursue these themes in greater detail here would only obscure in nuance what the Quebec colloquium uncovered as the primary (repressed) subtext common to both Quebec and Canadian discourses on cinema. And this would not be different strategizations with respect to state or nation, nor differences in ideology-formation or critique; indeed, not difference as much as the deferral of the fact of a *common genealogy*. As Janine Marchessault would put it in her colloquium paper on "The Emergence of a New Paradigm":

Being part of two cultures is like being a shifting signifier, which isn't bad given its powers to disrupt, to confuse and dislodge meaning even in some of the more anal recesses of signification. Certainly this negativity provides an essential strategy for unblocking a culture which threatens to deteriorate into positivism.

And the strategic paradigm by which to signify the critical dialogue that permeates Canadian and Quebec cinemas is, in a word, feminism. To quote Marchessault once again:

It is at this critical juncture - around the problem of 'what we are now, this very moment' as Michel Foucault remarked - that feminist... and nationalist concerns intersect. In... the current socio-political context, it is perhaps no longer a question of naming and not naming but rather of how to go about naming: how to redress the affirmative gesture without reproducing the structures of positivist hegemony.

Images of the body/cinema as: the body of images

As the 16th century German woodcut that illustrates this article indicates, the body is the thing-in-itself; all else is representation. But, here, between the body's inscription (as the site of a text that can be signed and designed) and the body's images (as the site of a monstration that can be demonstrated), might there not be a space for exploring, in colloquium co-organizer Denise Perusse's suggestion, the "irreconcilable differences" between sexes/bodies; cinema/life; or nations? And within the 'irreconcilability' of

Canadian and Québécois cinematic discourses, might that not mean that there are at least two feminisms, each searching separately for representations of the national body (beyond either shame or glory)?

The crucial importance not only of the colloquium's feminist panel, "Women in Cinema" (May 22), but of the contribution of the women colloquians in general, was that they were the only ones to raise such questions. (Which is not to say that other attempts weren't made to address other kinds of difference; for a positive example, Pierre Pageau's "Colin Low et Pierre Perrault: Points de convergence" or negatively Jean Pierre Lefebvre's smug dismissal of all English-Canadian filmmaking as totally American-derivative.)

On the feminist panel, Denise Perusse in her analysis of *Mourir à tue-tête* (1976) and *La cuisine rouge* (1979) found that the films posit "une pratique sociale féminine où l'altérité est escamotée;" that is, a practice that would on the one hand break the isolation and silence of women and on the other reject the "modèles traditionnels d'occupation de l'espace selon le sexe" in the search for "de nouvelles formes de représentation et création pour les femmes."

If Brenda Longfellow situated "the tradition of Quebec nationalist and feminist filmmaking in terms of a resistance to the totalizing models of both Hollywood and the Griersonian model of documentary," Quebec feminist film, she argued, can be read critically via French feminist theorizations of *écriture féminine* ("a practice of difference") but still within the Québécois

collective process of constructing a nation, a national identity, through the articulation of image and sound, a process, with respect to the feminist tradition, that represented an evocation of the feminine in relation to the imaginary and desire, as a specific space on the borders of patriarchal culture.

However, both readings of aspects of Quebec feminist cinema (in Perusse's case as a utopian social practice and in Longfellow's as an atopian textual practice) proved problematic - at least to male historians of Quebec cinema Pageau and Lever, and especially around the nation of *écriture féminine*. For Lever in particular, if *écriture féminine* has universal validity as a concept, can there be a specific *écriture féminine québécoise* and, if so, might it not be another difference within a difference?

But since Longfellow's and Perusse's papers were the only two to focus on Québécois feminist film, the theoretical gambit shifted to the English-Canadian feminists who, with dazzling interpretative creativity, acquitted themselves of the task, in Marchessault's phrase, of disrupting and confusing meaning from the anal recesses of signification.

On the opening day (May 21), Joanne Yamaguchi, speaking on the utterly unlikely topic of "Freedom in Canadian Cinema" managed to explode the narrow moulds of interpretation in which Canadian cinema languishes. Arguing that "Canada's Canada is iconographically free (from Hollywood stereotypes of Canada) to express itself from original experience," Yamaguchi, using Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin*

in particular, but also referring to *The Bay Boy*, *Mon Oncle Antoine, Who Has Seen The Wind*, and *Outrageous*, looked at the "possibilities for a cinema claiming its right to freedom of iconography." Suggesting a model for Canadian film analysis that she termed "parallel improvisational processing" of "archival recessive universals," Yamaguchi examined nine primary images from *My American Cousin*. For each image she shifted through five multi-vocal readings in an infinite play of "non-exclusive interpretations." "When Canadian cinema lets go the Hollywood hills," she stated, "and follows its own intuitions, then genuine freedom of expression results in a non-systematic eroticism which is a quantum leap beyond formulae."

Asked by a stunned member of the audience, "what the point" of her talk was, Yamaguchi grinned and replied, "There isn't one." Which was, of course, the 'point': namely, to paraphrase Rousseau, that Canadian cinema is born free, yet is everywhere in chains.

With day three's panel on the Canadian Avant-Garde, the fundamental issues came out into the open. Kay Armatage, in a paper entitled "The Feminine Body" analyzing Joyce Wieland's 1964 film *Water Sark*, argued that

As an artist Wieland has consistently and consciously sought out the feminine precisely as a terrain that has remained unexplored by her male counterparts...not simply a textual practice, but (as) the insistence on the feminine body as the subject...

Some of the transgressive implications of Armatage's reading of Wieland are far-reaching. Not only does she suggest that Wieland's film antedated the domestic upheavals of (a later) French feminism, but even more importantly perhaps, that Wieland's place among the Big Five of the Canadian experimental avantgarde (with Snow, Rimmer, Razutis and Elder) is primordial and, indeed, constitutive:

This conscious, self-consciously feminine enterprise has been realized in the 1980s through textual strategies which Joyce Wieland developed in the early 1960s: all of the devices of structural avantgarde, as well as the fragmentation of the body, the play of images against reflecting surfaces, the invention of cinematic languages which emphasized diffusion, distortion, condensation, fragmentation, loss of perspective, and so on. (emphasis added).

Thirdly, having discovered the feminine body in *Water Sark*, Wieland "proceeded to inscribe the trace of this body onto the human, even male body" - for example, onto Pierre Vallières' mouth (in her *Pierre Vallières*) which "becomes...the vulval lips which speak in the language of another," or across Pierre Trudeau's distorted features in *Reason Over Passion*, her extraordinary film where Wieland uncovers the Canadian national body.

This toppling of the male pantheon of Canadian avant-gardism was quietly sustained by Laurie McNiece's re-situation of Bruce Elder's filmmaking among "the concerns of avantgarde filmmakers elsewhere" (my emphasis); that is to say, among the internationalizing and

imperial traditions, whether classical or avantgardist, of male disembodiment. As McNiece cited Elder, "To pretend that our consciousness...escapes conditioning by the situation in which it finds itself is...the most terrifying aspect of our modern technical system. Our 'individual' wills have been brought into conformity... we... have become technique."

In fact, perhaps to pretend that "we have become technique" might instead precisely be what is most terrifying about the modern technical system. For as Armatage noted, citing the French feminist Josette Féral, one route of escape is still possible before succumbing to that fatal conformity:

Without speech and without voice, disappropriated because of her sexuality and her body, she is driven to the gestural expression of the hysteric where she finds, temporarily, an escape from this constraining world which imprisons her.

"Interpretive delirium," then, as one participant labelled the feminist interventions – or the way toward the way out? That was not the least of the challenges the feminists brought to Quebec City.

Problems and more problems

But if the feminist contributions were, at least to my way of seeing, the most intriguing indications of possible approaches towards opening up a larger site for theorizing the practices of what Peter Morris called "this stubborn insistence, that won't go away, of wanting to make our own films here," these were not, as the other conference papers would suggest, either directly or indirectly, without problems.

First off the mark with perhaps the most serious problematization was Yves Picard's attack against what he called "the paradigm of the mirror" that underlies the entire sociological current in Québécois film discourse, a mirror that sits within a frame mounted from the complex interactions of the apparatuses of state and industry. But the mirror of representation is also, according to Armatage, the reflecting or distorting surface (in Irigaray's notion, the *speculum*) whose speculations are the object of feminist reappropriations. Secondly, and perhaps even more radically in probing the deep structures and complicities of what Picard called the role of the "Etat-diffracteur" (the diffractory State) is that the glorification of the state's power to protect (and serve the capitalist economy) is articulated (in Québécois cinema at any rate) via representations of the feminine. And from Valérie in the hit feature that so successfully first undressed the "petite Québécoise", to Rose-Aimée in J.A. Martin *photographe*, to Bernadette in *La Vraie nature de Bernadette* and, lest we forget, all the films starring Carole Laure's body, it is these foreground representations of the feminine that, as Picard says, "tout au long de l'aventure du cinéma québécois de fiction... sont applaudis par la collectivité."

Thirdly since, as Picard points out, all the female characters that dominate Quebec cinema "sont toujours confrontées au capital, qu'elles décident de

quitter ou de combattre," the symbolic victories of the feminine in outwitting evil capitalists translates into box-office successes that only further reinforce the overdetermining role of the state in the industry the state protects.

If Picard is correct in arguing that what one could call patriarchal appropriations of the feminine are what fuse state, industry and the public into a trifunctional complex whose structures produce and reproduce the maintenance of what he calls "un univers créatif asservi," then the problematic of the Canadian and Québécois socio-symbolic institution of the cinematic imaginary has perhaps been scarcely addressed by feminist theory and filmmaking.

Another (implicit) problematization (of feminism, among other ideologies) was posed by Evan William Cameron's "How To Measure An Ideology," a logical positivist/radical empiricist interrogation of current ideologizing 'theoreticism' in contemporary film studies discourse.¹³ If, as Cameron argued, an ideology (or, what's the same to him, a theory) "is a system of predicates by which to describe the world whose key terms express simultaneously approval or disapproval of the objects or events described," then "theories can never be known to be true...Neither, however, can they be known to be false." Only "testable conjectures," Cameron said, but without ever explaining (or theorizing?) what these might be, can provide "the source of future innovation."

Additional problems that the colloquium generated turned around questions of the specificity of Québécois cinema. Thus what Bart Testa liked about Denys Arcand's films is their anti-lyrical turn against "the spiritual cinema (of the Jutras, Lefebvres or Leducs) opening out to the aura of its culture." Arcand's films become instead "de-eroticized" social dramas in "sarcastic relationship with...low American genre clichés."

In a fascinating paper entitled "Les Québécois et le cinéma: un mode spécifique d'exhibition," Paul Warren argued that authentic Québécois cinematography (e.g., Pierre Perrault), by its refusal of American industrial models of fictional re-embodiment, is an *anti-cinema*. Yves Lever's detailed content analysis of *Objectif*, Quebec's first modern film publication (1960-1967), captured a critical moment in the passage from a religiously informed view of cinema on its way towards an as-yet undefined critical secularity. Finally, a four-man panel on May 22 traced other aspects and influences relating to the filmmaking of Pierre Perrault (who, that evening and not without some mild embarrassment for a man who quit practicing law because, as he said, he couldn't bear to address judges as "Your Lordship", accepted an honorary doctorate, complete with epitoga, from Laval). If François Baby could argue that Perrault's filmmaking was a manifestation of traditional oral civilization, Pierre Pageau could respond that Perrault was Quebec cinema's outstanding *modern* filmmaker.

What modernism and postmodernism might be was the subject of a flurry of debate that followed Mary Alemany-Galway's reading (May 23) of Montreal filmmaker Rafael Bendahan's short *Le jardin (du Paradis) / The*

Garden as a postmodern (i.e., preeminently local) film.

Back to business as usual

If the Quebec colloquium proved anything, it was that the Canadian and Québécois cinematic discourses, once they've gotten over the shock of the other's languages, have a lot to say to one another. Much more perhaps than one might have thought; and certainly more than has ever been said before. I have tried to indicate some of the areas where much remains to be said, especially about the highly complex interactions between the four discourses of embodiment in Canadian/Québécois cinema: state/nation, institutions/industry, films, and public/bodies politic. Whether it will get said or when is, of course, another matter altogether. Five years went by since the last FSAC conference on Quebec cinema; four before the first hosted by AQEC.

In the current climate of freer intellectual trade, the two associations intend to get together again next year – in Montreal this time as co-hosts to the far larger American Society for Cinema Studies. Meanwhile, it's back to business as usual.

"Exploring Canadian film," Toronto critic Piers Handling once wrote, "is analogous to meeting a person suffering from amnesia. Their past is no longer remembered. It has no considered relationship to their present." One can lament this; one can cope with it; either way, one lives with it. Whether it will ever significantly change is more than just another question: it is the bile that is secreted like acid from within the poison of a 'national culture' that is willfully maintained in a permanent condition of servitude. "Don't they ever talk about anything other than Canadian or Quebec films?" inquired one puzzled participant. Sure they do, and the Quebec colloquium was thus the exception that confirms the rule.

"Il pleut à boire deboutte sur le cinéma québécois," said Jean Pierre Lefebvre at the colloquium, "mais il faut tourner quand-même, ce qui rend l'histoire encore plus mélancolique quand on voudrait la voir radieuse." That's one perspective.

Another was stated (in *Le Devoir*, 31/5/86), with splendid sarcasm, by Denys Arcand, fresh from his *Déclin de l'empire américain* triumph at Cannes this year: "Espérons que cela dure et qu'on ne change rien au système actuel."

A third perspective, as one of the Laval tunnel graffiti inscribed it, is poetic: "L'espérance, comme la phosphorescence, n'est visible que dans l'obscurité la plus noire."

And if it was dark that week in Quebec City, and cold and wet, inside Amphitheatre 3A, those occasional, spectacular moments of brightness were signs that a critical dialogue had actually begun. Que cela dure et qu'on ne change rien au système actuel... ●

Notes

1/ Service des relations publiques, Université Laval, "L'Université Laval dans le monde," *Au fil des événements*, Vol. 21, no. 34, 22 mai, 1986, pp. 8-9. On Mgr Laval and the origins of the Catholic church in Canada, see André Vachon, *François de Laval*, Toronto & Quebec, 1969, pp. 47 ff. As Pierre Véronneau noted in

his conference text, "L'idéologie de contestation chez les cinéastes francophones onétiens à l'époque de Duplessis," the Social Sciences Faculty at Laval under Jean-Charles Falardeau would later become a "foyer bien connu d'opposition au duplessisme," p. 6.

2/ Screenings ranged from the features and shorts specifically discussed in the papers presented by colloquants to, on May 23, an evening of English-Canadian experimental films presented by Rick Hancox who showed films by Barbara Sternberg (*A Trilogy*), Lorne Marin (*Trains of Thought*), Richard Kerr (*His Romantic Movement*), Hancox's own *Beach Events*, Chris Gallagher (*Mirage*), David Rimmer (*As Seen on TV*), John Paizs (*Springtime in Greenland*) and Phil Hoffman (*70, 200!*)

I was particularly impressed by Toronto experimentalist Michael Cartmell's three films (*May 24*), made between 1984-1985, *Cartouche*, *Prologue Infinité Obscure*, and *In the Form of the Letter X*. If Cartmell describes his films, *Infinité Obscure* in particular, as "a remake of Moby Dick", and that's by no means an erroneous description, his work seemed to me more a visual and verbal running commentary upon the conference's feminist theorizations. Cartmell implacably explores and deconstructs from within, via a profoundly Bazinian cinema that is all mummification effects, the great male signifiers of Sex, Death, Cinema, and God. Cartmell's films are filled with floating, talking heads that scream their negativity, bloodlust, rapine and savagery, all in the name of a dead god: "I shudder at the rigor of the ancient Egyptians," says a voice in *Cartouche* against images of the great pyramids, "it was here that the idea of Jehovah was born." Profound explorations of the "hideous allegory" (Melville) of naming, Cartmell's films, if much about the death of God the father, are also, in the loving images of Cartmell's son Sam, about the growth of the son/sun, and so too cinema, but within the recognition that film images are only meaningful as signs of death (past or future).

3/ A task that by rights belongs to Peter Harcourt, which he is planning to explore in a forthcoming issue of *Cinema Canada*.

4/ In Ottawa in 1981, the FSAC held a conference on Québécois cinema that, in one view, was so badly attended by English-Canadians that the formation a year later of the AQEC as a separate organization must have come as no surprise.

5/ The host associations intend to bring out in book form the proceedings of the colloquium within forthcoming months.

6/ For a view of the rise of television as a Frankenstein machine, see Joyce Nelson, *The Perfect Machine: Essays on Television, Technology and the Patriarchy*, Toronto: Between the Lines Press, forthcoming. On cinema and death, the locus classicus is still Bazin's "Ontology of the photographic image" in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, U. Cal. Press, 1967, and also Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, New York, 1985. In addition a French translation of recent Spanish philosophy brings that nation's powerful morbidity to re-examining the meaning of photography in *La photographie/le Néant*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.

7/ Gaudreault and Dunning head, along with Laval graduate students Alain Lacasse, Sonia Lemelin and Andrée Michaud, as well as others, the "Projet d'analyses filmographiques" (PAF), a \$90,000-budget research project with global implications for the history of the origins of cinema. Theoretically attempting, as Gaudreault put it at the conference, to reconcile "synchrone et diachronie, structure et développement, système et évolution, théorie (du cinéma) et histoire (du cinéma)," the project is analyzing cinema as the passage "d'un système 'totalisant' à l'autre," and how within that passage cinematic languages and functions change. With a computerized classification system generated from within the project itself, the PAF is compiling a detailed analytic filmography of every available film from 1900-1908 still extant at the British National Film Archive, the Service des Archives du Film de Bois d'Arcy, the Cinémathèque française, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Publication of PAF's first volume, based on viewing and analysis of the National Film Archive collection in London, is slated for 1989.

8/ See Germain Lacasse, *L'Historiographe: Les débuts du spectacle cinématographique au Québec*, *Les Dossiers de la Cinémathèque québécoise* No. 15, 1985.

9/ See Réal LaRochelle's paper at the 1983 AQEC conference, "L'expérience de la revue 'Champ Libre'," *Le cinéma: théorie et discours*, *Les Dossiers de la Cinémathèque*, No. 12, 1984.

10/ *The Struggle for Imperial Unity*, cited in Frank H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation*, Toronto Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1964, p. 15.

11/ See Peter Morris, "Backwards to the Future: John Grierson's Film Policy for Canada," in Gene Walz, ed., *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History*, Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1986, pp. 17-35.

12/ See Michael Dorland & Arthur Kroker, "Culture Critique and the New Quebec Sociology," Introduction to Michael Weinstein, *Fernand Dumont*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985.

13/ The concept of 'theoreticism' is used by Frederick Crews, who singles out American academic film studies as "a pugnacious clique" dominated by "imported" theory, see "In the Big House of Theory," *The New York Review*, XXXIII, No. 9, May 29, 1986, pp. 36-42.