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MODERN TIMES

Time and the Modern in the Fiction Films of William D. MacGillivray

MA Thesis
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Dedication

The future and the past are but the actual value we all give to the present, where the times of mankind, being many, are one.
Carlos Fuentes
Latin America: At War With The Past

Literary criticism should arise out of a debt of love.
George Steiner
Tolstoy or Dostoevsky

This thesis, too, arises out of a debt of love. Many debts of love, too numerous to list here. I want to dedicate this writing to my parents, Thomas Holland McSorley and Terese Madeleine Marmen, who ask only that I be curious and compassionate, and to Janet Stinson and Maya Stinson, who teach me courage, generosity, and the protean strength of love.

For all my many teachers, in all our many times together and apart, I remain grateful and humble.

Contents

Chapter 1

Frame Lines

I. MODERN

Modernity does not just appear as a result of any 'natural' evolution; there are many discontinuities, with both the rise and development of the modern world creating quite different forms of what it is to be modern. ... In short, there are different modern times and different modern spaces in a world of multiple modernities.
Peter Taylor[1]

Don Quixote tells us that being modern is not a question of sacrificing the past in favour of the new, but of maintaining, comparing, and remembering values we have created, making them modern so as not to lose the value of the modern.
Carlos Fuentes [2]

The work of contemporary Atlantic Canadian filmmaker William D. MacGillivray is a set of confrontations. His five fiction feature films investigate, perhaps even recalibrate, conventionally understood ideas of centre and margin, time and space, and most pointedly, traditional and modern. What MacGillivray presents in his work is not, in the manner of George Grant, a lament for a traditional or old and noble world locked inexorably in the processes of technological erasure. Instead, echoing the actively ambivalent response to technology-induced change advanced by Harold Innis and others, what the films reveal is a range of possible alternative critical positions within the experience of modern life in contemporary Atlantic Canada. As Carlos Fuentes reminds us, this does not necessarily entail 'sacrificing the past in favour of the new,' as much

of the rhetoric surrounding notions of the modern insists, but rather the 'maintaining, comparing, and remembering values we have created, making them modern so as not lose the value of the modern.' In a sense, this process is about remembering time. Fundamentally, in creating rich, complex narratives about a part of Canada facing considerable and rapid change, MacGillivray is making his own cinematic 'plea for time' in his confrontations with notions of what constitutes a modern existence. It is also a plea for space, to remember that as there are 'different modern times' there are also 'different modern spaces.'

This is a process and an articulation that does not always accord with the notion of the modern as it is described outside Atlantic Canada. It certainly does not accord with an historically rooted and still pervasive body of Canadian thought which characterizes Atlantic Canada as traditional and deeply conservative, as resistant to change, and as staunchly anti-modern.[3] In the films of William D. MacGillivray, the condition of being modern is revealed and expressed in how we, individually and collectively, negotiate social, cultural, and economic changes and encroachments which are often technologically driven and in the service of a set of interests located and controlled elsewhere. These narratives do not prescribe solutions or offer up answers, but they *do* present serious questions about how, in the face of such encroachments, we construct and understand our ideas of the modern. Borrowing substantially from Innis and blending his notions of spatial and temporal biases in communication, MacGillivray does not concentrate totally on the question of *what* is modern, but

asks instead *when* is modern, and, reformulating Northrop Fyre's famous query, *where* is modern?

Just what do we mean by modern? This is an enormous and admittedly nebulous question. Do we mean modernity? Do we mean modernization? Do we mean the technologically advanced society which has separated church and state and is driven principally by systems of monetary exchange? Do we mean the triumph of secular thought, individual autonomy, and democracy? [4]We mean all these things, of course, all these outward manifestations of the modern imagination which have regarded the modern as a progressive historical march from ignorance to enlightenment.[5] Times are improving, as time marches forward from the ancient to the modern. As John Jervis notes, "...this evolutionary conception of history has been fundamental to modernity itself." [6] There is, in other words, a teleological certitude to both the description of the 'modern' as well as its historiographical interpretations. Jurgen Habermas concurs, declaring that "Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself." [7] With regard to the ethos of modernity, the lived practice of its underlying assumptions, Berman describes it well: "Modernists demand deeper and more radical renewals: modern men and women must become the subjects as well as the objects of modernization; they must learn to change the world that is changing them, and make it their own." [8] Berman goes on to characterize what he regards as the distinctively modern impulse: "...a process of incessant enquiry, discovery, and innovation, and a

shared determination to transform theory into practice, to use all we know to change the world." [9] Agency, time-as-progress, individualism, will: these are seen as the contours of the modern attitude, the modern experience.

Another aspect of the 'evolutionary conception of history' of the modern is to be found in its places of origin. Typical constructions or theories of the modern argue that it is generally accepted to be a concept which has a predominantly urban (and, significantly, northern) [10] genealogy. Within this construction, it is understood that the modern is created in the cities and is disseminated to the towns and villages as a doctrine of improvement. Derived from English literature but common to many forms of cultural expression in Great Britain and elsewhere, Raymond Williams describes it this way:

> On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of *an achieved centre*: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. [11]

With this characterization in mind, Williams connects the city to notions of the modern, "Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning -- features of nineteenth century social experience and of a common interpretation of the new scientific world-view – have found, in the City, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness." [12] There is a centre where the modern is created, the city, and various margins to which it is scattered, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. This is generally how the process has been understood, conceptualized, even internalized and then applied in the design of

public policy, corporate strategy, and, linked to the topic at hand, the film industry.

As we shall see, MacGillivray's work does accord with some of these characterizations and contours of the modern. They are also seriously contested in his films, both in theory and in practice. MacGillivray relocates the possibilities of production of the modern into rural space and into a temporal framework which embraces the past as a constituent part of the present and, of course, the future. It is a quietly radical and perhaps even reactionary relocation of the idea of the modern, stating emphatically that the modern is produced in Cape Breton, in Halifax, in St. John's, indeed anywhere where values, however received or inculcated, are consciously reshaped in ever-shifting contexts. Or, to invoke Fuentes again, wherever those values can be remembered and made modern. Pursuing this spatial orientation of the modern, Miles Ogborn argues,

> Modernity's geographies are not, therefore, place-specific in any singular sense. These differentiated geographies are made in the relationships between places and across spaces. Again, this has tended to be understood as the exportation of modernity from centre to periphery, both for the metropole and empire and for city and country. This conceptualization, however, ignores the crucial ways in which these geographies of connection are moments in the making of modernities rather than being matters of transfer or imposition. [13]

Throughout MacGillivray's films we must therefore be alert to how his narratives are engaged in "...considering the production of a variety of 'spaces of modernity.'" [14] Similarly, and this will guide our approach to MacGillivray's own attitudes, Jervis argues that the conceptions of modernity as received are hardly

universal; on the contrary, the modern is a cultural construction which affirms itself from within. States Jervis:

> There is Western modernity; but there are, after all, other ways of being modern, other cultures and civilizations of modernity, other ways of incorporating or destroying the non-modern; and all of these are now interrelated. Perhaps, indeed, these mutations have been there from the start; perhaps modernity has always existed primarily as a story that exaggerates its own unity and distinctiveness. [15]

It is this very exaggeration of unity and distinctiveness that MacGillivray's work confronts. The confrontations have a specifically Canadian context and tenor, but they also suggest broader lines of enquiry. Significantly, one of these lines ponders the unexamined temporal dimension inherent to the processes of the production and reception of various cultural forms. In this, MacGillivray is pursuing a decidedly Innisian vector of re-instituting time itself as a central component of the debate about what constitutes modern expression in modern, or even in the so-called 'postmodern,' cultural forms. If the hydra head of this concept called 'modern' (modernity, modernization, Modernism) claims a privileged temporal status as being 'forward' or 'future' orientated (eg. avant-garde means 'ahead of the rest'), then what does that indicate about the ideologies, politics, and cultural forces which produced the notion in the first place? Without a sense of time, how can we understand, let alone validate, the narrative history of the modern, which, as Habermas noted, appears to generate its own 'normativity' out of itself? As Charles Taylor insists, correctly, regarding a possible cartography of modern selfhood and identity, "... we need to see the map in a temporal dimension. Not everyone is living by views which have

evolved recently." [16]Sounding very Innisian, too, Peter Osborne offers a similar confrontation: "The historical study of cultural forms needs to be rethought within the framework of competing philosophies and politics of time." [17] So then , we must ask: what time is it, and where are we, when the apparently momentous modern ascends and 'all that is solid melts into air'?[18] Such vertiginous questions, derived principally from Innis, animate and inflect MacGillivray's distinctive cinematic mapping of time, space, the self, and the modern.

II. ATLANTIC CANADA: HISTORY AND REPRESENTATION

This 'mapping' is, of course, related to the actual map of Canada. Born in 1946 in St. John's in pre-Confederation Newfoundland, MacGillivray has lived and worked in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for over two decades. He is an Atlantic Canadian. As such, he is aware of, sensitive to, and defiant about a series of discourses within Canadian culture which regard this part of Canada in a specific way and from a powerful but limited perspective. This awareness is structured into his films and dramatized in various ways, indirectly and directly, and it informs arguments his various films make about when and where the modern is to be understood in a Canadian context. As part of that context is historical, let us begin earlier, before maps even bore the name of 'Canada.'

The four British colonies of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, themselves European imperialist layers over ancient aboriginal societies such as Micmaq, Beothuk, and Maliseet, are some of the

oldest settled areas in what is now known as Canada.[19] These independent and interdependent colonies enjoyed considerable prosperity throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, with thriving industries in fish, lumber, mining, and shipbuilding. There was also vast and profitable trading with what is now called the Atlantic Rim, principally with England and with the newly formed American states along the eastern seaboard. After much fierce debate (in which some, like Prince Edward Island's Cornelius Howat, argued that "We would be no better off than if we were Russian slaves," [20] within a Confederation agreement with Upper and Lower Canada), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia joined the Dominion of Canada on 22 May 1867. Prince Edward Island became a Canadian province six years later in 1873; Newfoundland did not enter Confederation until 1949.

Both as an instance of colonial (and imperial) *realpolitik* and as an enlightened act of flexible political and economic collaboration, joining Confederation meant then, as it does now, different things to the different signatories. Harold Innis summarizes the interested parties' perspectives this way, "In the East, Nova Scotia had regarded Confederation as a device for opening American markets, whereas the St. Lawrence region thought of it as a basis of protection against American goods." [21] Consequently, Innis continues, "The Maritimes felt the full impact of capitalism in the destruction of wooden shipbuilding and in extensive transportation to central Canada. Their iron and steel and coal industries, developed to answer the demand for rails and the needs of industrial expansion in Canada, were among the first to feel the effects

of a decline in the rate of that expansion." [22] Canadian economic historian Robin Neill describes the historical trajectory in this fashion,

> Following a brief period of industrial expansion, the pendulum of Maritimes policy began its backward swing. In the 1880s, continentalization of economic activity in Canada drained the Maritimes of ownership and head offices. Whether for political reasons or economic reasons, and which is correct is still a topic for economic historians in the region, the Maritimes failed to keep pace with the industrial heartland of Canada. [23]

As Harold Innis would characterize it, "The Maritime Provinces have unfortunately been outside the main continental developments although they have contributed to the main task through exports of coal, iron, and steel, brains, and brawn." [24]

The reasons for the decline of Atlantic Canada after Confederation should not be oversimplified. It was not all good before; it was not all bad after. So then: not oversimplification, which leads to the development of a complacent victim position,[25] but not amnesia, either. Historian E.R. Forbes claims that "The British North America Act created a country which was a tightly integrated union for purposes of trade and defence. It allowed businesses to locate at the centre and draw their profits from the Maritimes or B.C. without reference to provincial boundaries." [26] More provocatively and polemically still, Gary Burrill declares that, "...the Maritimes has spent its entire history as a region at the wrong end of a core-periphery relationship, and its development since 1867 has been thwarted by policies designed to promote the interests of the region at the other end of that relationship, Central Canada." [27] Equally as forceful, Ian McKay states that, "In the 1920s the Maritime provinces were ushered into their Twentieth Century role

in modern Canada: one of dependence and underdevelopment, out-migration and unemployment, political marginality and cultural exclusion." [28] The history of Atlantic Canada is complex and troubled within Canada. If that history, as Burrill and McKay accurately suggest, is dominated by a real and perceived powerlessness and marginality, it is also bolstered by adaptation and adjustment, as Gwendolyn Davis contends,

> Already in the 1920s and 1930s, the forces of globalization were beginning to infiltrate Atlantic Canadian life through the residual impact of the First World War, foreign investment, expanding communications networks and travel outside the region for work. The traditional world of Atlantic Canada was then beginning to dissolve. It still continues to do so – not disappearing, but changing, questioning, and challenging versions of our history. [29]

What we are really talking about is the contextual construction of perception and knowledge. Who speaks for whom, and why? An example of this is the by now firmly entrenched terminology, developed in central Canada, of 'have,' and 'have-not' provinces, of which the Atlantic provinces are the latter. While this designation may be empirically demonstrable, the reasons for its coming into being – its context -- are hotly contested. We have also witnessed, since the early 1990s, increasing protests about federal transfer payments to and equally shared constitutional power with Atlantic Canada.[30] The reasons for these attitudes must be placed in their historical context. The terms of the debate, rooted in what can only be described as ahistorical materialism and demographic dogmatism, reflect an ideology and political praxis which both cynically ignores history and, as Innis had warned of particular economic philosophies and their deliverance by various emergent media technologies,[31] demolishes time itself.

The terms of the debate also claim to define and represent Atlantic Canada, dispensing simultaneously description and prescription to putative margins from putative centres.

Along with this contested and deeply troubled history of Atlantic Canada within Canadian history specifically and North American development generally, another component of the context within which MacGillivray produces his images is the popular image of Atlantic Canada as a place of unhurried innocence, natural beauty, and populated by pure, simple people unaware of or uninterested in contemporary debates about culture, politics, etc. This image is false. This image is constructed. Again, E.R. Forbes observes that throughout Canadian history, lived and written *after* Confederation, perhaps the "...most pervasive stereotype of the region was its supposed 'conservatism.' Employed in this sense the term usually meant timid, backward, or set in their ways." [32] Indeed, the stereotype could be used against itself, as Forbes explains: "Local reformers invoked myths and stereotypes of Maritime conservatism as social criticism. To many Canadians they served as necessary corollaries to the logic which insisted that Canada's dynamism came principally from its western frontier." [33] The production of this stereotype is a complex and ongoing process, and is now even more implicated in accelerated discourses of tourism, communications technology, and consumer capitalism.

Yet, as Ian McKay argues in THE QUEST OF THE FOLK, images of a 'traditional' Atlantic Canadian society and experience are as ideologically suspect as they are broadly embraced. While rooted in a reflection of one aspect of

historical and lived reality, they are constructs framed by the desires and ideologies of those who create and consume them. Often created *in* urban Atlantic Canada, they perpetuate folkloric rural stereotypes for popular consumption by tourists and locals alike; unlike the images of Atlantic Canada created by MacGillivray and others in that same Atlantic Canada, they deny the modern complexity of its life and cultural expression. As McKay relates, "The idea of an isolated, sheltered fisherfolk, far removed from the storms of modernity, depends not upon empirical evidence but upon age-old European paradigms; ...." [34] The principal paradigm adopted in this process is, of course, the pastoral, transplanted from Europe to rural Canada, especially Atlantic Canada. McKay therefore proposes that, rather than uncritically accepting these images, we should examine "...the ways in which urban cultural producers, pursuing their own interests and expressing their own view of things, constructed the Folk of the countryside as the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban and industrial life." [35] He goes further, arguing that in the specific case of Nova Scotia, whose car licence plates bear the solicitous slogan, 'Canada's Ocean Playground,' "Nova Scotia was indeed carefully constructed within the discourses of tourism as a 'therapeutic space' where the harried victims of capitalist modernity could recover their energy by the sea." [36] Indeed, McKay concludes, "The anti-modernist formula was remarkably resilient and impervious to the (abundant) empirical evidence of a thoroughly modern province undergoing a crisis of capitalist development." [37] and, paradoxically, "That Nova Scotia is so commonly represented as a haven from modernity within the

Canadian context may well tell us a great deal about the province's precocious cultural modernity." [38] Clearly, this representation responds to a largely urbanized consumer whose constructed lack is a desire for an anti-modern place of sanctuary. For many, it also perpetuates regional stereotypes within that same context, suggesting to McKay that "...certain central Canadians will probably always have a soft spot for the notion of the happily underdeveloped east coast Folk...." [39] Both for those who create the myths of the Folk and those who consume them, McKay contends that ultimately we should regard, "...the invention and diffusion of the concept of the Folk as a way of thinking about the impact of modernity. " [40] At best, it is thinking that suggests that Atlantic Canada has survived the onslaught of modernity; at worst, it pretends that modernity never arrived in this part of Canada.

MacGillvray's work, while certainly engaged in questions about the 'impact of modernity,' eschews and even directly contradicts this image of the Folk. Yet his work is often described in terms which invoke stereotypical images of Atlantic Canada. Even the most perceptive and appreciative critics succumb to these stereotypes. Here is Peter Harcourt, for example, writing about LIFE CLASSES, saying that it is "...slowly paced as befits the seasonal rhythms of the Maritimes..." [41], and, later in the same article, "If, for a central Canadian, to visit the Maritimes is to visit the past, watching these films might seem like going back in time." [42] Although his readings of the films are nuanced and incisive, the frame within which he reads them is inflected by stereotypical preconceptions about the nature and substance of life in Atlantic Canada. Elsewhere, the 1987

Toronto Festival of Festivals catalogue describes LIFE CLASSES in similar terms: "LIFE CLASSES is full of subtle delights and insights, marking MacGillivray as one of Canada's freshest talents whose films bask in the quiet truths peculiar to the rhythms of his native Nova Scotia." [43] *Variety*'s review echoes the Festival, "His sense of place is right on target and with cinematographer Lionel Simmons, translates the measured motion and down-home, proud nature of the province." [44] *Macleans* magazine opines that "LIFE CLASSES is a personal statement suffused with the quiet beauty of the Maritimes." [45] A headline in the *Ottawa Citizen* announcing a retrospective of MacGillivray's work reads, "Series brings Down East flavour to Ottawa film-goers." [46] Specific to film production itself, this attitude acquires new power when enforced by others who buy into such codes of representation, as Chris Majka reports in *Cinema Canada*: "... Atlantic media producers sometimes feel that the outside world is interested in their productions only if they present 'Atlantic' kinds of motifs and stories – lighthouses, lobster traps, grizzled fishermen, schooners, sou'westers, highland flings, and all other 'typical' Atlantic area features." [47]

All of these questions of representation, history and, even more precisely, historiography, revolve around the concept of region in Canadian thought. This concept is linked closely to the city-country and centre-margin dyads described above. MacGillivray is often described as a 'regional filmmaker,' as if his work is determined and somehow circumscribed by where he works. The same word is never used in relation to filmmakers from Montreal or Toronto. (Tellingly, it is

unthinkable that either Denys Arcand and Atom Egoyan, for example, would be defined in such terms.) Not surprisingly, MacGillivray's films trouble this established understanding of what constitutes the 'Canadian regions.' As he observes of the terms of the debate, "Regionalism is an institutionalized invention of those who think they live in the centre." [48]. This is not to deny the geography, or cartography, of Canada, but it is to insist on a participation in the defining of the term and, by extension, of oneself. Almost all of MacGillivray's films confront the biases inherent in the term 'regional' as it is used in Canada. It is another version, it would seem for MacGillivray, of the stereotyping process which fails to recognize history, individuality, and agency. It risks succumbing to pleasing, safe fictions of 'The Folk.' Janine Brodie proposes a more fluid understanding of the term: "Regions, in other words, are not arbitrary constructs but effects or consequences of historical relationships. Following this account, regions are shaped and reshaped by 'flows of some kind' – political, social, and economic links that connect geographic space in relationships and interdependencies." [49] While a sense of 'region' is inscribed in the cinema of MacGillivray, it is very much seen as spatial and temporal process, as a 'flow of some kind,' seeking its own decidedly diachronic definitions, and not conforming to a fixed set of signifiers imposed upon it from without or within. As Robin Wood contends,

> MacGillivray is what is often referred to as a 'regional' filmmaker: the description is accurate but not adequate. That, at a surface level, the films are perceived to be 'about' the cultural predicament of Eastern Canada and/or Newfoundland doubtless contributes to their limited marketability. The regional quality is extremely important, as it partly accounts for the inwardness and intimacy with which MacGillivray depicts the specific nature of the characters' problems. Yet the film's thematic – cultural difference, cultural clashes, the conflicting pulls of

city and country, technology and primitive simplicity, modernity and tradition, the oppositions never treated simply, let alone simplistically – has a far wider relevance than the term 'regional filmmaker' suggests. [50]

III. CANADIAN CINEMA

While more of these ideas will be taken up in the next chapter, it is relevant to link these historical and cultural processes to Canadian film culture in general. Although for most of the 20th Century absent from filmmaking, when a film culture did emerge in Atlantic Canada in the mid-1970s, it was invariably described by Canadian critics and scholars as 'regional' first and film second. In addition to the example of Peter Harcourt cited above, David Clandfield's abbreviated history of filmmaking in Canada, CANADIAN FILM, offers up a separate section called 'Regional Film,' for filmmaking outside of 'centres' such as Montreal and Toronto. Within this section can be found filmmakers from British Colombia, western Canada, and, of course, Atlantic Canada.[51] This attitude persists, and, although understandable given the preponderance of film production in central Canada, it is surprisingly comfortable in its unexamined assumptions about the context from which it speaks.

Another more revealing and more critically complacent example is to be found in a recent issue of the Canadian film magazine, *Take One*, dedicated to the 'Toronto New Wave.' The editorial argues, preposterously, that the "the heart and soul of English-Canadian filmmaking is to be found south of St. Clair [Avenue in Toronto] and the rest of Canada will just have to get over it."[52] At once

utterly arrogant and utterly insecure, it is actually a continuation, however pedestrian, of Northrop Frye's earlier and persuasive paradigm of Canada's cultural history. He compares arriving in Canada via the St. Lawrence River to Jonah entering the whale of the North American continent, passing by the Atlantic provinces as if they do not exist.[53] While unquestionably a compelling image, especially when Frye contrasts it with the founding myths of the United States, it literally and figuratively structures out Atlantic Canada. As Janice Kulyk Keefer remarks, "Frye's Laurentian paradigm of Canada can, in fact, be seen as an incidental demolition of the Maritimes and that region's vision of the reality it constitutes." [54] As we can see, the bias identified in Keefer's assessment of continentalist literary models established by such enormously influential intellectuals as Northrop Frye has and continues to inform Canadian film criticism, popular and scholarly.

This is not to characterize MacGillivray, or any other Atlantic Canadian filmmaker, as a victim. On the contrary, his work has generally been well-received critically. It is rather to emphasize that his work, and the work produced in that part of Canada generally, is very often received and interpreted within an historical and cultural framework which regards itself as central, even essential, to the embodiment and expression of some form of 'regionless', universal Canadianness. Moreover, it appears neither to investigate the roots of and reasons for its assumptions, nor to question its definitions and impositions of those definitions of centre, the region, and, ultimately, the modern on the films produced in Atlantic Canada. Perhaps what Canadian film culture should

undertake is an attempt, in that sprawling prescriptive formulation of Raymond Williams, to "...unlearn the inherent dominative mode" [55] of its own approach to work from Atlantic Canada. The unexamined and presumptuous biases of that mode are well encapsulated in Toronto critic Cameron Bailey's pronouncement, "If Bill MacGillivray lived in Toronto, he'd be famous." [56] It is a statement which says a lot about what is believed to constitute Canadian fame, a lot about Toronto's image of itself and its power, and a lot about MacGillivray, who has chosen not to live in Toronto.

IV. EXILE

Despite its obvious rhetorical nature and its intended complement, one of the assumptions underlying Bailey's statement appears to be that to choose *not* to live in Toronto is to risk occupying a space of regional isolation, perhaps even of internal exile. In a nation whose cinemas are almost totally dominated by American movies and whose filmmakers, with a few notable exceptions, all occupy a space akin to exile in their own country, the fact that MacGillivray is described this way again underlines the 'centre' to itself. As if, in real terms and despite the Hollywood hegemony, some kind of a 'centre' actually exists in practice. As Michael Dorland has pointed out, it is a benevolent delusion that Canadian film *criticism* has entertained for four decades, as well. [57]It creates its discourses of cinema and nation about a cinema and a nation whose outlines of existence are, as Peter Harcourt's famous term reflects, 'invisible' or ignored by

most Canadians in the case of cinema, and, in the latter case of nationhood, tenuous and eroding. In many senses, then, Bailey misses the point. Perhaps MacGillivray's choice to remain in Atlantic Canada to produce his work outside the still fledgling Canadian film business is actually a practically and theoretically appropriate one. To push this a little further, perhaps such a choice can only emerge out of a position which dissents from the logic of progress advanced by certain definitions of the modern, of modernity, or modernization. As does Herman Melville's Bartleby the scrivener, MacGillivray says to the invitation to enter the logic of progress and careerism and fame, however modest in the 'real' Canadian film industry: "I would prefer not to."[58]

In his illuminating book, TECHNOLOGY AND THE CANADIAN MIND, Arthur Kroker offers a characterization of Canada as an 'in-between' nation, suspended between the old, historically attentive European empire and the revolutionary, technologically adept, and future-orientated empire of the United States of America. [59] If we take Kroker's idea and relate it to the communications theory of Harold Innis, Canada can be seen to be suspended between time-biased European culture and space-biased American culture. The task of Canadian culture, in a sense, becomes the balancing of these biases and how they are expressed, mediated, and understood. The reality is at once less and more complicated than that, but either set of theoretical terms are useful inasmuch as they situate Canada positively as a place apart, a place outside, a place of self-created and resistant exile. Taking these terms into a consideration of Canada itself, if we accept the defined borders between centre and margin,

centre and region as outlined or assumed in the discourses of Canadian history, politics, and film studies, MacGillivray's work can be seen as emerging from a similar place of creative resistance. If Canada is an 'in-between' nation, then MacGillivray is an 'in-between' filmmaker and, after his own fashion and not because he has not become famous in Toronto, an internal exile. Indeed, as critic Astrid Brunner notes, "..he has a keen sense of the outsider, the exile, the non-participating observer." [60]

More precisely, MacGillivray is, in the terms of Hamid Naficy, a practitioner of "the interstitial mode of production in exilic cinema." ([61]) As Naficy describes them, "...exilic filmmakers are not so much marginal or subaltern as they are interstitial, partial, or multiple. And they are interstitial, partial, and multiple not only in terms of their identity and subjectivity but also in terms of the various roles they are forced to play, or choose to play, in every aspect of their films --- from inception to consumption." [62] MacGillivray's production company (actually more a philosophy in action than a company), Picture Plant, is organized very much in this fashion, as we shall see. Within these useful terms, one can perceive in MacGillivray's work just how "...the exile mode continually grapples with the politicized immediacy of the films and their collective enunciation and reception, that is, with the manner in which politics infuses all aspects of its existence." [63] Linked to this and to its operations as a producer and distributor, MacGillivray and Picture Plant actively demonstrate Naficy's theory in practice:

> Exilic and diasporic filmmakers and videomakers and their distributors and exhibitors are working at the intersection and in the interstices of culture industries; transnational, national, federal, state, local, private, ethnic,

commercial, and non-commercial funding agencies; and myriad institutions of reception and consumption. All of them grapple with exigencies and reverse magic of interstitiality which sometimes turns the promised freedom and flexibility of this mode into constraint and limitation. [64]

In both its style and its substance, the work of William D. MacGillivray confronts and foregrounds constantly the politics of its own representation, its position vis-à-vis the 'centre' and the commercial modes of production (such as they are in Canada), and its participation in the discourses of the modern.

Of course, most if not all of Canadian feature fiction cinema can be accurately described in the lexicon of exile. Historically, beyond the exceptional case of Quebec, it has been produced only sporadically and outside of a film industry as conventionally understood, and, due to American ownership of Canadian screens, unseen by Canadians. Naficy's argument applies to the history of Canadian cinema generally as well as to MacGillivray's work specifically:

We are not fated to choose those great apparatuses of mediation that structure our symbolic world: they somehow precede our presence and continue after it. What we can do, with all the modes of signification that lie to hand, is wage our wars of 'recognition' for lifeworlds that are threatened with extinction or eviction; and shape our words and images to frame those representations of home and exile through which we take possession of a world whose horizon is marked, all at once, by the spirit of arrival and the spectre of departure. [65]

For MacGillivray, then, the 'wars of recognition' and the 'framing [of] those representations of home and exile' are constant both within a specific Canadian context, by way of contesting specifically Canadian discourses of region, marginality, and conceptions of the modern, *and* within a broader context of the

Canadian film as a 'mode of signification' in the first place. The final chapter will deal more concretely with the latter theme, and Chapter 3 will undertake critical interpretations of the films themselves through the various thematic prisms we have sketched here. Before examining the works themselves, however, it is necessary to illuminate their context and mode of production, as the process by which they are made informs both their aesthetic and thematic structures as well as their significance.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 1

[1] Peter J. Taylor, MODERNITIES: A GEOHISTORICAL INTERPRETATION (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999) p. 12.

[2] Carlos Fuentes, "Cervantes, or The Critique of Reading," in MYSELF WITH OTHERS (Farrar, Strauss Giroux, New York 1988), p. 50.

[3] Please see E.R. Forbes, ed., CHALLENGING THE REGIONAL STEREOTYPE (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, 1989) and E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds. THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES IN CONFEDERATION (University of Toronto Press/Acadiensis Press, Toronto-Fredericton, 1993) for an exhaustive examination of this kind of thinking. For a more overtly politicized attack on conventional perceptions and representations of the Atlantic provinces, see also McKay, Ian and Scott Milsom, eds. TOWARD A NEW MARITIMES (Ragweed: The Island Publisher, Charlottetown, 1992). The stereotypes persist, as evidenced by Canadian Alliance Party national council member John Mykytyshyn's comments about Atlantic Canada only voting for federal political parties that will give them 'handouts' ("East Coast A Haven of Sloth," in *National Post*, 14 August 2000).

[4] Please see Stuart Hall, and Bram Greben, FORMATIONS OF MODERNITY (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992), Sott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, MODERNITY AND IDENTITY (Blackwell Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992), Peter Conrad, MODERN TIMES, MODERN PLACES (Alfred E. Knopf, New York, 1999), Anthony Giddens, THE CONSEQUENCES OF MODERNITY (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990), and Leszek Kolakowski, MODERNITY ON ENDLESS TRIAL (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990). Another very useful text is Marshall Berman's ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR: THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982).

[5] See note 4.

[6] John Jervis, EXPLORING THE MODERN (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998) p. 333.

[7] Jurgen Habermas, THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992) p. 7.

[8] Marshall Berman, "Why Modernism Still Matters," in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds., MODERNITY AND IDENTITY (Blackwell Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992) p. 35.

[9] Berman, in Lash et al, p. 35.

[10] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's anthology MODERNISM (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976) advances the idea that conceptions of the modern, and their multifarious expression in Modernism, is an almost exclusively northern and urban invention. In their 'The Nations of Modernism' bibliography, there is no mention of Spain; the nations listed are Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and the United States. Please see Carlos Fuentes, THE BURIED MIRROR (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1992) for his counter arguments about where the modern can be seen to have emanated. The idea that the modern was a largely nordic construction was also explored in a public lecture given by Carlos Fuentes at McGill University on 7 April 1995. It is curious that MacGillivray, a product of a North Atlantic context and culture, would share conceptions of the modern with the Iberian, or southern Mediterranean imagination. That the modern is intimately bound up with tradition, or the past, is an idea seldom admitted in more Nordic conceptions.

[11] Raymond Williams, THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY (Chatto and Windus, London, 1973) p. 1. My emphasis.

[12] Williams, p. 239.

[13] Miles Ogborn, SPACES OF MODERNITY (Routledge, London, 1998) p. 19.

[14] Ogborn, p. 12.

[15] John Jervis, EXPLORING THE MODERN (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998) p. 338.

[16] Charles Taylor, SOURCES OF THE SELF (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989) p, 496.

[17] Peter Osborne, THE POLITICS OF TIME (Verso, London, 1995) p. ix.

[18] The famous phrase from Karl Marx, used as a title by Marshall Berman's book, ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR: THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982).

[19] E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds. THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES IN CONFEDERATION (University of Toronto Press/Acadiensis Press, Toronto-Fredericton, 1993).

[20] Boyde E. Beck, et al. ATLANTIC CANADA: AT THE DAWN OF A NEW NATION (Windsor Publications, Ltd., Burlington, 1990) p. 159.

[21] Harold Adams Innis,"Great Britain, the United States, and Canada," in Daniel Drache, ed. STAPLES, MARKETS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston 1995) p. 274.

[22] Innis, in Drache ed., p. 274.

[23] Robin Neill, A HISTORY OF CANADIAN ECONOMIC THOUGHT (Routledge, London, 1991) p. 30.

[24] Innis, "The Importance of Staple Products in Canadian Development," in Drache, ed. p. 19

[25] For a elaboration on the 'victim psychology' partcular to Canada, please refer to Chapters 1, 2, and 3 in John Ralston Saul's . REFLECTIONS OF A SIAMESE TWIN (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1997), pp. 3-54.

[26] E.R. Forbes, CHALLENGING THE REGIONAL STEREOTYPE (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, 1989) p. 201.

[27] Gary Burill, AWAY: MARITIMERS IN MASSACHUSSETTS, ONTARIO AND ALBERTA: AN ORAL HISTORY OF LEAVING HOME (McGill-Queen's Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1992) p. 6.

[28] Forbes, p. 125

[29] Gwendolyn Davis, MYTH AND MILIEU: ATLANTIC LITERATURE AND CULTURE 1918-1939 (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, 1993) p. iv.

[30] Much of this protest emerged in the Constitutional debates about the Meech Lake Accord, due for ratification in June 1990. Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells was attacked and vilified for having the temerity – as a leader of a small, poor, sparsely populated province -- to question a deal which had the support of Canada's largest and most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec. For more recent examples, see "East Coast A Haven of Sloth" in National Post (14 August 2000, p. 1) and, "Federalism faces rocky road ahead, signs say" in The Globe and Mail (19 August 2000, p. A4).

[31] Innis, The Bias of Communication," in Drache, ed. pp. 325-349.

[32] Forbes, p. 7.

[33] Forbes, p. 7.

[34] Ian McKay, THE QUEST OF THE FOLK (McGill-Queen's Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1994) p. 28.

[35] McKay, p. 4.

[36] Ian McKay, "Helen Creighton and the Politics of Anti-Modernism," in Gwendolyn Davis, ed. MYTH AND MILIEU: ATLANTIC LITERATURE AND CULTURE 1918-1939 (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, 1993) p. 2.

[37] McKay, in Davis, p. 2.

[38] McKay, in Davis, p. 11.

[39] McKay, p. 308.

[40] McKay, p. 8.

[41] Peter Harcourt, "Planting Pictures: an appreciation of the films of William D. MacGillivray, *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, November 1987), p. 15.

[42] Harcourt, *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, November 1987), p. 16.

[43] Festival of Festivals official catalogue (Toronto, 1987) p. 165.

[44] *Variety*, September 9, 1987.

[45] *Macleans*, December 7, 1987.

[46] Noel Taylor, *Ottawa Citizen*, (Ottawa, Ontario) May 17, 1991.

[47] Chris Majka, *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, December 1986) p. 44.

[48] William D. MacGillivray, quoted in Tom McSorley's article, "William MacGillivray's Persistence of Vision," in *Take 1* (Toronto, Winter 1993) p. 18.

[49] Janine Brodie, "The Political Economy of Regionalism" in Wallace Clement and Glen Williams, THE NEW CANADIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1989), p. 141.

[50] Robin Wood, "Understanding Bliss," in *CineAction* (York University, Toronto, Winter 1992) p. 27.

[51] David Clandfield, CANADIAN FILM (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1987), pp. 105-109.

[52] Wyndham P. Wise, "From The Editor," in *Take One* (Toronto, Summer 2000), p. 5.

[53] In Frye's own words, "But Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. The traveller from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering into an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where five Canadian surround him, for the most part invisible." Northrop Frye, THE BUSH GARDEN (Anansi, Toronto, 1971) p. 217.

[54.] Janice Kulyk Keefer, UNDER EASTERN EYES (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987) p. 27.

[55] Raymond Williams THE POLITICS OF MODERNISM (Verso, London, 1989) Tony Pinkey, ed. p. 181.

[56] Cameron Bailey, "MacGillivray mines the pitfalls of creativity," in *NOW Magazine* (Toronto, April 2-8, 1992), p. 31.

[57] Michael Dorland, SO CLOSE TO THE STATE(S) (McGill-Queen's Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1998).

[58] Herman Melville, BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER (Orginally published in New York, 1853; Simon and Schuster CommonPlace edition reprint, 1997), p. 32.

[59] Arthur Kroker, "The Canadian Discourse," in TECHNOLOGY AND THE CANADIAN MIND (New Directions, Montreal, 1984) see especially pp. 7-13.

[60] Astrid Brunner, "Weaving Yggdrasil: The Film Work of William D. MacGillivray," in *ArtsAtlantic* (Charlottetown, Number 39, Winter 1991) p. 14.

[61] Hamid Naficy, HOME, EXILE, HOMELAND: FILM, MEDIA AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE (Routledge, London, 1999) p. 130.

[62] Naficy, p.134.

[63] Naficy, p. 132.

[64] Naficy, p. 144.

[65] Naficy, p.xii.

Chapter 2

Outside the Frame

McSorley: Do you feel marginal?
MacGillivray: Marginally.[1]

The context within which MacGillivray produces his films is an underlying condition of his contestation of the configuration of the Canadian centre-margin paradigm. If at some level MacGillivray's work redraws or reshapes the maps of Canadian modernity and marginality, it is important to examine not only the historical context of his emergence as an independent filmmaker, but also the relationship between that context and the thematic preoccupations of his work. In addition, it is also relevant to place him alongside his contemporaries in Atlantic Canada, as their films often share similarities with MacGillivray's work, both in their modes of production and in their themes. Given the recent emergence of a more industrialized form of film production in, principally, Halifax, MacGillivray's confrontations with discourses of what constitutes the modern and the centre-margin paradigm now resonate much closer to where he lives and struggles to work.

Since the mid-1970s, and spearheaded in some degree by MacGillivray's hour-long drama, AERIAL VIEW (1979), and the establishment of his independent production company, Picture Plant, one of the most notable trends in recent Canadian cinema has been the emergence of an accomplished,

distinctive body of work from Canada's four Atlantic provinces. Owing to the tenacity of vision of filmmakers from this sparsely-populated and comparatively impoverished part of Canada, the establishment of provincial film co-operatives, and support from national cultural organizations, an independent creative milieu has been developed to establish a context within which filmmakers make films on their own terms and in their own voices. Aside from the many impressive works themselves, what is astonishing about this development is just how recent it is, given that feature film production in Canada itself actually began in Nova Scotia in 1913 with EVANGELINE.

It is both ironic and appropriate that no print remains in existence of this first Canadian dramatic feature film. Made in 1913 by the Canadian Bioscope Company in the city of Halifax and on location in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, EVANGELINE was a commercial success in Canada and the United States but has since vanished completely, except for a few fragments of individual images housed in the National Archives of Canada. This unfortunate absence reflects the history and development of Canadian cinema generally, as it remains a national cinema largely unseen by its own nation and therefore absent from collective cultural and historical memory. Specifically, EVANGELINE's disappearance can also be heard to echo ironically in the Atlantic provinces, as feature film production in this part of Canada has been, with a few scattered exceptions in the 1920s and 1930s, virtually nonexistent.[2]

In another sense, the absence of EVANGELINE is also strangely appropriate. Although made in Nova Scotia and shot on various locations in that

province, EVANGELINE was directed by and starred Americans and was an adaptation of a poem by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In short, it is not a film made by Atlantic Canadians, but rather a romantic narrative set in the region's natural settings and produced by outsiders. This approach to film production, which uses the region as a colourful, delightfully backward, and picturesque backdrop, persists today and is present in other forms of cultural production.[3] Although such work temporarily infuses local production communities with money and technical experience, it has little to do with Atlantic Canada telling its own stories cinematically; it merely replaces a real absence with the false presence of the regional cliché. The rather fugitive birth of Canadian feature filmmaking in Atlantic Canada can be regarded, then, as a curiously appropriate historical irony, for the development of an authentic, indigenous Atlantic Canadian cinema would not take place for several more decades. Indeed, for most of the 20th Century, the very century of cinema, Atlantic Canada is conspicuous by its absence from the Seventh Art.

While certainly lamentable, such a profound and prolonged cinematic absence is not surprising. It is difficult to envisage a film industry sustaining itself at any time in Atlantic Canada, given the region's resource-based economy (fisheries and forestry), small population,[4] marginal political status, and its dependency upon and, as some have argued convincingly, exploitation by outside government and industrial interests. Economic arguments notwithstanding, the principal cause of the absence lies in Canada's historically colonial attitude towards its own cinema.[5] Since the 1920s, feature film

production in all parts of Canada has been inhibited by successive Canadian governments' political and economic accommodation of *the* 'centre' of cinematic power, Hollywood. With Canadian screens dominated by American film interests, Canadian films, even those from populous and affluent regions of the country, did not reach Canadian audiences.[6]

If the birth of an indigenous cinema from Atlantic Canada was delayed by a Canadian cultural inferiority complex and its consequent cinematic deference to Hollywood, it is ultimately made *possible* by two other archetypal and interrelated aspects of Canada's cultural zeitgeist: regionalism and government funding of the arts. Emerging out of the optimism and relative prosperity of the 1960s, the philosophy of supporting artistic expression in all regions of Canada with national cultural institutions (National Film Board of Canada, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, The Canada Council, and, more recently, Telefilm Canada), though not always satisfactorily implemented, enabled artists, writers, and filmmakers to live and work outside the mainstream cultural centres of Canada. Without the existence of this regional approach and the assistance of these national organizations, it would be still more difficult for filmmakers in Atlantic Canada to work in their part of the country. As Ian McKay notes, "Thanks to a limited but valuable democratization of culture since the 1960s, state money has been made more readily available to a wider range of cultural producers." [7]

In the early 1970s, the National Film Board set up regional offices in Atlantic Canada and The Canada Council also began to support independent

film co-operatives based in the region. This institutional combination, along with the energy and imagination of local filmmakers, helped establish a production infrastructure necessary to create an indigenous Atlantic Canadian cinema. In addition to functioning as training centres, the co-operatives (located in Fredericton, Edmonston, Halifax, Charlottetown, and St. John's) provided their members with access to cameras, editing tables, and lighting equipment. While the National Film Board produced many of its own films about the region, it also helped independent filmmakers with additional technical support and production services. The combination of resources contributed greatly to the number and quality of short films being made in Atlantic Canada. Although most of the work produced at the co-operatives consists of short drama, documentary, and the occasional animated film, the co-operative approach meant films were made independently, with a high degree of artistic freedom and with minimal financial means and risk. Tending toward the personal and meditative, and generally auteurist, these films were made on low budgets, using non-professionals, and much location shooting. As is the case in other parts of Canada, and indeed around the world, this kind of independent short film production offered valuable experience for those filmmakers who would later produce feature films. Independent short film production remains an essential, artistically rich component of the still remarkably young cinema of Atlantic Canada.[8]

It is out of this non-industrial, fiercely independent film practice, then, that a distinctive, identifiable cinema of Atlantic Canada emerges in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[9] As if in response to Atlantic filmmakers' long frustrated

desire to express themselves, the protracted cinematic absence is replaced with considerable speed by sophisticated, formally assured, and provocative images of a region which, in all senses of the word, produced them. The thematic and aesthetic implications of this new Atlantic Canadian cinema are also revealed in work which, while exploring the tensions and drama of this region, challenges established Canadian notions of realism, representation, identity and, indeed, regionalism itself.

If the films of William D. MacGillivray, as we shall see, can be said to challenge, or perhaps even ignore as irrelevant, assumptions made about the Atlantic region made by the 90% of Canadians who live outside it, then the films produced in Newfoundland in the past two decades can only be described as direct cinematic confrontations with those assumptions. In relation to Newfoundland, those assumptions contain a specific force as, perhaps more than any other part of Atlantic Canada, Newfoundland has been regarded by the 'centre' as an underdeveloped and unsophisticated member of the Canadian federation.[10] Indeed, the thematic and stylistic characteristics of films from Newfoundland are rooted in that province's unique political and economic relationship with the rest of Canada[11] and, as in the case of MacGillivray, in a independent, artist-driven model of film production. Emerging out of this crucible of marginality (geographical and otherwise) and independence, the new and indigenous cinema of Newfoundland, bursting with anger and wit and formal daring, takes serious and often satirical aim at notions of Canadian identity, at

certain sober traditions of the Canadian cinema, and even at Newfoundland itself.

Filmmaking in Newfoundland, as in other Atlantic provinces, is a recent phenomenon. This is not to suggest that no filmmaking activity whatsoever took place on the island. In fact, in 1931, an American-based company made THE VIKING, an impressive dramatic feature about the seal hunt in pre-Confederation Newfoundland; the film has drawn favorable comparisons to the work of Robert Flaherty. The development of an indigenous film community in Newfoundland would, however, take many more decades. In the 1960s, a combination of the National Film Board's 1967 "Challenge For Change", programme intended to get cameras into the hands of local people across Canada,[12] and Memorial University's development of a small film production unit helped create a modest infrastructure for filmmaking. In 1975, with founding of the Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-operative, local filmmakers began to produce an impressive and idiosyncratic collection of short films.[13] Drawing upon the considerable talents of the province's active theatre community these short films contain distinctive combinations of verbal wit, anti-clerical satire, social commentary, and self-conscious parody of cinematic forms. These combinations would also find their place in Newfoundland's feature films.

Until the co-operative began to help produce feature films like THE ADVENTURE OF FAUSTUS BIDGOOD (1986) and SECRET NATION (1992), the cinematic incarnation of Newfoundland was to be found in THE ROWDYMAN (1971) and in the persona of the film's protagonist, Will Cole. Starring and written

by native Newfoundlander Gordon Pinsent, the film focuses on the picaresque antics of a small-town buffoon with a sharp wit, insatiable sexual appetite, and a dead-end job in the local paper mill. His irresponsible behaviour with his best friend and favourite girl soon leads to tragic circumstances. Replete with made-in-Toronto Newfoundland accents (excepting Pinsent) and a cloying early-1970s musical score, THE ROWDYMAN's period excesses do not, however, totally dilute its social commentary. Despite concentrating on Will's personal limitations and interminable boyish clowning,[14] the film does acknowledge a degree of hopelessness in the Newfoundland world Will inhabits. Although it aspires to be a Canadian SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING (United Kingdom, 1960, Karel Reisz), and while Will Cole is certainly a member of a Canadian cinematic generation of disconnected, aimless characters, THE ROWDYMAN ultimately fails to move beyond its rather stereotypical representation of Newfoundland.

More in the tradition of THE VIKING, John N. Smith's WELCOME TO CANADA (1989) is a sympathetic, often poetic examination of the character of Newfoundland's people. Set in the remote outport community of Brigus South, a cluster of homes on Atlantic coast accessible only by ship, the film is a fictionalized retelling of an actual incident. In 1986, a lifeboat was discovered drifting in cold Atlantic waters by local fishermen. To their surprise, they found the lifeboat filled with Tamil refugees attempting to escape the civil strife in their native Sri Lanka by emigrating Canada illegally. Having been ferried across the Atlantic ocean from Amsterdam by professional immigrant smugglers, they were

put in a boat off Newfoundland's rugged coast and told they were actually being let off near Montreal. With its combination of local people and professional actors, as well an observational, seemingly unobtrusive documentary style, WELCOME TO CANADA presents an understated portrait of two marginalized groups helping one another. As refugees are brought ashore, they are fed, clothed and cared for by the people of Brigus South. Entering into discussions with their hosts about religion, geography, and culture each side learns a little about the other and recognizes the parallels between their respective islands.

While THE ROWDYMAN's innocent invocation of the devil-may-care Newfoundlander and WELCOME TO CANADA's sensitive portrait of generosity and dignity of Newfoundlanders present a benign if unfortunate reality in that province, both films only hint at the deprivation and frustration faced by the people of Canada's poorest province. This can be perhaps be accounted for by the fact that both films were produced in central Canada. Despite the best intentions of their liberal humanism and their relative merits as films, each can only be described as distant relations to an authentic Newfoundland cinema, especially when compared to the angry, absurdist sensibility so tangibly present in films produced in that province.[15] Ken Pittman's NO APOLOGIES (1990), edited by MacGillivray and produced by Picture Plant, as an example, offers a ferocious assessment of the state of things in contemporary Newfoundland.

Set in the company town of White Falls, NO APOLOGIES concerns the return of documentary filmmaker Mark Rogers to his home town after learning of his father's imminent death. As the family gathers to wait for its patriarch to die,

the personal anguish and frustration mounts for each of the surviving members. The father's death, the result of years of unhealthy exposure to industrial poisons, becomes a potent metaphor the powerlessness of ordinary Newfoundlanders and, indeed, represents the passing of one dark period of Newfoundland's history into the next. Television news reports filtering through the Rogers home tell of industry closures, multigenerational unemployment, and the final dismantling of Canada's national railway on the island.[16] Meanwhile, personal and political conflicts between Mark and other family members exacerbate the already tense situation.

An unrelenting attack on the failure of the Canadian confederation, NO APOLOGIES not only demolishes the Will Cole stereotype, which for Pittman is to be regarded as a dangerously apolitical anachronism, but also the myth of the impoverished yet happy Newfoundland. Indeed, NO APOLOGIES makes overt visual and verbal comparisons between the Third World and the decaying modern Newfoundland, a comparison WELCOME TO CANADA cannot bring itself to make. Aside from its astute political reading of the situation, implicating opportunistic provincial politicians in the destruction of the province, Pittman's film also explores, with honesty and humour, the personal costs of either remaining in Newfoundland or, as many choose to do, leaving it for life elsewhere.

If the fatalism and earnest anger of Pittman's vision of contemporary Newfoundland, delivered in a well-wrought realist cinematic style, demonstrates one dimension of the new cinema of Newfoundland, then THE ADVENTURE OF

FAUSTUS BIDGOOD, Michael and Andy Jones' carnivalesque re-imagining of the Faust myth, represents quite another. Ten years in the making and arguably the real beginning of Newfoundland moviemaking, THE ADVENTURE OF FAUSTUS BIDGOOD, which was finally released in 1986, focuses on the dreams and dreads of Faustus Bidgood, a meek, lonely, and mentally unstable government clerk working at the Newfoundland Department of Education. From behind his desk, Faustus dreams of becoming the first President of the People's Republic of Newfoundland, marrying the pretty secretary who ignores him, ascending through the ranks of the bureaucracy, and avoiding a return to the mental hospital. In his equally hallucinatory 'real world', Faustus' maniacal superior includes him in a scheme to destroy a rival Newfoundland government cabinet minister. In addition to these rich and interconnected narrative strands, the film also takes us on Bunuelian journeys through Faustus' memories of his terrifying Catholic education, his mother's death, and the imagined cinematic recreations of his imagined life as President.

This dense interweaving of fantasy and reality is rendered in an imaginative visual style and narrative structure. Directors Jones incorporate black and white cinema-verite documentary aesthetics,[17] slow motion fantasy sequences, surrealist flashbacks, and even animation into the labyrinth of Faustus' real and imagined worlds (worlds which are, admittedly, occasionally indistinguishable). With all its swirling energy and formal adventurism, THE ADVENTURE FAUSTUS BIDGOOD could only have come from an utterly independent, artist-driven filmmaking environment. This is not the stuff of

commercial cinema. Beneath its carnival of images, parody, and skewed psychology, the film does explore ideas of identity, memory, and the rather gothic dangers of closed systems of thought (here represented by religion, Catholic and Protestant, and by the bizarre pedagogical proposal, Total Education). It also poses questions about accepted 'realist' conventions of Canadian documentary and fiction filmmaking traditions. Beyond these themes, the film's absurdist glimmers of Newfoundland nationalism, a notion by no means dead in post-confederation times, registers an abiding political anger that may not remain in the realm of the imaginary forever.

In fact, this theme is pursued in Michael Jones' subsequent feature, SECRET NATION (1992), a conspiracy film about the referendum by which Newfoundland 'joined' Confederation. In the film, McGill Ph.d candidate in History, Freida Vokey (Cathy Jones), returns home to St. John's to do her final bits of research for her dissertation on the referendum which saw Newfoundland join Canada. She discovers her father may have had a dubious role in the process. Confronting various established ideas of history, collective and individual memory, and political power in relation to Newfoundland's entry into Canadian Confederation in 1949, SECRET NATION is a drama which suggests that what we think we know about Canadian history may be very tenuous indeed. More recently, John Doyle's EXTRAORDINARY VISITOR (1998), a feature length re-working of an earlier eponymous short film, ponders the implications of a visit by Saint John the Baptist (after whom the city is named) to contemporary Newfoundland. It is a Newfoundland now dominated by global capitalism, the

Vatican, CNN, and the rather soulless unbridled materialism of modernity. What Saint John finds is a place of anger, urban alienation, and media saturation. Like FAUSTUS and, to a degree, NO APOLOGIES, both these films examine how this province is perceived by others and how it perceives itself, whether in historical and political terms, as in SECRET NATION, or in religious and cultural terms, as in EXTRAORDINARY VISITOR.

In New Brunswick, a province more firmly rooted in the Canadian confederation, but nevertheless marginalized by its modest size, feature film production has proven as fleeting as EVANGELINE. Like Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and to a lesser extent, Prince Edward Island,[18] New Brunswick's film culture also emerged out of the tenuous yet tenacious combination of the National Film Board's policy of regionalization in the 1970s and the founding of independent film co-operatives. In fact, two co-operatives exist in New Brunswick, Canada's only officially bilingual province, to serve the English and French-speaking film communities.[19] Again, the filmmaking infrastructure is small and precarious, and the productions are almost exclusively short drama and documentary. In 1987, however, independent filmmaker Jon Pedersen, whose previous work includes award-winning short documentaries for the National Film Board, co-wrote, produced and directed an assured, psychologically complex feature-drama entitled TUESDAY WEDNESDAY.

Shot entirely in Fredericton, New Brunswick's capital city, TUESDAY WEDNESDAY is an intense drama about an ex-schoolteacher and reformed alcoholic named Phillip who searches for and tries to reconcile with the mother of

a boy he killed while driving drunk. Between attempts to connect with the woman, Phillip wanders through the town, visits former friends, seeks solace in literature at a university library, and, alone in his rented room, descends into the darker aspects of his troubled personality. With its austere, evocative style and spare, suggestive dialogue, Pedersen's often harrowing character study probes the psychology of guilt, forgiveness, and responsibility.

Perhaps more so than in MacGillivray's cinema, and certainly more than in films from Newfoundland, the sense of the 'regional' is muted in Pedersen's work. The difficult pilgrimage of Phillip to restore order to a world he has destroyed is after all not determined by geography; the title TUESDAY WEDNESDAY itself connotes a journey in time, not space. In fact, without the glimpse of a New Brunswick car license plate, Pedersen's one concession to regionalism, it would be difficult to 'place' the film. For Pedersen, this tale of isolation and alienation could, presumably, happen anywhere. As the first feature film to be produced in New Brunswick in over 60 years, TUESDAY WEDNESDAY is a remarkably mature and confident work which studiously ignores enshrined Canadian codes of regionalism. About a decade later, Bathurst filmmaker Tony Larder's UNSPOKEN (1996), a triptych about teenaged angst, also makes no issue of its place of origin, arguing that what happens in a northern New Brunswick town is, at some level, no different than what happens anywhere else in North America. Indicative of these filmmakers' reluctance to enter 'regional' discourses based on preconceptions of their part of Canada, these works also indicate of just how pervasive are the homogenizing cultural influences of the 'centre.'

While the development of an indigenous film culture in Nova Scotia is intimately bound up with those, including and especially MacGillivray, who founded the Atlantic Filmmakers C-operative in 1973, the province has recently encouraged more commercial production, and has financially backed Paul and Michael Donovan's Salter Street Films, which produces commercial fare for cinemas and television. Nova Scotia has also courted off-shore film productions from Hollywood and Europe. This trend has made independent film production more difficult in Nova Scotia, although there have been several features produced, including Lulu Keating's THE MIDDAY SUN (1989), Thom Fitzgerald's THE MOVIE OF THE WEEK (1990) and THE HANGING GARDEN (1997), and most recently, Andrea Dorfman's PARSLEY DAYS (2000). Although Nova Scotia's independent film community still produces many diverse forms of short films, including animation, the province's current film industry boom has retarded the evolution of the more personal, auteurist independent feature films by filmmakers such as MacGillivray.

Having struggled to make their films in a community of independent enthusiasts and out of no sustained feature filmmaking tradition, Atlantic Canadian filmmakers have established particular production methods to realize their own particular cinematic tradition. Interestingly, that tradition resembles more the European, auteurist approach than the American industrial model. Owing perhaps to their maritime rather then North American continental perspective, the films of this region also reveal more European than American cinematic influences in their approaches to narrative, film style, and character.

Whatever the external models and influences, Atlantic Canadian filmmaking has evolved from the independent, non-industrial approach to film production, although more commercially-oriented filmmaking practices did emerge out of these independent beginnings. In fact that latter emergence has come to predominate, with the recent development of a more industrial based film and television industry centred in Halifax. This is a source of some conflict in the film community and represents, to MacGillivray and others like him, the probable arrival of an independent filmmaking apocalypse in Atlantic Canada.

Of course, MacGillivray was there at the birth of this Atlantic independent filmmaking movement and community in the mid-1970s. He himself was born in Newfoundland, moved to Halifax to study at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and developed a strong interest in filmmaking. Pursuing his interest in cinema at the London Film School in England, studying under British writer-director Mike Leigh, MacGillivray soon began writing and directing his own films upon his return to Nova Scotia, where he taught art in local schools. He also became a founding member and first president of the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative in 1973, helping to generate and sustain a vibrant independent filmmaking community. With fellow collaborators Gordon Parsons and Lionel Simmons, he formally established an independent production company, Picture Plant, in 1981. Today MacGillivray and producer-partner Terry Greenlaw constitute the company, and they remain committed to its founding principle of providing an independent, artist-driven production context for making films.

Modelled on an idea similar to Quebec filmmaker Jean Pierre Lefebvre's 'Cinak' production company, [20] Picture Plant is, MacGillivray emphasizes, "...not industrial in any way, shape, or form.[21]" Resisting the industrialized modes of film production in Canada, whether demanded by private or public sector investment, he describes his position, "So the only way to fight that, is, I feel, with a kind of guerrilla tactic of working on your own and generating your own projects, your own ideas, not with a market in mind, *per se*, but always making sure that the film is marketable relative to the budget."[22] Readily acknowledging that this position dissents from the now predominant production models that favour studios, unionized crews, and producer primacy, he admits this creates difficulties. "We are a mom and pop operation, basically. When we describe ourselves as such, people laugh and tell us we'll never advance, whatever 'advance' means. And maybe they're right. Maybe the reason we have to struggle so much is the way we run our business. Because film has become such a business, it's harder and harder to stay true to our model." [23] Indeed, he observes, "By the time we got to producing ONE HEART BROKEN INTO SONG [a made-for-TV movie for CBC in 1998, directed by Clement Virgo], for example, we were strangers on our own set, and that's not a good feeling." Speaking to the nature of the industrial modes of production now dominating Atlantic Canada, MacGillivray concludes that "Film has ceased to be a medium for ideas and has become strictly a medium for making money." Clearly opposed to such a situation, MacGillivray issues this defiant restorative prescription: "If the machinery is bigger than the idea it is carrying, get rid of the machine."[24]

At a philosophical level, Picture Plant is intended to represent and literally enact a filmmaking process which attempts to balance pragmatism and idealism. As MacGillivray relates, Picture Plant is about "making films as if they were bits of knitting, like a pair of socks, like something practical yet beautiful at the same time. And, to quote Geoff the architect in our first film, AERIAL VIEW, we want to use local materials and local skills to make local images. We've never had the notion that these films are limited by their locale, but rather that they use their locale to express various aspects of the human condition." He continues, "For us, film is a practical thing. It's a job of work to be done. It's no different than any other job of work, except that it carries with it a subtext and a meaning that one feels responsibility towards; that you're doing it in a way that needs to be done. Since no-one else will do it the way you do, you have to be careful and true to your material. Ours are handmade films. Our films are intuitive, they are not fashionable." [25] Working with modest budgets and small crews, Picture Plant seeks to create a communal environment for its productions. "It is a team thing, and it works best when it's a team thing. Ideally, it's a situation where we're all doing different jobs but we're all essentially trying to cook the same meal. I like [Jean] Renoir's line that you make films with friends, not money. That's what we try to do, although it's never that simple, and it's getting harder and harder to work like that because of commercial forces." Nevertheless, he adds, "Picture Plant runs the way our films do. The structure of Picture Plant is very similar to structure of our film shoots. Much to our regret sometimes [laughs], we do

everything at Picture Plant."[26] It is a conscious strategy to keep the proper proportion between the idea and the machinery that will deliver it.

Out of this idealistic and practical, perhaps even organic (it is Picture 'Plant' after all), mode of production, which attempts to conform the production process itself to the material being produced, comes a series of films about individual characters trying to shape their lives on their own terms by telling their own stories or making their own images. "I like showing characters who are – I hate this word – empowered to make their own images. That comes from my teaching. I want people to know that, yes, it is possible to tell your own story and it is important." [27]In a culture of accelerated and homogenous image production and delivery, he argues, "People forget their own families and people forget the meaning of their local and personal histories, and they defer to other people's histories and give over to the importance of other people. And what our films are all about is saying no to that; they are about re-affirming that sense of community and its various modules within that greater context that must be cherished and remembered and investigated." [28] At another level, "It's not so much the story itself, but how the story is being told. That process is itself a confirmation of culture, and history, and community."[29] In MacGillivray's work, then, what is inside the frame always has a dialectical relationship with what is outside the frame, whether within the narrative logic or thematic patterns of the films themselves or in the terms of how those very films are materially produced within Picture Plant's philosophy of production.

An integral and complex component of this dialectic relationship between what is inside and outside the frame is the idea and the reality of place. Of the presence of place in his work as a storyteller, MacGillivray contends that "The politics of it can be irrelevant; the *awareness* of it is essential." [30] This idea of place is bound up in Canada with, as mentioned above, an institutionalized concept of 'regionalism,' which emerges out of the centre-margin historical and economic paradigm described by Harold Innis and other Canadian scholars.[31] In the work of William D. MacGillivray, as well shall see in Chapter 3, the implications of place, and its more fashionable obverse, 'placelessness', are complicated and render problematic accepted ideas of region and further complicate the centre-margin paradigm with a re-imagining of its assumptions and definitions. This is indicated by MacGillivray's response cited at the beginning of this chapter, and also in this simple, and complex assertion: "Wherever anybody is, is the centre. We all create our own centres." [32] Referring to the constructions of the idea of 'the region' and its seemingly unexamined execution politically, economically, and culturally in contemporary Canada, he at once affirms the idea and places it in a new perspective, "There are many regions, and one of them is Toronto."[33]

Linked to this notion of the relationship between what is inside and outside the frame, MacGillivray perceives an erosion of serious concern for a sense of place in the film community in Atlantic Canada in recent years: "In a strange way, there isn't a 'here' anymore. If you look at the work that comes out of here, there is no concern for even the most trivial sense of 'here.' Everything has changed.

It's all about 'now,' and nothing else matters." [34] More distressing for MacGillivray is that even at the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative, where the independent filmmaking spirit is supposed to live, "AFCOOP is seen as a training ground to move people into the industry. The reason they get funded is not to become filmmakers, but to be workers, to be techno-drones. There's no feeling that there is a 'voice' left at the co-op." [35] Moreover, he argues that the constructed notion of 'region,' if had any immanent meaning at all, has now become a source of a strange kind of re-colonization of Atlantic Canada. He cites the movement of several producers and screenwriters to from Toronto to Halifax, where they can now be regarded as 'regional' producers and thus qualify for financial support from federal funding agencies mandated to encourage 'regional' production. One example, says MacGillivray, is television series screenwriter Wayne Grigsby [NORTH OF 60, BLACK HARBOUR],

> Now we see people like Wayne Grigsby moving to Nova Scotia because there are perks for being in the region because it's 'the region.' He comes down here and totally misrepresents this place in his BLACK HARBOUR series, but he qualifies as a regional voice. Camelia Frieberg is another example; her films will now be regarded as Nova Scotia productions, which they may be someday, but it's unlikely given that she works exclusively with Atom Egoyan, Jeremy Podeswa and other Toronto filmmakers.[36]

While the nature of film production has changed considerably and now reflects a more industrial (and more modern and modernized?) approach, especially in Nova Scotia, Picture Plant attempts to maintain control over its mode of production. In response to the array of technological and commercial imperatives which have now entered production in his home province,

MacGillivray says of he and Greenlaw's approach, "We keep trying to adapt modernity to our purposes." [37] That particular process of adaptation is arduous and ongoing, especially in an increasingly commercialized context for telling stories with moving images. As Peter Harcourt has stated of Picture Plant's ultimate project, "Living in a country that has a federal policy that still encourages the most exploitative of filmic enterprises – producing for the most part stuff to be placed between the ads on commercial television – we cannot help but admire films that employ local materials and local skills, that plant pictures in the mind of how we live. " [38] Those pictures, and the lives constructed within and expressed by them, articulate self-reflexively the nature of their production and confront seriously the contexts within which they are received and interpreted.

Having emerged from the dark absence which followed EVANGELINE out of Nova Scotia in 1913, the new Atlantic Canadian cinema, not even three decades old, has already created some of the most enduring works in contemporary Canadian cinema. Its creative daring and intellectual rigour have also dislodged established images of a part of Canada long absent from the process of representing itself on the screen. As Pierre Veronneau notes, "Toute cette problèmatique est très actuelle et cela montre bien la manière dynamique qu'ont les cinéastes des Maritimes de poser la question de leur identité sans avoir recours à la construction d'une Atlantique mythique." [39] Important, articulate, and *central* to the Canadian cinema, for they have also redefined notions of marginality, the filmmakers of Atlantic Canada do not concern themselves with absence; they are engaged in a process of illuminating the

cinematic possibilities of their own astonishing presence. Or, as MacGillivray has his protagonist Peter Breen exhort to his media students in UNDERSTANDING BLISS, "Tell your own stories. Get to know who *you* are, yourselves." It is his own credo.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 2

[1] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[2] In fact, fewer than 10 feature films were produced in Atlantic Canada between 1913 and the 1970s. See D. John Turner, CANADIAN FEATURE FILM INDEX 1913-1985 (National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 1987). See also, Peter Morris, EMBATTLED SHADOWS (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1978).

[3] For example: American director Randa Haines' CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD (1986), shot in New Brunswick, as well as Dutch filmmaker Heddy Honigman's MINDSHADOWS (1987), set in Nova Scotia but essentially a Dutch film. Not to belabour the point or to denigrate the film, it is worth mentioning that WELCOME TO CANADA (1989), produced by the NFB's Montreal studio and directed by Montreal director John N. Smith, also belongs in this category. Nicholas Kendall's execrable CADILLAC GIRLS (1993), Mort Ransen's MARGARET'S MUSEUM (1996), and, to a lesser extent, Allan Moyle' s NEW WATERFORD GIRL (1999) also fall into this category. For examples of this phenomenon and an analysis of its production and consumption, please see Ian McKay's THE QUEST OF THE FOLK (McGill-Queen's, Montreal, 1994).

[4] Today the four Atlantic provinces, comprising Newfoundland and the three Maritime provinces of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia have a combined population of under three million, approximately that of metropolitan Toronto.

[5] The cultural argument becomes even more compelling in light of number of feature films currently being made in Atlantic Canada. With a small change in Canadian attitudes toward its own feature filmmaking in recent years and with federal and provincial government financial assistance, a film industry has indeed begun to develop slowly in Atlantic Canada, primarily in Nova Scotia.

[6] For a more thorough account of the troubled evolution of Canadian feature filmmaking, please refer to Ted Magder's CANADA'S HOLLYWOOD (University of Toronto Press Toronto, 1993) and Mendath Pendjukar's CANADIAN DREAMS AND AMERICAN CONTROL (Garamond Press, Toronto, 1990).

[7] McKay, THE QUEST OF THE FOLK (McGill-Queen's, Montreal, 1994) p. 309.

[8] It is important to note the valuable contribution made by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to filmmaking in Nova Scotia, offering several film

production workshops and courses in 1980s. The College's role as an international centre of contemporary art in the 1960s is examined in William D. MacGillivray's feature documentary, I WILL NOT MAKE ANY MORE BORING ART (1988).

[9] More commercial films also emerged out this context in Nova Scotia, directed and/or produced by brothers Paul and Michael Donovan. They include films such as SIEGE (1982), DEFCON 4 (1984) and GEORGE'S ISLAND (1990). Having had a surprising degree of commercial success, the Donovans have also become involved in television production and have even built studio space and sound stages in Halifax, in addition to their financially success production company, Salter Street Films.

[10] This attitude is even enshrined in mainstream Canadian humour as the "Newfie" joke, a joke which typically involves the moronic Newfoundlander world drifting stupidly through the modern world.

[11] Since deciding to join Canada in 1949 by means of a referendum (a referendum in which the margin of victory was narrow) on promises of economic and political benefits, Newfoundland has remained Canada's most impoverished province. Its chronically depressed economy and consistently high unemployment rates have demonstrated to some that joining the Canadian confederation has not significantly improved standards of living in Newfoundland.

[12] See Chapter 10, D.B Jones, MOVIES AND MEMORANDA (Canadian Film Institute, Ottawa,1981).

[13] It is at Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-operative that filmmakers such as Michael Jones (THE ADVENTURE OF FAUSTUS BIDGOOD, SECRET NATION) and Ken Pittman (NO APOLOGIES) began their careers.

[14] See Robert Fothergill's seminal essay, "Coward, Bully or Clown: The Dream-Life of a Younger Brother," in Seth Feldman, Joyce Nelson, eds., CANADIAN FILM READER (Peter Martin Associates, Toronto, 1977).

[15] In watching WELCOME TO CANADA, one is reminded of NFB founder John Grierson's concern about filmmakers who "... may make their films with the people and in the villages, but are soon off and away...to their normal metropolitan milieu. The old unsatisfactory note of faraway liberal concern for humanity-in-general creeps in, in spite of these real excursions into the local realities." (CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE NEWSLETTER, Spring 1972, as cited in D.B. Jones MOVIES AND MEMORANDA, Ottawa, 1981, p. 177) Curiously, Pinsent's later return to his home province, JOHN AND THE MISSUS (1987), a film he wrote and directed, suffers a similar fate and cannot manage the anger appropriate to the story of the forced relocation of entire Newfoundland mining communities by the provincial government in the early 1960s.

[16] The railway is a potent metaphor in Atlantic Canadian cinema which has historical and political implications. The building of a national railway in Canada, from coast to coast, was one of the key promises made to the Atlantic provinces to encourage them to join the Canadian confederation in the mid-19th century. For this reason, the railroad's failure to deliver the much-vaunted continental prosperity to the region, and indeed its recent dismantling by the national government, are concrete reminders of how the promise of confederation has been betrayed.

[17] In fact, the film not only cleverly parodies the documentary tradition in Canada, it also deconstructs the realist tendency of the Canadian fiction feature film that has grown out of that tradition.

[18] It is worth mentioning that, as Canada's smallest and least populated province, it is understandable that Prince Edward Island has yet to produce a feature film. Nevertheless, The Island Media Arts Co-op, founded in 1978, is actively involved in short film production and the training of aspiring filmmakers. It also hosts the Atlantic Film and Video Producers Conference.

[19] The New Brunswick Film Co-operative was founded in 1979, while Cinemarevie, the film co-operative of New Brunswick's Acadian filmmaking community, began operating in 1980. Each has produced a variety of short films, including documentary, short drama, and animation.

[20] 'Cinak' is Jean Pierre Lefebvre's filmmaking 'practice' which is auteurist in its philosophical disposition, arguing for the primacy of the filmmaker as artist who must control his or her work. Pragmatically, Lefebvre also insists that the budget of the film must reflect the potential size of its audience. Please see Peter Harcourt JEAN PIERRE LEFEBVRE (Canadian Film Institute, Ottawa, 1981).

[21] Interview with author.

[22] Colin Henderson, "Inter-View" with MacGillivray *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, November 1987) p. 21.

[23] Interview with author.

[24] Interview with author.

[25] Interview with author.

[26] Interview with author.

[27] Interview with author.

[28] Interview with author.

[29] Interview with author.

[30] Interview with author.

[31] Such as Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, Gaile McGregor, Arthur Kroker, and others.

[32] Interview with author.

[33] Interview with author.

[34] Interview with author.

[35] Interview with author.

[36] Interview with author.

[37] Interview with author.

[38] Peter Harcourt, *Cinema Canada*, (Montreal, November 1987) p. 21.

[39] Pierre Veronneau, A LA RECHERCHE D'UNE IDENTITE (La Cinematheque quebecoise, Montreal, 1991) p. 33.

Chapter 3

Inside the Frame

The selection of a point of view is the initial action of culture.
Jose Ortega y Gassett[1]

Many things are changing in the world; many others are surviving. *Don Quixote* tells us just this: this is why he is so modern, but also so ancient, eternal. He illustrates the rupture of a world based on analogy and thrust into differentiation. He makes evident a challenge that we consider peculiarly ours: how to accept the diversity and mutation of the world, while retaining the mind's power for analogy and unity, so that this changing world shall not become meaningless.
Carlos Fuentes [2]

Culture is concerned with the capacity of the individual to appraise problems in terms of space and time and with enabling him to take the proper steps at the proper time. It is at this point that the tragedy of modern culture has arisen as inventions in commercialism have destroyed a sense of time.
Harold Innis [3]

The struggle for meaning in a world that is changing is the essential thematic core of MacGillivray's confrontation with ideas of the modern. His characters are indeed 'thrust into differentiation' and respond by searching for 'analogy and unity,' for a creatively constructed and responsive 'point of view.' From Geoff in AERIAL VIEW to Mary Cameron in LIFE CLASSES to Peter Breen in UNDERSTANDING BLISS, there is a conscious and concerted effort by these characters, with varying degrees of success, to use the 'mind's power' to navigate its profound alienation in a rapidly changing, utterly commercialized

and dangerously atemporal society. In this sense, MacGillivray's fictional universe bears remarkable similarities to Cervantes,' as both artists suggest through their protagonists' journeys that a modern response to the flux of life occurs in the recognition of the spaces between change and stability. Put in more Innisian terms, that the modern is an instance of balance between time and space executed by individual agency and conscious response within a recognized context.

At some level in keeping with MacGillivray's conception of time as processual, though not necessarily progressive, we will examine his five fiction features (AERIAL VIEW, STATIONS, LIFE CLASSES, THE VACANT LOT, UNDERSTANDING BLISS) in chronological order. This is not to impose a rigid temporal interpretive grid, however appropriate that would be, but rather to trace recurrent and overlapping themes and stylistic strategies evident in the fictional work since MacGillivray began to 'tell his own stories' in a storytelling medium long dominated by others whose interests lay elsewhere. Given the lack of a firmly rooted feature fiction filmmaking tradition in Atlantic Canada, the choice to privilege the act of imaginary invention over the 'empirical' recording of actuality, as in the more established Canadian documentary filmmaking tradition,[4] will preoccupy us here. It is in these gestures of cinematic imagination that MacGillivray confronts established constructions of time, space, and the modern, re-imagining and re-locating them within the discourses of Canadian culture generally and Canadian film culture specifically.

I. AERIAL VIEW (1979)

With his first work, AERIAL VIEW, a 59-minute drama about a young architect disillusioned with the materialist culture in which he lives and works, MacGillivray adumbrates his preoccupation with identity and alienation (both potent preoccupations within the Canadian cinema generally). This film also quietly announces that films from Atlantic Canada need not concern themselves exclusively with so-called Atlantic themes. Though clearly placed in Atlantic Canada, within the dramatic content and the temporally fragmented narrative structure of the film is articulated an argument about where the modern world is seen to exist and what are its characteristic features.

A successful urban architect, Geoff has become dissatisfied with the direction of his profession, both in grand philosophical terms and in realtion to the financial dictates his Halifax firm must operate within. Geoff decides to quit the firm, as he is more interested in designing and building local housing, as he says, "using local materials and local skills."[5] While this estranges him from his business partner, his wife, and, to a lesser degree, his son, Geoff moves from the city to the home he is building by the ocean and ultimately, is left isolated and alone. While this is the story told by AERIAL VIEW, it is by no means how its narrative is constructed. Instead of a linear, arguably 'realist' construction, MacGillivray splits this study of alienated idealism into temporal shards, fragments which we must piece together as the 59 minutes unfold. Indeed, the first scene in the film has Geoff and his son Sammy watching 8mm home movies about happier times, about the past, before all this change was precipitated by

Geoff's decision. As Peter Harcourt observes, "...there is in MacGillivray's work a constant play between what is present and what has passed – in fact, often a destabilization of the present in relation to the past."[6] Harcourt goes on to describe how MacGillivray achieves the formal expression of the instability:

> Couple to these strategies of temporal disjunction is a frequently imposed dislocation between image and sound. MacGillivray plays with the standard textbook practice of overlap editing – introducing the sound for a new scene while the present scene is still on the screen; cutting away to a new scene while the present sound continues. In MacGillivray's hands, however, this practice is so extended that different bits of narrative information are presented simultaneously on the screen.[7]

This technique will be used again in STATIONS, a film created completely in the editing room,[8] but in AERIAL VIEW it functions as a formal strategy to articulate the uncertainty of the protagonist, the spectator, and the previously unexamined state of things. Beginning with AERIAL VIEW, then, we can witness the development of a poetics of destabilizing disclosure which will characterize all of MacGillivray's fictions; it is a poetics which insists upon the spectator's awareness of his or her own limitations of knowledge and apprehension.

Connected to the notion of limited knowledge, this film demonstrates that an aerial view is but one of many. Concretely speaking within the narrative of the film, that view has become one of panoptic triumphant capitalism, as indicated in the film's final line. Geoff's former partner, Ross, having peered out from a small plane at Geoff's 'locally produced' coastal house in the midst of prime development real estate, says to his pilot, 'Let's get out of here, this is costing me money.'[9] In a commercialized culture of vertical orientation, from corporate

hierarchies to the 'vertically integrated' film and television industry (now in place in Nova Scotia, too), MacGillivray's first major film issues a refutation of the assumptions underlying the very notion of the 'overseer.' Be it in the idea of god (St. Matthew's Anglican church is seen in the background, and below, as an elevator takes Geoff and Ross up to an office atop Halifax's corporate skyline), or Bentham's or Foucault's panopticon, or in the imposition of modes of architectural design to satisfy commercial interests, AERIAL VIEW constitutes a plea for horizontal space, for the horizon itself, for a point of view other than that of the one from above.

If the film is a critique of how space is imagined as mere commodity in modern capitalist societies, it also argues that time has suffered the same fate. In AERIAL VIEW and, especially in STATIONS, MacGillivray fragments linear time in the narrative. Peter Harcourt observes, correctly, that in all of MacGillivray's cinema, "...no privileged sense of a present tense... ."[10] This feature of his work begins with AERIAL VIEW. Exhibiting time via its cinematic play with tenses and, of course, concurrently shaping and reshaping our sense of 'what is happening,' MacGillivray emphasizes formally the importance of time as a organizing construct not only for the cinema (an art which the late Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky called 'sculpting in time'),[11] but also for culture itself. Geoff's accusation is that architecture must serve an quasi-organic and cultural function in linking humans with their lived space and their life-in-time, *not* the narrow commercial imperatives of late 20th Century capitalism, which structures time out of its discourses, save to commodify it in such phrases as 'time is money.' The

fact that at the end of the film Geoff is isolated from his wife, his son, and his architectural mentor, Tom, who himself confesses to have compromised with the state of things and taken a job arranged for him through family connections, simply underscores the cultural problem of time in modern Canada. Indeed, it reveals the limitations of Geoff's counter-cultural position, however noble it may be.

AERIAL VIEW's penultimate scene is crucial to an understanding of how MacGillivray is developing his sense of the modern, his argument that the modern is here. After a night partying, Tom, Geoff, and Tom's companion walk to a shipwreck and stand apart on its watery deck. Tom speaks of his compromised ideals and Geoff remains silent. Framed to emphasize the distance between them, the scene is a densely layered evocation of loss, of change, and of remembrance, both for the characters and, due the film's structure, the spectator: there is the eroding wreckage of maritime Canada's history beneath them, their own personal histories, the changing nature of the materialistic society they inhabit, and Geoff's ideas and ideals about architecture which have torn down his personal life. At once 'typically Atlantic' and critical of such typology as anachronistic, the scene offers another reading in relation to the film as whole. The distance between Geoff and Tom is the complex space where the conflict of 'how to accept the diversity and mutation of the world, while retaining the mind's power for analogy and unity, so that this changing world shall not become meaningless' will occur and recur. There, on that broken hull of Atlantic

Canada's marine history and troubled evolution within Canada, is sketched out by MacGillivray the very space of the modern.

II. STATIONS (1983)

MacGillivray's and Picture Plant's first full length feature, STATIONS, extends these formal and thematic approaches across the entire landscape of Canada. Set on a pan-Canadian train trip from British Columbia to Newfoundland, STATIONS follows a troubled television journalist, Tom Murphy, as he travels from Vancouver with a cameraman to a difficult family reunion and funeral in St.John's. Murphy's personal journey, initiated and haunted by the suicide of Harry, a close friend and former colleague in a Catholic seminary, is further complicated by his television station's assigning him to produce a documentary of the trip, to capture aspects of the Canadian identity from coast to coast. With its fragmented narrative, existential concerns, and meditative modalities, STATIONS is reminiscent of early Wim Wenders films, while its explorations of identity, memory, and the relationship between individual and landscape are quintessentially Canadian. In addition, its investigation of the use of images (television, Polaroid snapshots, home movies, etc) to understand and articulate personal, national, even regional identities gives the film a rich self-reflexive dimension. There is a concern, too, for the cultural force of orality in the form of songs, conversations, and personal interviews structured into the film. As an image based culture is, according to Innis' formulation, a space-biased one which deforms our sense of time and an oral-based culture is time-biased,[12] STATIONS is an exploration of perhaps *the* modern cultural struggle between

temporal and spatial forms of communication. Consistently intelligent, restlessly inquisitive of its own powers of representation, and visually authoritative, STATIONS expands upon AERIAL VIEW's formal strategies to further investigate the complex and *Canadian* cultural relationship between time and space.

In many senses, STATIONS is a compendium of space-biased communications technologies. From the train, itself a potent space conquering technological force in Canadian history and culture, to the television camera that records the journey, to the telephones, microphones, and Polaroid cameras that punctuate and describe the personal space of those on the train: the film depicts a Canada in motion, in flux across vast space. Tom Murphy's journey takes place in the interstices between, on the one hand, his own interior struggles with guilt over Harry's suicide and his estrangement from his father for having quit the seminary many years earlier, and, on the other, his professional exterior, interviewing 'ordinary Canadians' with his cameraman as they travel from Vancouver to Halifax. This narrative journey takes place, physically and psychologically across space, but it is anchored in time.

In fact, for all the technologically produced and over-determined media constructions of knowledge which are spatially biased (represented especially by the TV documentary Tom is ordered to make), STATIONS argues for a balance with the temporal by both insinuating and insisting upon oral forms of expression. These are located in the film in the many conversations Tom has with various people, all of whom complicate his personal and professional project: "You're not who you appear to be, Mr. Murphy," says a lonely woman he encounters and

mocks after hearing about her troubled life; "Stories are boring," says another passenger,[13] after Tom tells him he is a journalist trying to do a story; "The big ones want to look at the little ones," shouts the angry man, who turns the camera on Tom after this incisive declaration of awareness of how predatory and trivializing television can be to individual suffering (earlier his cameraman Gordie sniffs contemptously of the interviewees on the train, "Well, they're not exactly giving away any secrets"); Bernard the VIA Rail porter's intriguing theories about the four great concepts of modern civilization, "capitalism, communism, socialism, and railroadism," are also explained orally.[14] They are also present and insistent in Tom's disturbing dream about his mother, in the home movie images of his induction ceremony at the seminary, in a guitar-playing passenger's song that tells of father-son conflict stretched over time. Most potently of all, time is inscribed in Tom's filmed interview with Harry himself, who tells Tom of his confusion and anguish after leaving the seminary, of how he has been unable to find a secular identity upon which to build a new life. All of these exchanges create doubt and ambiguity in Tom's mind as his personal crises begin to bleed into his professional life.

While these examples may be seen to denote the presence of the temporal, in the Innisian sense, its insinuation is to be experienced, indeed discovered, in the film's formal structure. Peter Harcourt has noted, "...while the films both have structurally a beginning, a middle, and an end, this structure does not correspond to the narrative time of the film. It is not just that there are flash-backs or flash-forwards: the films' narrative strategies cannot be explained in this

way. Both AERIAL VIEW and STATIONS refuse any sense of an unfolding present tense." [15]This refusal, emphasized at a formal level, foregrounds our consciousness of time as a construct while it examines the epistemological implications of that consciousness. It is not simply a question of how we know what we know, or what the film discloses to us, but rather an investigation of how we construct our understanding of things *in time* and, given the pan-Canadian settings of the film's narrative journey, across space. As spectators, we are made aware of the process of becoming aware, and of how over the duration of the film our knowledge of things changes and evolves.

When Tom Murphy arrives in St. John's to face his father at a raucous party held by his sister, in some sense the spatial and the temporal have merged, and a measure of existential balance is achieved. MacGillivray even alters the structure of the film in this sequence, shifting the narrative's style from fragmentation to linearity.[16] Innis argues that the cultural predominance of spatially-biased media of communications, such as television and cinema, contribute to the creation of 'monopolies of knowledge'[17] (what American Walter Lippman later termed 'the manufacture of consent') which spread themselves over vast geographical distances and can elide differences, encourage stereotypes, and presume to occupy a pre-eminent, centralized, perhaps even 'aerial' view. In STATIONS, MacGillivray registers a countervailing temporal emphasis, orally expressed, which affirms complexity, ambiguity, and difference in relation to ideas of individuality, technology, otherness, regional identities and stereotypes, and the imagining of Canada itself. As Pierre Veronneau has

written, from its very setting on and off the rails, this is a film very much of and about Canada:

> Le Canada est un pays qui ne s'est pas construit sur une identité commune, sur une quête partagée, sur un projet collectif. On pourrait presque dire que son unique lien – son unique, en tous cas, au plan mythique – fut la construction d'un chemin de fer. En choisissant ce motif narratif – et en amenant le preducteur de Tom à lui imposer ce moyen de transport - , MacGillivray indique l'objet de sa réflexion: le Canada.[18]

Finally, and at another level 'outside the frame,' STATIONS is also distinctively Canadian in its mode of production. Made in the early 1980s, after the collapse of the notorious Tax Shelter Era[19] of would-be commercial filmmaking in Canada, STATIONS in many senses anticipates the mode of development of the renaissance of independent filmmaking in English-speaking Canada. Made for very little money and shot almost entirely on location,[20] it is an example of an artist-driven, non-commercial form of feature filmmaking. The script, for instance, was created collaboratively by the cast members with MacGillivray and cinematographer Lionel Simmons while on shooting on the train.[21] The structure of the film, as mentioned above, was created entirely in the editing room, as the film had no pre-conceived narrative form, merely a story of a man returning home to a funeral of a friend. This kind of film practice would become, of necessity as much as by intention because there was virtually no sustained film industry, the norm in Canada after 1983 with the arrival in English-speaking Canada of a 'new wave' of other independent fillmmakers, such as Mike Jones, Atom Egoyan, Peter Mettler, Patricia Rozema, Guy Maddin, Patricia Gruben, and others.

III. LIFE CLASSES (1987)

In LIFE CLASSES, MacGillivray pursues similar thematic directions but locates the pursuit, more strictly speaking, in Atlantic Canada only. He also expands considerably upon the spatial-temporal Innisian paradigm evident in AERIAL VIEW and STATIONS. Paradoxically, perhaps, this paradigm is here explored in a narrative far more linear in its construction, spatially and temporally speaking. Yet the concern for balance, a modern balance, is more explicitly articulated. While made for a substantially larger budget than STATIONS,[22] and released within an expanded context of distribution and exhibition,[23] LIFE CLASSES retains Picture Plant's principles of thoughtful, non-commercial, personal filmmaking which speaks from its 'locale to express various aspects of the human condition.'

LIFE CLASSES is the story of Mary Cameron. Made pregnant by an irresponsible boyfriend, she leaves small-town Cape Breton to have her child in Halifax. A struggling single mother working in a department store, she supplements her income by modeling nude at a local art school. Encouraged by friends, she is soon developing her own artistic talents, abandoning her paint-by-number sets to draw her own sketches. In doing so, Mary enhances her already considerable inner strengths and begins to discover and interpret her relationship to her past, her family, and the culture which produced her. The process helps

her reconnect with her father, her family's troubled history, and with Earl, the feckless satellite dish salesman-bootlegger father of her child. At once an eloquent portrait of self-discovery and an investigation of the mysterious processes of making art, LIFE CLASSES also ponders how imported cultural norms and attitudes, whether from cultural 'centres' in Europe or the United States, can be imposed on the individual imagination. Mary's journey toward discovering, to borrow a phrase from a pretentious amateur art collector in the film, the "conceptual underpinnings"[24] of her life and, by extension, her art, is an extraordinary one. This process of discovery (process and discovery being central motifs in MacGillivray's cinema), carried out amid the clutter of art school jargon and the visual clamour of an image-saturated mass culture, is rooted in Mary's rural, localized cultural traditions. As its very title suggests, LIFE CLASSES is concerned with how life is lived, or, more precisely, how life *can* be lived and how we can learn to live it. Indeed, the film asks: how do we construct our lives? Within this quiet, intimate narrative of personal discovery and realization, MacGillivray explores questions of representation, identity, and epistemology, and their relationship to contemporary society's various and ubiquitous image-making technologies. In this thematic gordian knot he also engages questions about what constitutes the very conceptualization and practice of modern life.

In LIFE CLASSES, the idea of the modern, or more precisely its assumed embodiment and expression in modern art (Modernism), is encountered by protagonist Mary Cameron as a system of knowledge to which she has little or no

access. Modern comes from elsewhere, from distant 'centres' in Europe and, more recently, the urban United States. Attending a lecture on contemporary art on Vassily Kandinsky, Jackson Pollack and other 'abstract impressionists,' Mary hears that, with regard to visual arts, the 20th century has witnessed New York replacing Paris and London as the pre-eminent centre of thought and practice in modern art. It is from these distant urban centres that ideas and expressions of the modern are understood to be conceived and then disseminated. Later in the film, after she has become employed as a nude model for an art school's 'life classes,' Mary attends a lecture by a visiting German artist. This particular artist's technologically produced artifacts and her utterly closed conceptual theoretical discussions about them constitute another argument of authorized modern expression. In this instance, it is a theoretically sanitized and sanctioned centre of European aesthetic philosophical discourse which, for MacGillivray and his heroine, is to be interrogated from the 'margins' of artistic production and individual experience. At a discussion of the artist's work wherein the artist describes how she has workman physically construct her large sculptures, Mary, whose experience of artistic expression is by now deeply personal and personally engaged, asks the translator of the artist, "What does *she* do?"[25]

The idea that the modern is thought to be an exclusively urban construction is acknowledged, but it is also contested. Mary Cameron is a modern woman *not* because she leaves rural Nova Scotia for urban Halifax, but because she searches for a balanced re-creation of rural and urban, centre and margin. In this sense, Mary embodies a dialectics of contemporary Canada, post-colonial yet

still colonized, anticipated in Innis' writings. As Jody Berland observes, "For Innis, as for any theorist of colonialism and imperialism, the notion of the margin implies a notion of the centre and of a necessary, dialectically productive relationship between the two."[26] The aforementioned lecture on modern art and the encounter with the German artist reflect the limitations and the possibilities of this dialectic. Mary's encounters with the 'centres' of art education and practice on the one hand illuminate her lack of formal training and reinforce her sense of marginality, but on the other activate a resistance to prescribed and apparently sterile pedagogical and theoretical models of artistic practice. The dialectic is productive not because Mary's work is better, or that the established 'modern art' techniques are invalid, but rather that the collision of approaches and processes will, ideally, inform each other's production and interpretation.

A central dramatic passage in MacGillivray's exploration of this notion of a 'dialectically productive relationship' is can be found in the sequence in which Mary and her friend Gloria agree to participate in a multi-media 'happening' being organized in Halifax by a visiting New York video artist. Located somewhere between the technological utopianism of Marshall McLuhan and a peculiarly mediated version of 'primal scream' therapy, the 'performance' features two men and two women, each with a musician, singing or simply talking about their pasts while standing naked in vertical clear plastic tubes. As the subjects and musicians interact, several cameras circulate, beaming the images of the participants via satellite back to New York. Not without a sly and satirical edge, this sequence weaves together several centre-margin discourses: metropolis and

hinterland, United States of America and Canada, visual and oral cultures. Linked to these, MacGillivray expresses concerns similar to those alluded to by Innis in a trenchant assessment of a culture with a space-biased media of communication based on visual rather than oral exchanges, "As modern developments in communication [eg photography, documentary and realist cinema] have made for greater realism they have made for greater possibilities of delusion."

Clearly, on one level, this sequence is a critique of the processes of cultural imperialism as executed by television technology. New York audiences will consume the personal and abstracted confessions of the participants, who, in true colonial fashion, have been paid in advance. On the surface, the medium flattens and de-contextualizes (or, to use Anthony Giddens' useful term, 'disimbeds') the 'authentic' psychological articulations of its subjects as it offers up their experiences for the aesthetic pleasure of the video artist as producer and the distant audience as consumers. It is simultaneously much more than that. While this multi-media 'happening' can be regarded in many ways as exploitative, it also has unintended and positive consequences in MacGillivray's narrative. Thanks to erratic and unprotected satellite signals, the performance is beamed back to Mary's Cape Breton home and is watched by Earl and by her father. In other words, through a technological accident, her candid and deeply personal admissions are finally heard by the very people who need to hear them. The technological experience as represented here is highly ambiguous; it is alienating, controlled and commodified by others and intended for other

purposes, yet it allows, however accidentally or *interstitially*, extraordinary intimacy and interpersonal communication. At another level, the transcendence of space by this form of mass media involves foreign control, but also contains indigenous local knowledge. As Innis contends in "The Bias of Communication,"[27] MacGillivray recognizes the paradoxes and dialectics of an era dominated by space-biased communication technologies: they can at once erase and affirm local specificity. Again, Berland's commentary is useful: "For Innis it is the capacities of communication technologies which enable this simultaneous integration and extrusion of colonized territories."[28] In addition to LIFE CLASSES' demonstration of the ambiguities of technological experience, it also dramatizes the struggle to resist those "monopolies of knowledge" Innis associated with increasingly space-biased media of communication. In a world of accelerated cultural homogeneity and ahistorical materialism, Mary claims her own marginal space and time in her drawings. Resisting the pre-set patterns of high art theory developed elsewhere *and* abandoning her over-determined paint-by-numbers kits, she actively negotiates the representation of her own experience and comprehension of what is central and what is marginal.

Moreover, Mary also resists in her connections to and reworking of the oral tradition in her family's cultural history. The song she sings ("My Child Is My Mother Returning"), which is also the musical leitmotif of the entire film, locates her life and her story in terms of duration, in the initimate terms of human, generational *time*. Similarly, her interest in the Gaelic language and in her Halifax neighbour's tales of the destruction of the Afro-Canadian neighbourhood of

Africville also reflects a concern for a conscious sense of continuity and community. Conversation therefore becomes, in several instances in LIFE CLASSES, a preserver of contradiction and individual, largely female, history and subjectivity. Again echoing Innis, orality in general is imagined in MacGillivray's work as an impediment to and a creative displacement of the now accelerating technological delivery of 'monopolies of knowledge' from putative centres to equally putative margins. This spatial bias is contested by the various manifestations of oral, or time-biased, communication. As Innis notes, "A concern with communication with the ear assumes reliance on time."[29] Elsewhere, Innis argues that, "The oral tradition supported Greek scepticism and evaded monopolies of religious literature."[30] In LIFE CLASSES the concern for orality dissents from the encroaching 'monopolies' of mass-media and consumer capitalism. Indeed, perhaps more resoundingly for MacGillivray, "...the oral tradition implies the spirit but writing and printing are inherently materialistic."[31] This is not to suggest that MacGillivray is as categorical as Innis in this regard, but his assertion of the importance of oral tradition through the character of Mary Cameron is a forceful critique of both spatially-biased media systems and the territories of the modern they presume to identify and embody.

For MacGillivray, then, perhaps *the* characteristic feature of being modern is rooted in refusal. It is a refusal anchored in the conscious act of reinterpreting established spatially-biased epistemologies and all the social, political, and moral prescriptions which may flow from them. This is not a clinging to the traditional in the face of change. On the contrary, it is a conscious effort, within the narratives

themselves and extending to the actual world beyond the frame, to confront the nature and significance of change itself. In fact, LIFE CLASSES concludes with an unequivocal rejection of traditional arrangements. Looking directly at the camera as Earl, her father, and her daughter Marie place branches on a fire at Mary's inherited country home, Mary Cameron utters a pre-emptive "No" to Earl's imminent marriage proposal. It is a confident, strong, compassionate declaration of a renewed, recreated, and re-calibrated set of affiliations in Mary's life. In this refusal is the affirmation of Mary's conscious, conflictive, and non-parochial but intensely local construction of her own and very modern life.

Unlike STATIONS, whose fragmented narrative mirrors the uncertainty and angst of its protagonist, LIFE CLASSES is rendered in a deceptively simple realist style, as if to formally inscribe Mary's own hesitant yet increasingly assured mastery of representation. There is in LIFE CLASSES a clearly evoked sense of place which permits MacGillivray to examine the identity and interiority of his character as she moves from rural Cape Breton to urban Halifax and proceeds to oscillate creatively between them. In this way, Mary Cameron's artistic development (away from paint-by-number renderings of 'typically Atlantic' scenes of the sea and lighthouses we see her working on early in the film) can also be seen as a metaphor of a region reclaiming its own representation. In that complex process of reclamation, situated in a refusal of predetermined representations and interpretations, is to be found the essence of MacGillivray's drama of the modern.

IV. THE VACANT LOT (1989)

If MacGillivray achieves a balance between his thematic concerns and a more linear, 'realist,' and perhaps accessible narrative form in LIFE CLASSES, that balance appears to vanish in his next film, THE VACANT LOT. The linear narrative style is preserved, indeed enhanced, but what informs it and gives it context and subtext is uncharacteristically sketchy and schematic. Like its troubled characters, the film seems to minimize or perhaps even deny the past as a meaningful part of its present, except as a source of numbing pain. While it insists, as all MacGillivray's films do, that the past is always present, the value and relevance of that past is put into question. THE VACANT LOT attempts to explore the ruptures of history, family, and continuity, but contains no engaging formal language to express it. Much like Patti Precious, the lead singer of the film's eponymous punk band, it is confused and searching for a language with which to express its apparently inchoate anger and disillusionment. Although anomalous in MacGillivray's oeuvre because of its clear concessions to the denotative imperatives of a more commercial storytelling style, the film is nevertheless consistent with his recurrent thematic concerns of cultural dislocation, selfhood, and the potentially liberating force of artistic creation.

THE VACANT LOT is the story of a relationship between Trudi, a young, reticent guitarist in an all-female punk band -- 'The Vacant Lot' -- and David, an aging rock star at the end of a once prominent career. Despite their age difference, David and Trudi are linked by absent fathers (Trudi's is a derelict country and western singer; David was raised by two uncles) and a desperate

desire to escape the world they inhabit to a faraway and supposed 'centre' of things, Los Angeles. When The Vacant Lot is hired by a club to, in the club owner's words, "play music that people will drink to," they have to leaven their original songs with more commercial music, and they hire David as a lead guitarist. The band then heads out on an ill-fated tour of Nova Scotia. Before they even get to their first gig, their van breaks down and they are marooned in a small café. They never play again. Within the context of an emerging inter-generational love story between Baby Boomer David and Generation Xer Trudi, MacGillivray's film presents a Nova Scotia of absent, thoughtless, non-communicative parents, an ahistorical popular culture, and a region so burdened by the failures of its past generations that its young continue to think they must escape by leaving. David describes Nova Scotia as "the end of the road," and Trudi sees it as "just the beginning," but both will leave it behind.

Where there is a hard won transcendence to be mined from the past of Mary Cameron, the past in THE VACANT LOT is a source of unremitting pain and disappointment. The connections to it are severed. For example, when Trudi's absent father, Johnny Sadler, shows up one night and gives her a cassette tape of his old songs, she later tosses it out of David's car into the snow as they drive to the airport. For his part, David has been forgotten by his old band mates, who are now successful in a new configuration 'out west' in Los Angeles. Moreover, when he goes to visit his uncle Alfie, who raised him, David is greeted by an old man who can't recognize or remember having raised his nephew. In this sense, the film renders a much bleaker vision of contemporary Atlantic

Canada, suggesting that the temporal and spatial are disconnected. These characters have internalized the assumptions of the 'centre' and are compelled to realize themselves by going to it.

Inside the frame, the film is about impasse: Trudi's, David's, Patti's. Not unlike the story of Mary Cameron, THE VACANT LOT's story is built upon the desire to escape stasis through creative agency. Unlike Mary Cameron's trajectory, Trudi finds only frustration in playing for others, be it playing guitar for Patti Precious or singing in the local choir. Even though she does eventually take control by discarding her father's music and by asking David to make love to her, Trudi's impasse, like David's, can only be transcended in a distant, glamorous elsewhere of the imagination. It is an unconvincing strategy. Perhaps MacGillivray is proposing that she is merely representative of a generation produced by the selfish and materialistic culture of its parents. In this sense, THE VACANT LOT is an illumination of both generations' disconnection from time in a predominantly space-biased media world of video and television. It is a serious cultural impasse, MacGillivray seems to suggest, but the search undertaken in this film fails to accomplish anything more than to identify the symptoms.

Outside the frame, as it were, THE VACANT LOT also represents an impasse in MacGillivray's work. With a budget of approximately one million dollars and a relatively large crew, this is Picture Plant's most elaborate and, arguably, most industrial scale production. This may account for MacGillivray's concession to commercial style narrative: linear arrangement of events, 'invisible' editing pattern, unremarkable and expository mise-en-scene. It may also account

for the decision not to incorporate his usual formal and thematic investigations of storytelling into the story itself. This lack inhibits his ability to move beyond the awkward and inarticulate surfaces of the empty worlds he depicts. *How* the story is being told, often so compelling in MacGillivray's cinema, is here of little interest. The form of THE VACANT LOT is unbalanced, inasmuch as there is an marked absence of what Harcourt identifies in MacGillivray's best work, that is, "...a self-reflexive concern with systems of representation."[32] While of some interest, THE VACANT LOT's commercial style, uneven script and cast make it a strangely uncertain exploration of Arthur Rimbaud's (later borrowed by Milan Kundera) evocative dictum, 'life is elsewhere.' [33]

V. UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990)

This question of where, and perhaps when, 'life is' finds its most self-conscious expression, formally and thematically, in MacGillivray's fifth feature fiction film, UNDERSTANDING BLISS. In many ways a return to the small, artisanal Picture Plant production mode of AERIAL VIEW and STATIONS, the film was shot in six days with cast and crew of 12 and with a budget of just over $300,000.[34] Its examination of an intense, passionate relationship in the process of collapse incorporates into its very intimate drama broader ideas of centre-margin, alienation, identity, and region. The film is also, with LIFE CLASSES, MacGillivray's most thorough and complex interrogation of the notion of the modern within the Innisian paradigm of space-time biases of communication. In

fact, not only is the idea of the modern explored within the narrative itself, it is also physically inscribed in the material construction of the film itself.

As we have seen, with the exception of the anomalous THE VACANT LOT, MacGillivray's cinema regards its regional setting as complex, serious, and, paradoxically, almost incidental. It also ignores stereotypical representations of the Atlantic region as a good-natured yet unsophisticated cultural backwater, a stereotype to be found in films from central Canada like Donald Shebib's GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD and present in varying degrees from Peter Carter's THE ROWDYMAN to John N. Smith's WELCOME TO CANADA to Mort Ransen's MARGARET'S MUSEUM. For MacGillivray, while the 'regional' context of his films does resonate thematically, it neither determines the films' meanings nor their characters' possibilities. In UNDERSTANDING BLISS, the study of a failed relationship between a woman from Toronto and a man from Newfoundland, this problematic notion of region is foregrounded.

UNDERSTANDING BLISS is the story of Peter Breen, a Cultural Studies professor in St. John's, and Elizabeth Sutton, a professor English and an expert on the life and writings of New Zealand author, Katherine Mansfield. She travels from Toronto to St. John's to give a talk about Mansfield, including a complete public reading of the short story, "Bliss." Having had several encounters at various academic conferences, they resume their affair in St. John's, where she meets Peter's father and sister, Mae, and experiences the specific cultural context which has shaped Peter's life and thought. While she prepares for her performance, Peter's class gets ready to perform a traditional Mummer's Play. As

the day passes, the two characters begin to realize that more than Canadian geography separates their lives. After her ill-attended reading, videotaped for Peter by Mae, the forlorn Elizabeth goes to Peter's class and is a decidedly uncomfortable participant in a raucous rehearsal of the Mummer's Play. Afterwards, back in her hotel room, the relationship is brought to a bitter end.

In addition to the dissonance of their divergent artistic interests and academic affiliations, over the course of the film Peter and Elizabeth's respective regional identifications are gradually revealed to be not only sources of strength and identity, but also evidence of serious personal limitation and alienation. MacGillivray conflates this regional problematic with the idea of the modern as it is understood to inform the style and the production of meaning in cultural texts, be they literary, folkloric, filmic, or theatrical, *or* be they produced in Toronto or St. John's. Much of UNDERSTANDING BLISS is organized around the interrogation of the assumptions underlying the construction of such terms as 'region' and 'modern' as they are embodied or imagined to exist in the two main characters. Indeed, as their relationship founders upon a clash of expectations and not a little mutual indifference and self-absorption, a line audible from Elizabeth's reading of "Bliss" resonates ironically and appropriately: "They were so frank with each other – such good pals. That was the best of being modern." [35]Being modern: there is the theory and there is the practice, and there is the place – the context -- where the theory is practiced. Reminding us, as Peter does Elizabeth, to 'remember where you are,' this film examines precisely how complex and differentiated those ways of 'being modern' can be.

In UNDERSTANDING BLISS, it is impossible to forget where you are. From the cinematographic inscription of the city with Steadicam tracking shots to the main characters walking through the hills and streets and alleys of downtown St. John's, to the recurring images of the harbour and the city's architecture, to the insistent fog horns and montage of voices layered in the sound edit, there is a firmly constructed sense of place. That sense of place is also articulated in various ways in the dialogue. Elizabeth invokes Peter's description of St. John's, in Canadian terms, as the "Far East." Peter himself describes Elizabeth to his father as his "friend from away," and St. John's itself as "a walking town" and "a very small and nosy community." There is even a brief, witty history of the city woven into the dialogue after Elizabeth inquires about the reasons for what she regards as the "makeshift" styles of architecture in downtown St. John's. We also hear of how Peter was perceived by the Toronto academic community during his visits 'up there.' Betraying her own acceptance of the centre-margin paradigm (with Toronto occupying the former), after seeing his old neighbourhood, Elizabeth asks Peter, "What if you hadn't escaped?" [36]

All this insistence on the consciousness of place in UNDERSTANDING BLISS is not to make the film more 'regional.' Nor is it to embrace uncritical discourses of the Newfoundland "Folk," as described in McKay's work, but rather it is to put the construct of 'region' into a state of flux, and to dismantle the centre-margin paradigm which validates one particular understanding of it. The concept of region is thoroughly ventilated in this film: it is acknowledged, affirmed, demystified, critiqued, and, most important of all, contextualized. The process of

illuminating the contexts of cultural expression, his characters' and his own, is central to all of MacGillivray's cinema. This process is especially apparent, of course, in UNDERSTANDING BLISS, as both characters are directly engaged in the creation, interpretation, and validation of various kinds of cultural texts in specific contexts.

Elizabeth Sutton's experience of context is instructive. While we first meet her in a dark bath in a nondescript hotel, she is, quite literally, de-contextualized, as are we as spectators. As she walks through the city and experiences, as we do, its topography, her ongoing affair with Peter is placed in a new context, although this does not appear to change her view of the nature of the relationship. She is curious, but uninterested in this new context. Perhaps based on an assumption that self-consciously 'literary' performances are of sufficient cultural import to be transportable effortlessly from one context to another, she does not alter her performance for its new context. On a broader level, perhaps this represents an inherent spatial bias rooted in a culture of printed texts[37] which are widely disseminated, and Elizabeth's disappointment at the reception of her reading can be seen as a recognition of the limitations of this particular bias of communication. After the reading, Mae argues that the concerns of academics in one context should not be thought to be automatically transferable or to be of universal interest. As she tells the disappointed Elizabeth after a reading where only nine people attend (compared to 320 for the same performance in Toronto), "It's not that we're not interested. It's just that we don't want to be told to be interested."[38] The spatial bias of the printed word can minimize or ignore the

ambiguities of lived experience in time; or, in Mae's apposite appraisal of the reading, delivered in concise Innisian spatial-temporal terms, "At this time in this place, it's not relevant."[39]

If Elizabeth's encounter with this new context moved her, as she describes the thematic trajectory of Mansfield's "Bliss," from 'superficiality' to 'realization,' Peter Breen's awareness of context informs his whole being. This awareness underlines his sense of how the processes of various forms of cultural imperialism can elide difference and erode the very voice of context itself. As he exhorts, alluding to Newfoundland's independent, pre-Confederation past, "You don't need Canada or America coming down here and telling you what's worth holding on to, what's worth saving. ... Tell your own stories, get to know who *you* are, yourselves."[40] He continues, "You must contribute either by listening to a story or, even better, by telling a story."[41] Peter's is an active, participatory conception of culture which privileges the cultural power of the storytelling process, or, as he puts it, "the event of the story being told."[42] For Peter, the relationship between the event and its context is critical, as he tells his students, "You see, the context alters – it changes, it adds to it, diminishes it, enlarges it, expands the meaning of the piece." He also argues for the temporal bias of individual or community storytelling as a strategy to resist processes of cultural homogenization. As he concludes, "None of this is new; it's ancient, ancient, ancient stuff, but it never ever ever ceases to be relevant."[43]

Juxtaposed in the film to Elizabeth's static reading of the Katherine Mansfield story is the uproarious rehearsal of the Mummer's Play by Peter and

his students. In this extended and antic sequence, the differences of its narrative style, produced and reshaped by the context of production, is made manifest. The Mummer's Play is traditional form of community theatre which suspends 'normal' identities and social norms with its masks and disguises; it is also open-ended, able to incorporate contemporaneous references into its improvisational form. It is, in a sense, using 'local materials and local skills' to create a set of performances to articulate a response to contemporary events. (In this instance, this play is an attack on the neo-colonial position of the Government of Canada under then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.) It is ancient. It is also modern. In this affirmation of the temporally-biased, oral forms of indigenously produced cultural expression, MacGillivray reiterates that the modern resides in the ancient and the ancient is a constituent part of the modern. That this argument is made from a putatively marginal culture in Canada reflects how MacGillivray's cinema is engaged in troubling accepted notions of where and when the modern is produced.

The word 'relevant' is uttered twice in UNDERSTANDING BLISS. Specific to the film's narrative and reaching beyond it, MacGillivray's use of the term contends that the meaning of relevance is always contextual and biased. Nothing is simple in this film. Given his own pronouncements about context and bias, for example, it is curious that Peter has little interest in Elizabeth's videotaped performance except as material to be incorporated into future classes, his own controlled context. The strength he draws from being grounded in Newfoundland also limits his ability to engage in Elizabeth's interest in the work of Katherine

Mansfield. In fact, when she tells him what story she will be reading, he remarks offhandedly, "Oh yes, I think I read that one."[44] It also blinds him to the nature of his relationship with Elizabeth, which he regards far more seriously than does she. (When he tells him about possibly leaving his wife to be with Elizabethm Peter's perspicacious father even asks him, "Are you sure *she* wants any of this?")[45] All of these various and overlapping discourses of region, individual identity, representation, and cultural currency are woven into the film's gradual, assured trace of the impending wreckage of Peter's and Elizabeth's relationship. It is a relationship that has become in its new context of St. John's, de-contextualized and irrelevant.

While these tensions operate at the level of the narrative itself, they are also inscribed in the film's specific formal and material construction. Shot on Hi-8 video and edited entirely on video equipment, the completed UNDERSTANDING BLISS was then printed onto 35mm film. There exists no 'negative' of the film. In one sense, it is not a 'film' at all, but rather an in-between form of motion picture. The reasons for this production and aesthetic decision by Picture Plant were both practical and philosophical. After the trying experience of making the THE VACANT LOT, MacGillivray and Greenlaw wanted to return to a more manageable production model, and also soon realized that this script, co-written by MacGillivray and Kathryn Cochran, would not likely find generous funding in any event. The production mode had to match the low budget, and video is much cheaper to shoot on than celluloid. (It was also seen as a preparatory experiment for their next and still unrealized feature script, THE DREAMS OF JINKY

DROVER.)[46] That experimental pragmatism was underlined by MacGillivray's notion of exploring ideas of temporality in a medium known for its disposability and even spatial promiscuity. As he says, "I wanted to work with what is an essentially glib medium -- it has no weight, it has no history – and tell a tale about people in a place who are laden with their personal and cultural histories. This contrast of form and content appealed to us."[47] Evincing MacGillivray's modernist examination of his own systems of representation, UNDERSTANDING BLISS is in many ways a return to the self-reflexive tendencies of AERIAL VIEW and STATIONS. In a film which at one level is about how we affiliate ourselves with various systems of representation (literature, theatre, film, architecture, and ultimately, language), it is fitting that the very medium itself is under investigation.

Mistakenly described by *The Globe and Mail* critic Stephen Godfrey as "simplicity itself,"[48] this film is one of MacGillivray's most complex confrontations with ideas of Canada, the modern, temporal and spatial biases of communications technologies and narrative traditions, and the paradoxes of his own filmmaking practice. The oddly textured video-film visual surfaces of UNDERSTANDING BLISS are rich in implication. How do we as spectators respond to images which correspond neither to video art nor the standard celluloid image? Is what we are watching constructed or merely recorded? Moreover, the preponderance of long takes and Steadicam affirms the complexity of a tangibly terrestrial view, of the horizontality of space within which the characters will negotiate their relationship. In cinematic terms, it makes the representational images and largely linear narrative construction appear

strangely irreal within this form of visual miscegenation, this hybrid of videotape and celluloid. It is a formal strategy that is simultaneously intimate and detached, not unlike, perhaps, the characters it examines and the story it tells. Critic Cameron Bailey's vivid description of the visual style of the film is incisive: "The fluid long takes that result throw the film into the dichotomous realms of poetry and surveillance; the camera is relentless, its images both raw and shimmering." [49] Within these dichotomous realms, MacGillivray delivers formal emphases to the process of telling stories and 'getting to know who we are.' As UNDERSTANDING BLISS both depicts and *enacts*, this is anything but simple.

Peter Breen argues for the primary significance of the 'event of the story being told.' For a Canadian filmmaker, particularly one who lives outside what is presumed to be 'the centre' of film production in Canada, this line has added political resonance, as the 'event of the story being told' is the film itself as it moves through a projector. We do not have enough of these events in Canada, let alone Atlantic Canada, argues MacGillivray.[50] Instead we prefer to defer to the 'events' of Hollywood, or, as Peter formulates it, "to the experts and dilettantes who don't really care."[51] For its intelligent and impassioned insistence upon the process of connecting what is happening inside its frame to the cultural politics of the world beyond its material construction, UNDERSTANDING BLISS is a radical and, despite its deeply implicated and obvious technological construction, an *organic* piece of cinema.

CONCLUSION

That a modern culture exists and is to be explored in Atlantic Canada is a given; it is the rich complexity of that culture that compels MacGillivray's cinema. If we accept a combination of Ortega y Gassett's and Innis' conceptions of culture as a starting from a point of view and expressed in spatial and temporal balance, then cinema of William D. MacGillivray constitutes an exploration of the drama inherent in this combination. That it does so in the late 20th Century, and is articulated in a context in which, as Fredric Jameson asserts, "... the ultimate form of commodity reification in contemporary consumer society is the image itself,"[52] reflects MacGillivray's counter-cultural, even 'auratic'[53] regard for images as a mode of resistance. He uses images *not* as a form of commodity reification, but rather as a medium within which to question such processes of reification and to insist upon the 'mind's power for analogy and unity in a world thrust into differentiation.'

Both in terms of the mode of the material production of the films and their thematic and stylistic outlines, this characteristic of the cinema of William D. MacGillivray can be usefully affiliated with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'dialogic' cultural text. We recall that dialogism is the "...characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia."[54] MacGillivray's cinema does indeed accord with Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia.' Heteroglossia is defined as, "The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which ensures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions – social, historical, meteorological, physiological – that will ensure that a word uttered in that place

and in that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; ... ."[55] As we have seen, the emphasis on context in the production of meanings is what animates the fictional worlds MacGillivray creates as well as the formal shape of their animation. This 'dialogism' incorporates ideas of identity, modernity, time, space, centre, margin, and our relationship as spectators to the processes of perception and meaning in cinematic experience. Moreover, as a particular emphasis in a specifically Canadian context, his cinema also offers subtle investigations of the 'conceptual underpinnings' of notions of regionalism. Though clearly and firmly rooted in contemporary Atlantic Canada, MacGillivray's cinema, like the characters who populate it, seeks to locate its so-called regional concerns into larger questions of alienation, technology, identity, memory, and possibilities of personal transcendence. It is, then, a modern cinematic cultural practice that emerges out of a 'point of view' acutely aware of its context, inquisitive about its ontology, and affirmative of its presence in the processes of time.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 3

[1] Jose Ortega y Gassett, THE MODERN THEME (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961. Trans. James Cleugh) p. 60.

[2] Carlos Fuentes, MYSELF WITH OTHERS (Farrar Strauss Giroux, New York, 1988) p. 49-50.

[3] Harold Innis, " A Plea For Time," in STAPLES, MARKETS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston 1995. Daniel Drache, ed.) p. 375.

[4] This thesis addresses only MacGillivray's fiction feature films. There is insufficient space to discuss his rich body of work in the short drama and the documentary form, of which the latter includes five short films and two feature length documentaries, I WILL NOT MAKE ANY MORE BORING ART (1988) and FOR GENERATIONS TO COME (1995). In addition, this thesis will not examine his 13-part televison comedy series, GULLAGE'S, produced in 1996-1997.

[5] AERIAL VIEW (1979).

[6] Peter Harcourt, "Planting Pictures: an appreciation of the films of William D. MacGillivray, *Cinema Canada* (Montreal, November 1987) p.16.

[7] Harcourt, p.16.

[8] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[9] AERIAL VIEW (1979).

[10] Harcourt, p. 15.

[11] Andrey Tarkovsky, SCULPTING IN TIME (The Bodley Head, London, 1986. Trans. Kitty Hunter Blair). See especially Chapter III, "imprinted Time."

[12] Harold Innis, " A Plea For Time," in STAPLES, MARKETS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston 1995. Daniel Drache, ed.) pp. 356-383.

[13] This passenger is actually the renowned Swiss documentary filmmaker, Robert Frank, whose own work questions the epistemological validity of the documentary and, as alluded to here, journalism.

[14] All citations are from STATIONS (1983).

[15] Harcourt, p. 16.

[16] Harcourt finds this formal shift to be a weakness in the film. Please see is Cinema Canada article, p. 19.

[17] Innis. "The Bias of Communications," in Drache, ed. p.330.

[18] Pierre Veronneau. A LA RECHERCHE D'UNE IDENTITE (La Cinematheque quebecoise, Montreal, 1991) p. 69.

[19] For more on the Tax Shelter Era of filmmaking in Canada (ca. 1977-1983), please see Jay Scott "Burnout in the Great White North," in Seth Feldman, ed. TAKE TWO (Irwin Publishing, Toronto, 1984) pp. 29-35.

[20] Strangely enough, National Film Board of Canada actually suggested that Picture Plant build a set for the sequences to take place on the cross-Canada train. Perhaps this can account for the joke made at the NFB's expense when Tom Murphy's boss at the television station, after looking over some of Tom's rushes, states bluntly, "We can't put this shit on the air. We're not the NFB."

[21] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[22] The budget for STATIONS was approximately $220,000, while the LIFE CLASSES budget was cost $655,000. Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[23] By the time LIFE CLASSES was completed, Canada had developed a far more active specialty channels for movies (eg. First Choice et al), and a number of small, independent distributors, such as Toronto's Cinephile and Creative Exposure, had begun to distribute Canadian films to repertory cinemas across Canada.

[24] For a lively and perceptive interpretation of the resonance of the phrase in LIFE CLASSES, please see Robin Wood, "Towards A Canadian (Inter)National Cinema: Part 2 LOYALTIES and LIFE CLASSES" *CineAction* (York University, Toronto, Summer 1989), pp. 29-35.

[25] LIFE CLASSES(1987).

[26] Jody Berland, "Space at the Margins: Critical Theory and colonial space after Innis," (unpublished paper, Toronto 1995) p. 5.

[27] Innis, in Drache, ed., p. 372.

[28] Berland, p. 10.

[29] Innis, in Drache, ed., p. 400.

[30] Innis, in Drache, ed., p.405

[31] Innis, in Drache, ed., p.420.

[32] Harcourt, p. 16.

[33] See Arthur Rimbaud, A SEASON IN HELL, first published in 1872, and Milan Kundera, LIFE IS ELSEWHERE, published in 1974.

[34] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[35] Katherine Mansfield, "Bliss," SELECTED STORIES (Oxford University Press,Oxford, 1981), p.122, as cited in UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[36] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[37] Innis, in Drache, ed., "The Bias of Communications," pp. 325-349.

[38] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[39] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[40] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[41] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[42] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[43] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[44] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[45] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[46] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[47] Interview with author, 17 July 2000.

[48] Godfrey. "Homegrown work a highlight at Atlantic festival," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, 29 September 1990).

[49] Cameron Bailey, UNDERSTANDING BLISS festival catalogue description, Toronto Festival of Festivals Official Catalogue (Toronto,1991) p. 223.

[50] William D. MaGillivray, . "Sitting In The Dark," *CineAction* (York University, Toronto, Spring 1992).

[51] UNDERSTANDING BLISS (1990).

[52] Fredric Jameson, SIGNATURES OF THE VISIBLE (Routledge, New York, 1990) pp. 11-12.

[53] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in ILLUMINATIONS (Schocken Books, New York, 1969. Hannah Arendt, ed. Trans. Harry Zohn).

[54] Mikhail Bakhtin, . THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981. Michael Holquist, ed. Trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist) p. 426.

[55] Bakhtin, p. 428.

Chapter 4

Time Frames

In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them.
Anthony Giddens [1].

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modern, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again.
Raymond Williams[2]

The third characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value. ... It is literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility;
.Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari [3]

For Carlos Fuentes, the modern age began in 1605 when Miguel de Cervantes' fictional creation Don Quixote rode out of his library and discovered that the world did not exist precisely as it was written in books.[4] In that fissure between belief and experience the modern is created, imagined, sustained. In the films of William D. MacGillivray, there are similar experiences for his alienated, intelligent, searching characters who must struggle to create their modern lives in that epistemological chasm between what they have been taught and what they experience. (Outside the frame, this may also apply to those

watching MacGillivray's films with certain preconceptions about Atlantic Canada and what constitutes the modern.) Confronting the barren enchantments of solipsism in their respective eras with affirmations of temporal and social contexts for human engagement, both Cervantes and MacGillivray map the outlines of exile *and* the potential to imagine or even construct 'another possible community.' In MacGillivray's work, the search for processes to 'forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility' is always examined within the context of what Bakhtin identifies as "...the fundamentally social modes in which discourse lives,"[5] As Picture Plant uses 'local materials and local skills' within the larger framework of the North American commercial film industry, it resists the 'disembedding' processes Giddens speaks of as characteristic of one form of modernity. [6]This work refuses as reductive his contention that social spaces are only 'phantasmagoric' and are shaped exclusively by the powerful and pervasive penetrations of space-biased media of communication. MacGillivray's work insists that there are other conceptions, other potentialities, other cartographies of the modern and modernity.

Admittedly, there are undeniably many sources of phantasmagoria, as Giddens articulates it. There is much to resist. One of the most influential and space-biased manifestations of the phantasmagoric, of course, is the Hollywood cinema. While it uses the same basic technology and material construction as any other filmmaking enterprise, its extraordinary economic, aesthetic and cultural hegemonies, especially in Canada, can be seen to constitute, to adapt Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, the cinema's 'major literature.' In this sense,

MacGillivray and Greenlaw and their preferred film production practices at Picture Plant represent an instance of 'minor literature.' As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language." [7]. They work with the same material as Hollywood, wth the same physical and technological elements of the 'major literature,' but, like the Irishmen James Joyce or Samuel Beckett writing in the English language or the Czech Franz Kafka in the German, Picture Plant attempts to form, in film terms, "...a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses." [8] These 'strange and minor uses' can perhaps then re-orient our epistemological preconceptions. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "Only the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on." [9] This redefinition of popular and marginal, or central-marginal ('regional'), is activated in the Picture Plant 'minor literature' as a forceful re-inscription of Harold Innis's 'plea for time' which, paradoxically, argues for a new spatial cartography of the modern. To return to Charles Taylor, the insistence in MacGillivray's work is upon always seeing the map in a temporal dimension, too.[10] This must be done in order to remember a modern past and, to invoke Williams, a modern future which is not atomized and alienated but retains some relevance for lived human collectivity and affiliation.

Indeed, all of the work of William D. MacGillivray is engaged in a critical process of what Judith Stamps has suggestively called, 'unthinking modernity.' [11]Not only does this take the form of a deep and active scepticism regarding

notions of technological and other forms of progress, but his work also reflects a valuable and useful critical strategy known as 'negative dialectics.' As she describes it, "So named by Adorno and Benjamin, negative dialectics is a creative and transcendent response to rigid forms of reasoning." [12] While developed in the thought of European thinkers Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, Stamps perceives and identifies its outlines in the work of Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis. For Stamps, their work produces an important set of interconnected and overlapping ideas about communications processes in a Canadian context, and "The resulting dialogue, a recognition of margins as essential sources of critique, is a key element in the concept of negative dialectics." [13] Within Canadian cultural production, then, the work of MacGillivray can be seen to seek a 'creative and transcendent response to rigid forms of reasoning,' whether that reasoning be applied to conceptions of Canadian history, regionalism, and political power, or to intellectual assumptions and argument about where modern living and modern thought occur in Canada. The margins are indeed 'essential sources of critique;' MacGillivray employs negative dialectics in order to 'unthink' modernity by critiquing its assumptions and to interrogate where those margins are understood to exist, and why.

MacGillivray is engaged in rendering narratives of the elastic, certainly dialectical, perhaps even symbiotic relationships between assumed notions of centre and margin. From the perspective of Atlantic Canada, this relationship this relationship has historical, economic, and political resonances which inform the background of the films. Seen in this context, these texts represent contemporary

Canadian examples of Innis' famous notion, applied in a strictly but not exclusively economic context, of "storm centres." As Innis wrote, meaning that this is where larger possible crises can first be anticipated, "In a sense the economies of frontier countries are storm centres in the modern international economy." [14] The Atlantic provinces, returned by Confederation to 'marginality' and, in a way, the frontier within a continentalist economic and political system, also begin again to reflect stresses of the new 'modern international economy,' as did those pre-Canadian colonies in 18th and 19th century British North America. In the 'storm centres' that are narratives such as AERIAL VIEW, STATIONS, LIFE CLASSES, THE VACANT LOT, and UNDERSTANDING BLISS, the social, psychological, and cultural implications of the late 20th Century's technologically driven 'global economy' are identified and explored. Furthermore, these narratives serve to resist representations generated elsewhere about the nature and substance of life in Atlantic Canada. These works recalibrate the centre-margin dynamic by unmasking its biases, by exposing its false hegemony, by arguing that maybe the 'centre' is shaped by the margins, not vice versa. It is another instance of the notion of negative dialectics we can see at work in these two cultural texts. As Stamps elaborates for a more explicitly historical application,

> For Canadian and European theorists, negative dialectics was primarily a method of studying social phenomena, a new way of studying history. They understood history as an open-ended series of qualitative changes that emerged at the margins of dominant institutions. The theorists developed texts that simulated a negative dialogue by juxtaposing multiple perspectives on the topics in question. This multiple approach would allow authors and readers to see their object of

study as a totality. But it would not allow them to define the object, in lockstep fashion, as having a single founding cause or essence. [15]

These are processes of interpretation and perception which are evident in all of MacGillivray's films, albeit in relation to notions of individual identity and modern experience within a set of specific circumstances. It is in such a complex and conflictive set of Canadian historical, economic, political, and technological tensions that the fictions of MacGillivray, informed by and armed with the flexible instruments of negative dialectics, confront ideas of the Canadian modern in the narrative trajectories of their protagonists. What these fictions propose is a theory of the modern that argues that it may not be exclusively urban, technocentric, visual, and spatial. It may be sometime, something, and somewhere else entirely.

As Habermas relates, "The question now is whether one can obtain from subjectivity and self-consciousness criteria that are taken from the modern world and are at the same time fit for orienting oneself within it – and this also means fit for the critique of modernity that is at variance with itself." [16] This is the question dramatized in MacGillivray's cinema, a cinema in which is heard an echo of George Grant's admonition that only through "...a constant and relentless reflection on this modern idea can we hope to liberate ourselves from the naïve acceptance of it. " [17] Perhaps ultimately what his cinema attempts to identify are what Charles Taylor calls "...anthropologies of situated freedom." [18] All of his characters are, in one form or another, engaged in a search for a 'situated freedom' within an increasingly preordained nexus of narrow political ideologies and economic structures which declare themselves to be the 'conceptual underpinnings' of 'the modern world.' This 'situatedness' is a set of spatial and

temporal processes which are located in but not limited to Atlantic Canada. They are also taken up in the as it were 'non-regional' work of other contemporary Canadian filmmakers, especially Atom Egoyan, Peter Mettler, Guy Maddin, Denis Villeneuve, Robert Lepage, Lea Pool, and others. One might say of MacGillivray, as James Clifford does of American poet, William Carlos Williams, "His cosmopolitanism requires a perpetual veering between local attachments and general possibilities." [19] and that his work, rooted in a part of Canada often regarded as unmodern, "...makes space for specific paths through modernity." [20]

In this sense as a Canadian and, as illustrated, within various political, economic, and cultural discourses in this country, *Atlantic* Canadian filmmaker, MacGillivray's cinema embodies Eric Woolf's characterization of being modern as experiencing, "...a flaring up of the most radical hopes in the midst of the their radical negations." [21] An exile, an interstitial explorer, a key figure in the 'minor literature' of making Canadian films, MacGillivray embraces the Deleuze-Guattari challenge: "How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have only one single dream: to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language? Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor." [22] In MacGillivray's own words that 'flaring of radical hopes against their radical negations,' both in the film narratives and their actual modes of production, constitute small victories. As he explains, ever contextualizing and recontextualizing his work, "... 'win big' an American notion. 'Win medium' is a Canadian notion, and 'win small' is an Atlantic notion. So my films deal with winning small." [23]

Produced consciously and deliberately in the 'margins' of Canadian – indeed North American -- culture, MacGillivray's works describe conceptions of modern life which resist the prevailing, one could even say continentalist, space-biased forms of communication which claim the territory of the modern and which either annul time or understand it only as time-as-progress. His work attempts instead to enact and articulate the experience and consciousness of the modern as a balance of the forms of communication comprised by technology and orality. MacGillivray attempts to locate this decidedly Innisian balance in a combination of the fluidity of space-biased media forms (cinema, television, video) created from the 'margins,' *and* the modes of resistance to 'obsessive present-mindedness' found in oral forms of communication which are foregrounded in various manifestations in his five fiction feature films. As Innis suggests, "Obsession with present-mindedness precludes speculation in terms of duration and time." [24] The consequence of that obsession can be the elimination of time itself as an active component in cultural discourses. As a result, argues Innis, "The essence of living in the moment and for the moment is to banish all individual continuity." [25] For Stamps, the Innisian preoccupation with orality's possibilities is a critical component to the development of a useful 'negative dialectics' in contemporary Canadian cultural life. "In Innis' view, an oral tradition served three main functions – it enhanced cultural memory and, thus, a historical sense of time; it promoted an empathic sensibility; and it promoted tolerance for ambiguity in meaning." [26] In these five works, MacGillivray makes the same case.

In distinct but interconnected ways AERIAL VIEW, STATIONS, LIFE CLASSES, UNDERSTANDING BLISS, and, to a much lesser extent, THE VACANT LOT move through, as Arthur Kroker describes where Innis traveled, the "deepest interstices of the technological experience, understood as the primal of Canadian society." [27] It is a place of considerable ambivalence and ambiguity, as MacGillivray demonstrates in his dramas of the complex interactions between technology and individual identity in late 20th Century Atlantic Canada. These films are, in other words, creative confrontations with an individual modern Canadian continuity mediated but not determined by technology. They are also useful interventions of 'negative dialectics,' contesting established ideas of what constitutes the modern and where and when in Canada it is to be recognized. Such recognition may be difficult, but its dramas are compelling: Geoff talks of another path and hears his ideas clash with the ambiguities of lived experience; Tom Murphy attends to the voices of others to find his own as he crosses the vast Canadian landscape by train; Mary Cameron stands naked in a plastic tube and speaks and sings while her image and voice are beamed by satellite to New York and to Cape Breton; and an impassioned, defiant Peter Breen tells us to tell our own stories. In the cinema of William D. MacGillivray, all these voices flicker across the ephemera of technologically produced centres and margins to anchor themselves, modern and articulate, in the heart of time.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 4

[1] Anthony Giddens, THE CONSEQUENCES OF MODERNITY (Stanford University, Los Angeles, 1990) pp. 18-19.

[2] Raymond Williams, THE POLITICS OF MODERNISM (Verso, London, 1989) Tony Pinkey, ed., p. 35.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, KAFKA: TOWARD A MINOR LITERATURE (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986 trans. Dana Polan) p.17.

[4]Carlos Fuentes, "Cervantes, or The Critique of Reading," in MYSELF WITH OTHERS (Farrar, Strauss Giroux, New York 1988), p. 49.

[5] Bakhtin, Mikhail M. THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981. Michael Holquist, ed. Trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist) p. 259.

[6] Giddens, p. 21.

[7] Deleuze, Guattari, p. 16.

[8] Deleuze, Guattari, p. 19. Novelist Robert Kroetsch offers a Canadian echo of this notion: "The Canadian writer's particular predicament is that he works with a language, within a literature, that appears to be authentically his own, and not a borrowing. But just as there was in the Latin word a concealed Greek experience, so there is in the Canadian word a concealed other experience, sometimes British, sometimes American." From "Unhiding the Hidden," cited in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tifton, eds. THE POST-COLONIAL STUDIES READER (Routledge, London, 1995), p. 394.

[9] Deleuze, Guattari, p. 18.

[10] Charles Taylor, SOURCES OF THE SELF (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989) p. 496.

[11] Judith Stamps, UNTHINKING MODERNITY (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995).

[12] Stamps, p. 18.

[13] Stamps, p. 15.

[14] Harold Innis, "The Political Implications of Unused Capacity in Frontier Economies" in STAPLES MARKETS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston 1995) Daniel Drache, ed. p. 34.

[15] Stamps, p. 20.

[16] Jurgen Habermas, THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 20.

[17] George Grant, PHILOSOPHY IN THE MASS AGE (Copp Clark, Toronto, 1959) p. 22.

[18] Taylor, p. 515.

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