1979: Reading the Tax-Shelter Boom in Canadian Film History

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Abstract

More certified-Canadian feature films were shot in Canada in 1979 than in any other year. The height of what has become known as the "tax-shelter boom," 1979 stands as a remarkable moment in the history of the Canadian cinema, with 70 features shot in a year in which Hollywood produced only 99 films. The extant history of the Canadian cinema has largely ignored this moment, and in this thesis I argue that the slim treatment of the period by critics represents a "received wisdom," consistently repeated, but seldom scrutinized, and that this received wisdom is representative of the culturally nationalist impulse which has coloured the entire historiography of the Canadian cinema. Because many of the films produced during the boom were in the style of Hollywood genres, the "received wisdom" presents the entirety of the tax-shelter boom as a cultural and industrial near-disaster for the Canadian cinema, and this thesis, partly a revisionist history, explores not only those

conclusions, but also provides critical discussion of them.

I begin by presenting the received wisdom, the existing account, on the period. This is followed by a chapter which situates the tax-shelter boom in a history of state intervention in the feature film industry. Following this, I provide analysis of the contexts surrounding the tax-shelter boom, including critical discussion of articles and reviews from the contemporaneous popular press, and of the industry discourse. I then turn my attention to the texts themselves, which the received wisdom more or less ignores, and provide three thematically-organized chapters of textual analysis: the first organized around readings of gender and genre in the films, the second on the prevalent theme of "selling out," which is central to numerous films of the period, and a third chapter which explores the place of Quebec in the films of the period.

The thesis concludes with an analysis of the material effects of the government policies which led to the boom, and concludes that in this respect too, the received account of the period -- once again, as a failure -- needs to be reexamined.

1979 : Une analyse du boum des abris fiscaux dans l'histoire du cinéma canadien
Résumé

En 1979 plus de films canadiens ont été tournés au Canada qu'au cours de toute autre année. L'apogée de ce que l'on connaît maintenant comme le « boum des abris fiscaux » de 1979 marque un moment important pour l'histoire du cinéma canadien. Cette période, pendant laquelle 70 long-métrages ont été tournés alors que Hollywood n'en produisit que 99, a été en grande partie laissée de côté dans l'histoire du cinéma canadien. Dans la présente thèse, je soutiens que le peu d'attention que les critiques ont porté à la période reflète des « idées reçues » sans cesse répétées mais rarement examinées de près. Ces idées caractérisent d'ailleurs la position nationaliste culturel qui a imprégné toute l'historiographie du cinéma canadien. Etant donné que plusieurs des films produits à cette époque imitaient le style des films de Hollywood, le boum des abris fiscaux est perçu comme un quasi-désastre pour le cinéma canadien. La présente thèse, qui est en partie une analyse révisionniste de l'histoire, explore ces conclusions tout en offrant une discussion critique de celles-ci.

Après avoir rendu compte des idées reçues sur la période, je situe le boum des abris fiscaux dans un contexte d'intervention de l'Etat dans les affaires de l'industrie cinématographique.
Par la suite, j'analyse les contextes du boum et propose une discussion critique d'articles de la presse populaire ainsi que du discours de l'industrie cinématographique.

Je me penche ensuite sur les textes qui sont plus ou moins écartés dans les idées reçues et structure l'analyse textuelle de ceux-ci en trois chapitres thématiques. Le premier chapitre regroupe les lectures portant sur le genre cinématographique et la question du sexe; le second porte sur le thème du compremis, thème récurrent et central de nombreux films de la périod; et le troisième chapitre explore la place du Québec dans les films de cette époque.

En conclusion, j'analyse l'effet matériel des politiques gouvernementales qui ont conduit au boum et conclus que la perception reçue de cette époque en tant qu'échec doit être révisée.

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PART I: Contexts

CHAPTER ONE

The Received Wisdom on the Tax-Shelter Boom

Canadian film studies is currently experiencing something of a renaissance. A flurry of publishing has brought to market several new books in the past few years, some of which make significant contributions to the field and provide either useful correctives to entrenched assumptions, or simply ask a different set of questions than those broached in the first wave of publishing on Canadian cinema from the 1970s, and in the few books which have appeared since then. Some of these recent books include, for example, *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Womens' Film-Making* which provides feminist readings of works both canonical and not, and Christopher Gittings' recent addition to Routledge's national cinema series, *Canadian National Cinema*, which situates the Canadian cinema in critical theories of representation and (post-) colonialism quite removed from the dominant nationalistic strands of previously existing Canadian film studies. Representative as well of fresh breezes blowing through the field is a book such as *Like Mangoes in July: The Work of Richard Fung*, a collection of essays on the moving video work, frequently situated within a queer aesthetic, of one

of Canada's most celebrated video artists. William Beard and Jerry White's 2002 edited collection *North of Everything: English Canadian Cinema Since 1980* also includes a few instances of outstanding new research on matters previously unconsidered by Canadian film scholars: on, for example, matters to do with exhibition and reception. Exhibition, in fact, is at the centre as well of Charles Acland's recent book *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture*, which devotes a good deal of attention to examining the Canadian film culture from a standpoint quite distantly removed from its customary characterizations, providing a compelling revisionist account of the relationship of Canadian film-goers to their own national cinema and to historical changes in international cinema spectatorship. Historical scholarship in Canadian film studies too is undergoing an expansion, mirroring the turn toward history evident in Anglo-American film studies at large, with recent work such as Kay Armatage's monograph on Nell Shipman, Melanie Nash's work on Norma Shearer, the recent special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* celebrating the pioneering work of historian Peter Morris and devoted to historical revisionism, and the recent publication of Paul Corupe's outstanding and vital investigations into 1950s and '60 Canadian exploitation cinema, which he categorizes

under the broader historical movement he calls "Canuxploitation," a formation which also includes the schlock cinema of the tax-shelter boom which is one primary focus of this dissertation. Corupe's work, in fact, exists as the only quasi-scholarly research published on the commercially-calculated Canadian cinema as a category. [1]

While this activity demonstrates a lively community of scholars, a thriving field and burgeoning, expansive, view of Canadian film studies, it is still demonstrably the case that Canadian cinema of the commercially-calculated kind -- that is films in the most popular idioms, genre films specifically -- remain largely outside the purview of the field's research. The few exceptions to this tendency are relatively recent, and appear to be part of a mounting movement toward what could amount to a wholesale reconsideration of the previously existing characterizations of the Canadian national cinema as an alternative one. In the past, Canada's cinema has been discussed as being dominated by the largely non-theatrical forms of animation, experimental, and especially documentary, and more recently as an almost

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[1] See, for example, Walz 2002, Beard and White 2002, Armatage et al., *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies* v.13, n.2 (Winter 2003), Nash 1998, Armatage 2003, and Allan 2003.

exclusively auteur art cinema, with critics and historians paying little consideration to popular forms. In addition to Corupe's aforementioned work on Canuxploitation, we find in Bill Beard's strident defence of David Cronenberg's work, and in Jennifer Vanderburgh's illuminating recent essay comparing the reception of Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters* (1984, U.S.) to David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (Canada-U.S. 1983), examples of the gradual recognition of the place of the popular in the Canadian film culture.[2] The following thesis seeks to contribute to this understanding as well.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "national popular" is instructive for analyses of the Canadian film culture, particularly for those seeking to explain the lack of critical attention paid by the extant literature to the most popular forms. The apparent, and disconcerting, disconnect between Canadian film scholars and government policy-makers which Michael Dorland illustrates - that is, between "academic knowledge" and "governmental knowledge" - seems at least as vast as the distance between scholarly-critical descriptions of the Canadian film

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[2] See "32 Paragraphs about David Cronenberg" in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, pp. 144-159, for example.

culture and what Charles Acland calls "the actual cinema-going practices of Canadians" (1997, 284). Gramsci imagined a better society when the tastes and culture of cultural elites and the people found closer congruence in an emergent "national popular," a formation which would counter bourgeois hegemonic power. I suggest that the pleasures associated with the consumption of popular texts need not be seen as necessarily contributing to the Americanization of Canadian life, and, on the contrary, after Gramsci, that a full recognition of the existence and even legitimacy of popular taste by Canadian film scholarship is more likely to contribute to the realization of a Canadian "national popular" than the persistent hand-wringing over presumed cultural imperialism which dominates the nationalist historiography. Analogously, as Iain Chambers has observed, Gramsci's insights into the national popular are instructive in the case of the British national cinema when popular Hollywood films are held up to comparison with the convincingly British kitchen-sink dramas such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960), and when the apparently satisfactorily "national" images associated with the Angry Young Man cycle are shown to be steeped in a nostalgic, conservative, and mythic national past. Whereas, on the other hand:

> 'America' and all it seemingly stood for -- consumerism, modernism, youth, the new, the refusal of tradition -- could and did represent a more significant challenge to a native cultural hegemony than more local forms of opposition based on more traditional affiliations (273-4).

Gramsci's alternative view of the potential relationship of popular culture to national culture, as Chambers' application of it demonstrates, is one which allows us to consider films in the popular idiom, even should they seem "American" in character, as a part of other national cinemas. Films in the popular idiom exist not necessarily as a threat to the national culture, but as one possible element of the dismantling of cultural hegemony in Canada

1979

The recently published third edition of James Monaco's popular American textbook *How to Read a Film* (now subtitled "Movies, Media, Multimedia") contains a thirty-one page long "chronology of film and media," organized by year. The first entry for 1979 reads, "Canada and Australia emerge as film powers" (587). The description in an undergraduate film textbook of Canada as a "film power" should be startling to anyone

with even a cursory knowledge of Canadian film history. Even those who are well acquainted with this history have evidently chosen to ignore Canada's briefly-held powerful position in world cinema production, since nowhere else other than in Monaco's chronology have I come across this relatively, although fleetingly, accurate description. The prevailing characterization of the Canadian cinema has been one of failure and absence.[3] 1979, many are surprised to hear, is the year in which more cerified-Canadian feature films were produced in Canada than any other. The height of what has become known in both Canadian film and communication studies as "the tax-shelter boom," 1979 saw 70 Canadian feature films shot, an enormously high number for Canada by any measure.[4] For the sake of comparison, it could be

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[3] See Charles Acland, "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience" for an excellent discussion of the concept and consequences of absence in the Canadian film culture.

[4] There are many ways to count films made in a country. My "70 certified Canadian feature films shot" counts, specifically, those fiction feature which were certified by the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office and whose primary shooting took place in the calendar year 1979. A small handful of these actually started shooting in late 1978, wrapping in 1979, and a few others began late in 1979, finishing in 1980. In any case, most of these films weren't released (or broadcast) until 1980, and several others not until 1981-4. Parenthetical dates in this dissertation conform to the customary dating of a film for its release year. Dates and directors will be

noted that since the establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (now Telefilm Canada) in 1967, Canada has produced an average of around 30 features per year, though in several years as few as four or six. As well, it could be noted that Hollywood produced only 99 features in 1979, and that Hollywood typically produces at least 3 or 4 as many times features as does the Canadian industry. For other points of comparison, in 1979, Britain produced 61 features (but 54 in 1978 and only 31 in 1980).[5] These facts corroborate Monaco's description of Canada as a "film power," at least in terms of productivity. In addition to this prolific production, 1979 also saw the release of sixteen previously produced Canadian films. Significant among these is Ivan Reitman's *Meatballs* (shot in autumn 1978), a huge commercial

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parenthetically named only in the first reference to a film. As well, the national origin of a film will be cited only the instance where it is not a totally Canadian production. Thus, American films will be identified as such, as will bi-national and multi-national co-productions. If no national origin is cited, the film is Canadian.

[5] Interestingly, so far as the received wisdom surrounding these events is concerned, both Martin Knelman (1987) and Ted Magder report that in 1979 Hollywood only made 95 features. They might be correct, and I only base my claim of 99 on the *Variety* year-end piece (January 2, 1980). This doubt about how many feature films a country produces in a given year is indicative of the degree of uncertainty of industrial knowledge in national cinema scholarship.

success which clearly contributed directly to Reitman's ascension to the upper echelons of Hollywood's "A" list of commercial directors. By way of introduction, I want to be clear that this thesis will focus specifically on 1979's productions (which were mostly released in 1980-2), but as the entire context of the film culture certainly informs that analysis (it seems that *Meatballs*' runaway success that summer inspired producers to attempt to duplicate it in 1979), the year's significant non-production-related cinematic events will also receive some scrutiny.

Briefly -- and the emergence of this will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two (on the history of Canadian film policy)-- the tax-shelter boom happened because of three separate but related policy and regulatory decisions taken by the federal government. The first of these was the creation in 1974 of a Capital Cost Allowance (hereafter, CCA), a one hundred percent tax deduction the federal government offered on funds invested in three industries: oil and gas exploration, new rental-housing construction, and certified-Canadian feature film production. Given the energy crisis of the 1970s and the severe rental-housing shortage endured by several fast-growing Canadian cities, but especially by Calgary and Edmonton, it is unsurprising that the federal

government should have felt that tax shelters to stimulate private investment in these industries was a worthy policy instrument. While it is somewhat less self-evident why the federal government should have included feature film production in its CCA, the relative failures of previous industry-incentive programs in that sector suggest that some other industrial stimulus was necessary for the creation of a feature film industry.

In addition to the 100 percent tax write-off for funds invested in certified-Canadian feature films, the tax-shelter boom was also fueled by a significant shift in the investment strategy by the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC).[6] Whereas previously the agency had made equity investments in feature films, following the creation of the CCA, the CFDC shifted toward providing bridge financing, helping with the most difficult to acquire early capital required to get film projects off the ground. Last, the Canadian securities commission finally agreed in 1978, after four years of discussion and legal petitioning by the film industry that the private-placement investment scheme was appropriate to film finance. This decision

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[6] It should be noted that while Canadian tax law already allowed an annual 33 percent capital cost allowance on any investment, including in films, which could be claimed up to 100 percent over three years, this CCA in these three industries allowed for the entire investment to be immediately deductible.

allowed producers to sell small "shares" in a feature film production in blocks (usually of $1000 each), which meant that numerous middle-class Canadians could take advantage of the tax shelter with much smaller investments than the millions required to fully capitalize a feature film (Magder 178-80). As a result of these changes in law, capital flooded into the industry which enjoyed the huge production boom which this thesis explores.

The Received Wisdom

> December 15, 1980. Prime Minister Trudeau, in black tie, a blood-red rose ever so slightly wilted on his satin jacket collar, looked pensive. A journalist had gestured toward the ballroom...Taking in the fur, the diamonds, the hairdos, the journalist had commented, "Your government is in some sense responsible for all this." The prime minister smiled. "It is amazing what a few tax laws can do," he said. Then he added, with a shrug, "There are now many Canadian films. But there aren't too many good ones, are there?" (Scott 68).

This anecdote sums up the conventional take on 1979's anomalously inflated productivity on the part of the Canadian industry: that the investment-encouraging tax-shelter provided by the "Capital Cost Allowance" worked extremely well, but also that the huge majority, if not all, of the films produced under this scheme were wretched. This thesis

will examine a series of questions related to this conventional wisdom, including: what kinds of feature film policies had been pursued up to, and including, 1979, and what were the goals of these policies? Were they partially, completely, or not at all successful? What kinds of films were actually produced in 1979? What were the circumstances of their release and distribution? Of their critical reception? Does the critical response reflect, as could be argued, elitist cultural nationalism? How has this period been treated in the histories of Canadian cinema, film policy, and film studies? Has this period been duly considered in analyses of the idea of "national cinema" in Canada? Are these films under-regarded and unacknowledged because they don't meet a certain taste standard of Canadian-ness? The thesis, thus, is motivated by the virtual invisibility of 1979 (beyond claims that the films were bad) in the current version of Canadian film history.

The overarching question of this research is: what does the success (lots of films produced, even some commercially successful ones) and the failure (bad films, insufficiently "Canadian" in character, mostly unprofitable, even unreleasable films) of 1979 tell us about the ways in which the Canadian cinema has been and should be understood? Popular cinema -- or at least cinema in the popular idiom, successful or

not -- has long been considered integral to other national cinemas. Even placing Hollywood in America aside, we could note the French, British, and Italian cinemas' genre cycles, while the usual conceptions of the Canadian national cinema have resolutely ignored the popular, focussing instead on the alternative formats of documentary and experimental film-making, and for the past thirty years or so on the auteur-driven art cinema. And in the case of Quebec, Bill Marshall and André Loiselle have both recently shown how integral the popular is to that national cinema. In Canada, though, David Cronenberg alone stands as a figure regarded by national critics as working in the popular idiom, that is, making genre pictures, at least at the beginning of his career, and his very anomalousness has been the focus of most of the Canadian attention paid to his work. The Canadian film canon reveals an art cinema, almost exclusively, but unabashedly commercial features are produced in Canada by Canadians, and a huge huge number of them in 1979, but these remain outside of discussions of what constitutes the Canadian cinema. Why?[7]

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[7] The 1999 special issue of *Post Script*, on Canadian cinema, edited by Barry Grant, is one notable exception to this gaping lack: it contains serious studies of Cronenberg's early shlock horror, of *Porky's* (Bob Clark, 1981), as well as Loiselle's path breaking article on Quebec's "stupid films," "Subtly Subversive or Simply Stupid: Notes on Popular Quebec

The films of 1979 are almost never discussed by scholars of Canadian cinema. This is all the more surprising given the wildly anomalous output of that year, and given that *Meatballs* is one of the most commercially successful films in the history of the Canadian industry. Beyond 1979, we can see a certain tendency of scholars of Canadian cinema. A glance down the list of "Blockbuster Golden Reel Award" winners, for the highest Canadian box-office take in a given year, reveals numerous popular films which are almost without exception utterly ignored by Canadian film scholarship, for example: *Heavy Metal* (1982 -- $2.2 million gross in Canada), *The Care Bears Movie* (1986 -- $1.85 million), and Air Bud (1997 -- $1.6 million).[8] And while the fact of a tax-shelter boom merits mention in the literature, when the films themselves are referred to, it is fleetingly, derisively, dismissively. Perfectly representative of this tendency is the following claim from Gerald Pratley's analytical history of film in Canada, *Torn Sprockets*:

> in the space of one year, from 1978 to 1979, Canada achieved the dubious distinction of being

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Cinema."

[8] I cite these films as examples only because they are popular Canadian films whose national origin is seemingly obscured by their distance from the national thematic of canonized Canadian cinema.

> the only nation in the world to turn its film production over to "international films" and in doing so sold itself into oblivion" (125).

Devoutly nationalistic, Pratley's analysis carries on to complain about Canadian locations masquerading as American ones, about American stars in leading roles, and about the overwhelming sense of "American-ness" of these films, peppering his complaints with loaded descriptors such as "terrible," "silly," and "truly awful" (125). But doesn't the enormous productivity of the period, and perhaps even the films themselves warrant some further comment than this? Furthermore, the scant French-language scholarship on the English-Canadian cinema participates in this erasure of the tax-shelter boom as well. Representative of this is Pierre Véronneau's edited volume *À la recherche du'ne identité: renaissance du cinéma d'auteur canadian-anglais*. Given its title, it is not surprising that it should concentrate solely on the English-Canadian auteurs McGillivray, Maddin, Rozema, Egoyan and so on, but as the sole existing work in French on English Canadian filmmaking, one might expect *some* consideration of the tax-shelter boom, if only as a moment of historical development toward the eruption of mid/late-1980s auteur production which the book charts.

It can be argued that these films don't rate attention because, as genre pieces, they do not "fit"

with the critical definition of what constitutes a Canadian film. Insufficiently arty, angsty, auteurist, these films do not satisfy the criteria established by elitist cultural nationalists such as Pratley. Films in the popular idiom, genre films with American stars largely, are seen not to qualify as "Canadian:" this commonsense claim demands unpacking and scrutiny. To be perfectly clear, the point of this exercise is not simply re-evaluation. The goal here is not simply to flip the evaluations of "failed" films into "successful" ones. Instead, interrogating the premises behind the dismissal, as un-Canadian, of genre films is the broader purpose, a question which I take up specifically in Chapter Four.

Consistently repeated, all we seem to know about the period can be summed up in such conclusions as this one from Jim Leach's 2002 Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture:

> ...the infamous Capital Cost Allowance Act of 1974 encouraged tendencies already present in the film industry to produce films that imitated the narrative structures of Hollywood genres and did their best to conceal any signs of the nation in which they were filmed. In these films...it was Canada that disappeared (2002, 7).

On display here is the habitual characterization of the tax-shelter boom period, and it is not entirely accurate. This thesis, thus, is motivated by the

virtual invisibility of the texts themselves (beyond that they were bad genre films) in current versions of Canadian film history. I do not accuse Leach of doing anything other than nonchalantly repeating the received wisdom on the period, and I select this example only because of its recentness, its high profile, and the nodding reception which greeted this familiar and therefore apparently accurate claim.[9] If it is true that several films of the period hid their Canadian origins, it is equally true that many did not, and this thesis argues that these films have been erased from Canadian film history because of their association with the period in which they were filmed.

Here are some sources of the received wisdom. Written by the duly celebrated Canadian film historian, Peter Morris's encyclopaedic reference volume on the Canadian cinema, *The Film Companion*, is perfectly representative of the sort of cavalier dismissal of the films of the tax shelter boom by the extant literature. Elsewhere, Morris has been an especially astute observer of the historiographical consequences of cultural nationalism, especially as

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[9] I characterize the reception of Leach's comment as "nodding" since at the gathering of film scholars where it was made -- the 2002 Film Studies of Canada conference in Toronto -- it went unremarked upon, and furthermore since it was repeated in the printed version of the lecture in the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*.

this motivation affected canonization, but there seems to have been something so commonsensical about assuming the badness of the tax shelter boom movies that they resist Morris's usual perspicacity.[10] For example, in a remarkable passage from his entry on the CCA, he writes, "most of the films made (including the not inconsiderable number never released) were designed for a mass market, North American audience, not a Canadian one, and usually involved Canadian cities masquerading as American ones and stories set "no place" (1984, 55). Later, Morris grudgingly admits that "a few films, if hardly Canadian in any real sense, did extremely well at the box office internationally" (1984, 55). What exactly differentiates between a "mass market, North American audience" and a Canadian one appears to be a question that does not trouble Morris in the slightest. Even more surprising is the fact that the *Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee* of 1982 (the Applebaum-Hébert Committee), in their section of the film chapter on the Capital Cost Allowance, quotes Morris verbatim, without citation, that the films "were intended for a mass-market, North American

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[10] Exemplary of Morris's insights in this regard is his "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonization of Canadian Film." Canadian Journal of Film Studies 3.1 (Spring 1994) 30-38.

audience, not a Canadian one" (255). That Louis Applebaum and Jacques Hébert, co-chairs of the committee and authors of the report, repeat Morris's strange claim in the federal government-published report of the Cultural Policy Review Committee speaks to the entrenched nature of the premises behind the "tax shelter boom as failure" argument and the degree to which the received wisdom is perpetuated by simple repetition. One would like to ask Morris and Applebaum-Hébert: how is the Canadian film audience different from the "mass-market, North American audience"?

Morris does not seem to question either what makes a film Canadian "in any real sense." The certified Canadian films of the boom had to meet exactly the same Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) dictates to qualify for the tax shelter as did any other Canadian film, with points awarded for the national citizenship of the producers, director, stars, and so on, and with provisions stipulating the Canadian incorporation of the producing firm.[11] And

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[11] CAVCO was created by the federal government in 1974 in conjunction with the Capital Cost Allowance program to establish which film productions were sufficiently Canadian to be eligible for the tax write-off. The points system for determining the Canadianness of a particular film was amended in 1980 and 1982, largely as a result of perceived abuses of the certification system during the tax shelter boom.

the unreasonableness of the notion of setting necessarily having to represent itself -- a strangely recurrent beef about popular film in Canada -- is made perfectly clear, for example, by Jean-Luc Godard's Alphaville (France, 1965) in which mid-sixties Paris hilariously plays the part of the eponymous futuristic planetary capital. *Alphaville*'s status as French, one presumes, is not undercut by such masquerade. I explore this matter much more fully in Chapter Five on "selling out."

Peter Rist's recently published *A Guide to the Cinema(s) of Canada* is also encyclopaedic in form. Like Morris, Rist makes a prefatory acknowledgement that no such work can be exhaustive in its coverage. Yet, it is notable that he makes absolutely no mention of the numerous films produced at the height of the tax-shelter boom in 1979. In fact, aside from *Heavy Metal*, *Porky's*, *Meatballs* and *The Grey Fox* (1983, Phillip Borsos), all the other films made throughout the tax-shelter years are ignored as well. This exclusion might be accounted for simply because the biggest hits of the era - *Heavy Metal, Porky's* and *Meatballs* - have come to stand, in toto, for the whole of the boom (as if naming the biggest hits evokes the entire cycle of more than 100 films). *The Grey Fox* -- a "high-quality" (if not a high profit) film and the first feature by a prospective auteur -- is generally

not associated with this cycle of production at all. I would suggest that the apparent willingness to habitually ignore the vast majority of the tax-shelter movies is more likely explained by a combination of wish-fulfilment and shame (if we pretend they don't exist, they'll disappear) and overt nationalist elitism, which says, in Morris's own words, that these genre films are "hardly Canadian in any real sense." The extant literature is the historical account. What is recorded is what we know of what existed. Later in his preface, Rist admits to relying heavily on Morris's aforementioned *Film Companion*, which Rist calls "indispensable" and "an absolutely key research source." This lineage, like the example of the Applebaum-Hébert Report quoting Morris verbatim and without citation, illustrates clearly the ways in which the writing of history depends upon the methods and presumptions of the writers of history, how the repetition of received wisdom can become self-perpetuating, and how the premises that underlie considerations of cultural value and historical significance have ultimately contributed to a skewed account of what actually constitutes feature filmmaking practice in Canada.

The received wisdom is so common that nearly every single book on Canadian film ever published explicitly or implicitly participates in its

perpetuation by either largely dismissing Canadian films in the popular idiom or by ignoring them. Most notably, Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dream and American Control: The Political Economy of Canadian Film Industry* and Gerald Pratley's *Torn Sprockets: The Uncertain Projection of Canadian Film* are particularly dismissive of genre filmmaking, and where films in the popular idiom are considered by scholars of Canadian cinema, it is often their supposed scarcity which is highlighted. Recent works including *Canada's Best Features*, *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* and *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, while occasionally evoking the popular, all tend much more heavily toward considerations of Canada's well-established auteur art cinema.

Interestingly, while Canadian film scholars have habitually ignored, excluded, and systematically made invisible these films, flourishing and devoted interest in them proliferates in lively fan communities on the Internet and elsewhere. Seminal of the fan works that devote considerable attention to the tax shelter boom films in general, and to 1979's specifically, is Michael Weldon's well known cult film reference text *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*, which includes some discussion of at least seven Canadian features from 1979: including *Death Ship*

(Alvin Rakoff, 1980), *Terror Train* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1980), *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch, 1980), *Scanners* (David Cronenberg, 1980), *Tanya's Island* (Alfred Sole, 1980) -- all shot in 1979 -- and *City on Fire* (Alvin Rakoff, 1979) a disaster film shot in 1978, but released in the summer of 1979. Weldon's entries, in the zippy, fannish style emblematic of the book as a whole, take as given the cultural value of these films as pop texts and note several features of them which would seem to make them interesting, not only to cult movie fans, but also to scholars of style and form in Canadian cinema. His observations, for instance, include that *Terror Train* was actually shot on a train (an unusual choice), and by John Alcott, the celebrated cinematographer who shot for Stanley Kubrick *A Clockwork Orange* (UK, 1971), *Barry Lyndon* (UK, 1975) and *The Shining* (UK, 1980).

As well, connoisseurs of trash aesthetics -- horror film fans, and movie fans of other related taste dispositions -- have embraced the Canadian tax-shelter movies in internet fan cultures, where vernacular criticism pays much more attention to the texts than have "legitimate" Canadian film scholars. A good example of these kinds of enthusiams is found in a web review of Mario Azzopardi's *Deadline* (1984) from a trash movie fan site. "Greywizard" writes:

> there are countless ridiculous things to find fun about *Deadline*, when you are not soaked in the randomly injected gory sequences...there's a scene at a movie shoot where no one seems to know how to properly make a movie - including the makers of *this* movie!...Does this sound appealing to you? I'm sure it is, and you'll no doubt feel greatly rewarded when you find this obscurity (www.coastnet.com/~greywizard/ accessed June 27, 2002)

As will be clear from this quotation, Greywizard writes with a fan's enthusiasm, rather than with a scholar or critic's detachment, but nevertheless the longish discussion of the film (in the neighbourhood of 1000 words long) contains a great deal of insight into the pleasures of failed texts and exists as certainly the best critical discussion of the film I've encountered.

Because of their invisibility from the terrain of national cinema scholarship, and the critical silence on these films beyond claims that they are irredeemably bad, an examination of the tax-shelter boom films themselves which grants them cultural value can lead down some fascinating paths. First of all, while it may be true that Canadian locations masquerade as American ones more often than not, and that teen sex comedies, such as *Pinball Summer* (Canada, George Mihalka, 1979), or horror films such as *Prom Night*, do not contain any especially or overtly "Canadian" imagery or themes, the recurrent

thematic preoccupation with "selling out" evident in the tax shelter boom films is most striking. Again and again, films of the period return to conflicts between earnest, maybe even "good" citizens and nefarious, commercial interests, where what may be seen as an "American" way of life is juxtaposed with somehow more genuine concerns, for example in *Nothing Personal* (Canada-USA, George Bloomfield, 1980), *The Agency* (Canada, George Kaczender, 1980), or *Dirty Tricks* (Canada, Alvin Rakoff, 1981). In several others we actually find conflicts between art and commerce, most directly perhaps in *Fantastica* (Canada-France, Gilles Carle, 1980) and *Deadline* (Canada, Mario Azzopardi, 1980), both of which can be seen as thematically enacting the tensions and struggles borne by a national film policy torn between conflicting industrial and cultural goals. This theme will be taken up fully in Chapter Five, which considers variations on the theme of "selling out."

National Cinemas

Insofar as the category "national cinema" is at all useful as an analytical category, films that deal with apparently national concerns should be particularly useful texts for analysis. Efforts to specify a national cinema have usually resulted in a canon of nationalistic works, predominantly in the art

cinema idiom. Andrew Higson, in his article, "The Concept of National Cinema" describes this tendency as

> a criticism-led approach to national cinema, which tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema, a culturally-worthy cinema steeped in the high-cultural and/or modernist heritage of a particular nation state rather than one which appeals to the desires and fantasies of the popular audiences (40).

This premise lies behind the dismissal of many of the tax shelter boom films since, as films that masquerade as American, with no discernible treatment of Canadian themes to be found in them, they are presumed to be not useful as artefacts of Canada itself. Even if all of the tax shelter boom films exhibited these characteristics, I still suggest that it behooves scholars of the national cinema at least to look at the films and attempt to take account of them, of what their existence says about Canadian life or Canadian film culture. Their complete disappearance clearly illustrates Andrew Higson's notion of the "criticism-led" approach to national cinema, a seriously deficient model. Many of 1979's genre films are exactly of this "masquerading" sort, and I examine some of these, particularly the horror and teen sex comedies through the lens of gender roles and representational issues in Chapter Four.

Perhaps surprisingly though, a number of 1979's films are not bad knock-offs of American genre

pictures, but are concerned specifically with national themes. That the tax-shelter boom in Canadian cinema coincided more or less directly with one surge in interest and participation in the political debate over Quebec's future in Canada (as exemplified by the May 1980 referendum on sovereignty association), the little attention paid to contemporaneous films that deal with Québécois nationalism is surprising, and these films too receive close readings in Chapter Six.

Confusing Industrial Policy Goals with Cultural "Value"

This thesis will also begin a disentangling of the intertwined discourses surrounding the failure of the tax-shelter boom movies as texts, and the apparent failure of the tax-shelter boom as industrial policy. From the policy standpoint, we have in 1979 what could be argued a triumphant success: an awful lot of films made, and presumably, a lot of economic benefit. The "infant industry" argument motivated the policy, but was it successful in even that respect? We know that the production boom then launched the careers of Robert Lantos and Ivan Reitman (for example) but did it establish careers for editors, cinematographers, craftspeople, actors, etc? One career which certainly begins with the tax-shelter boom, and with 1979

specifically, is that of celebrated actor Maury Chaykin, whose short comic turns in *Nothing Personal* and *The Kidnapping of the President* (George Mendeluk, 1980) are great bits of character-acting, and in his first screen roles. How many other cases like this are there? The lessons for film policy provided by the tax-shelter boom will be taken up fully in Chapter Seven, "Little Flowers Growing."

At least three major works in Canadian film studies give some consideration to the tax shelter boom, and to 1979 specifically: Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry,* Ted *Magder's Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films,* and Michael Dorland's *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian feature Film Policy.* However, in none of these three texts is much attention paid to the texts themselves, nor is the overarching question of my thesis even broached. Pendakur's chapter on the capital Cost Allowance, perhaps one source of "the received wisdom," is steeped in the kinds of nationalist arguments, those opposed to commercial culture in general for being necessarily "American" in form, which this thesis will examine. For example, Pendakur complains about the CCA that,

> a different logic of film production operated

> here, as opposed to making films for Canadian audiences with Canadian themes, concerns and talent. It is the logic which operates in commercial cinemas around the world where films are made to appeal to mass audiences (174).

What exactly a "Canadian theme" might be is not a question which Pendakur ever asks. Nor is the matter of what may be un-Canadian about an "appeal to mass audiences." These are precisely the questions which need to be put to the received wisdom, and which are addressed directly in Part Two of this thesis, in the chapters concerned with the films themselves.

Various other scholarly works have skirted the perimeter of my problematic, including, for example, an Ontario Economic Council Discussion Paper, "The Public Strategy and Motion Pictures: The Choice of Instruments to Promote the Development of the Canadian Film Production Industry," André Loiselle's "Subtly Subversive or Simply Stupid: Notes on Popular Québécois Cinema," and Charles Acland's "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience." All of these existing studies contribute something to this thesis's argument, even if by offering points to argue against.

The Theoretical Framework/Approach

The first task of a project such as this is to

justify the choice of the parameters: Why 1979? If the Capital Cost Allowance was begun in 1974, why not start there? If 1978 saw the first flowering of the Tax Shelter Boom, why not start there? What can this look at 1979 tell us? What does it mean to take a thin slice of history such as a one-year period and scrutinize it as if its boundaries were anything other than arbitrary? Can we see 1979 as a turning point for the Canadian cinema in policy terms? In any other ways? What constitutes a Canadian national cinema is a question which would be answered one way after a survey of the existing scholarly literature, and a completely different way after a survey of the films themselves. This thesis uses the height of the tax-shelter boom, 1979, as a reference point or lens through which to examine broader questions of taste and historiography in the national film culture. 1979 serves the purpose well since it was not only the apex of the tax-shelter boom, it also produced no films aside from Cronenberg's *Scanners* which have ever been taken seriously by scholars of the national cinema, and this one only retrospectively. 1979's films are especially useful for evaluating or interrogating this discrepancy since they are so anomalously numerous yet so entirely invisible. 1979 also may be seen as something of a watershed year in the broader cinema culture as the move toward the "blockbuster mentality"

established in Hollywood was solidified, while at the same aligned more closely with what once appeared to be its polar opposite -- the auteurism of the New Hollywood. Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* (USA) is a perfect example of this trend toward the melding of the blockbuster with the personal auteur vision. That the Canadian-produced genre films of 1979 were mostly dismissed as second-rate or mediocre versions of Hollywood's usual spawn might be telling of overall movements in popular cinema generally. As well, as Roger Corman notes, one reason he moved his extremely successful independent production house out of the theatrical market in the post-*Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) Hollywood was that huge money was beginning to go into what were essentially Corman-esque genre pictures with saturation release (xi-xii). Corman, thus, moved successfully into alternative exhibition venues such as the emerging straight-to-video and pay-tv markets, both places where many of the Canadian films of 1979 were released. Theatrical release exists only as a "prestige" market in the evolving film-video marketplace of 1979.

The existing account of the Canadian cinema is partial, and one of its lacks is any account of the calculatedly commercial productions of the tax-shelter boom, and of 1979 specifically. Given the historical

treatment of absence (as I noted at the outset) and even of the "invisibility" of indigenous work in the Canadian film culture, it is especially ironic that texts in the popular idiom should be rendered invisible in a formation which consistently celebrates the heroic auteur art cinema, no matter how marginalized it may be from the majority of Canadian film-goers, over those films which seek to achieve the more everyday pleasures associated with the consumption of pop texts. This is to say that it is in many ways surprising that historical and critical activities of Canadian film scholars have on the one hand consistently complained about the apparent absence of audiences for Canadian films (and even about the apparent non-existence of popular Canadian films), while on the other hand have also consistently ignored or downplayed the existence of those films which seem on the surface more likely to resonate with Canadian movie-goers. While it may be true that most of the films of the tax-shelter boom films were not popular with audiences, it is equally true that several were. The larger point here is not simply that there were some popular success during the tax-shelter boom, but rather that there is an observable historical bias by Canadian scholars and critics against films in the popular idiom, and this thesis seeks to explore the nature of, and premises behind,

this historical bias.

The Thesis

The main argument of this work is that a re-evaluation of the incredible production boom of 1979 changes our understanding of the contours of the Canadian cinema. That from an industrial perspective, the policies which led to the tax-shelter boom may have been more successful than is presently believed and that our present assumption of its failure is due to taste-based claims about the popular, and about cultural value, in their evaluative and historical senses. What we think of as "Canadian cinema" has never included the popular, and re-evaluating the history of 1979 should help correct this blind spot, and may have future implications, insofar as historical knowledge can impact upon feature film policy directions.

This thesis is divided into two main sections, with this introduction preceding the first of them, and a chapter on the material industrial effects of the tax-shelter boom (and a conclusion), following Part Two. The rationales behind this division spring from my belief that understanding a moment such as the height of the tax-shelter boom must consider both the texts themselves and the contexts which surround them.

Looking at texts in isolation (to determine their "real," often "hidden" meaning) is unsatisfying and ultimately inadequate for dealing with the questions this thesis asks. However, the approach taken to the tax-shelter boom by the received wisdom - that is, disregarding texts almost entirely, concentrating solely on the contexts and intertexts of the film's production - is equally unsatisfying and incomplete. Since one of the overarching claims of this thesis is that the films actually made during the height of the tax-shelter boom have been utterly ignored by historical account, I believe that the textual analyses provided in part two are an essential move toward redressing this problem. Nevertheless, I also recognize that situating these films in the context from which they emerged is equally valuable and essential, especially insofar as doing this job will illuminate the other overarching claim of this thesis: that longstanding biases against commercially-calculated popular feature film making in the Canadian film culture have resulted in a limited and inaccurate picture of what the Canadian national cinema actually is.

Therefore, the thesis begins with this introduction to the scholarly treatment of the films of 1979. Following this, Chapter Two considers the history of state support of the film industry leading

up to the tax-shelter boom. Section One ends with a third chapter discussing the media discourse of the day, examining the premises behind the dismissive treatment of the tax-shelter boom by the popular press.

Part Two also contains three chapters, but these are focussed on the films themselves. The textual analysis chapters are organized thematically. The first considers some of the numerous genre films of the period. Specifically, horror films and teen sex comedies are discussed, in the context of theoretical notions of genre and their relationship to issues of gender and nation. Following this, Chapter Five scrutinizes some of the numerous films of the period which feature prominently the theme of "selling out." While several cultural phenomena of the late 1970s point to why this should have been such a common theme then, the chapter connects this heightened interest in the selling out theme to the discourse of the film industry and of the film policy apparatus of the day, one which was torn between the competing ideals of a popular and commercially viable feature film industry for Canada, and what was seen as its only other possible manifestation: a culturally worthy, nationally specific cinema which seldom attracted Canadian audiences and was unsaleable internationally as well. While the majority of the texts discussed in

the first two chapters of textual analysis are of the kind most usually associated with the tax-shelter boom -- that is, they masquerade as American, disguising locations, using American stars, American currency, flags, license plates and so on -- the last chapter of Section Two discusses a series of films produced in 1979 which are specifically Canadian in setting and thematic terrain. In fact, all of the films discussed in Chapter Six are about the relationship between Quebec and English Canada. This discussion demonstrates how the failures of the nationalist film historiography in Canada -- that critical apparatus which has all but ignored films made in the popular idiom -- have rendered important texts, those dealing with specifically national themes, invisible.

Just before concluding, the thesis moves away from the texts themselves again, this time to weigh the efficacy, from an industrial standpoint, of the film policies which led to the tax-shelter boom. Here, I show how, while there has been some acknowledgement in the extant literature of the success of the tax-shelter boom in industrial terms, this is acknowledged grudgingly and incompletely. This final chapter makes direct connections from the tax-shelter boom era to the present day flowering of the film and television industries in Canada. The fact that these industries contribute billions of

dollars annually to the Canadian economy (and that Canada is now the fifth largest exporter of television programming in the world) and the fact that almost every single year since the mid-1980s the Canadian industry has produced an internationally celebrated film, testify to this success despite the lingering perception that the Canadian cinema is a failed enterprise. I argue in the last chapter that seeds for this recent success were sown during the tax-shelter boom.

CHAPTER TWO

WHERE DID THE BOOM COME FROM? A Short History of State Intervention in the Film Industry in Canada

There are many different ways in which governments in Canada have promoted, supported, influenced and shaped cultural production, distribution and consumption. Observing the range and variety of policy instruments which affect cultural formations -- from railroad construction to tariffs, taxes, and duties, censorship boards and regulatory bodies; from outright grants and other forms of direct subsidy, to tax-breaks for investors -- this variety of activity reminds us of the fact that culture in Canada is not created solely through direct subsidy to producers of cultural commodities. In a series of ways, it could be argued that the complaints which have arisen at various moments in this history (over the eventual participation by governments in commercial feature film production) fail to take account of the fact that a very wide range of other policy instruments have had significant effects upon the national culture.

A good example of the role various state policies can play in the Canadian film culture is found in the period 1928-38, where a combination of inaction by the

Canadian government and misguided action by the British government led to the so-called "quota quickies." These were very cheaply produced feature films made by American firms, often with American actors in Hollywood-like narratives, shot in Victoria, British Columbia in order to circumvent the British government's imposition of a quota on non-British empire films which were allowed to be shown in Britain. These films circumvented the quota law because they were produced in the empire and had British subjects (in this case, Canadians) on the production payroll. But it was the British quota law in combination with the Canadian government's decision *not* to impose quotas of its own (at a time when other empire nations including Australia were following the lead of Great Britain and imposing import quotas) which created the set of circumstances which are usually seen by historians as one of the important early instances of the Canadian film culture being perverted and retarded by foreign control, in this case by both American firms for which Canada merely provided the branch-plant, and by British film policy and its deleterious effect on Canada.

Nevertheless, despite the Canadian government's

inaction on quotas in the late 1920, one of the first observations that is typically made about film in Canada is that active participation of the state in film production since the earliest days of the medium is one of the Canadian cinema's defining features. Here is Peter Morris, early Canadian film historian:

> Among the most significant defining characteristics of film in Canada is the manner in which governments have had a persistent involvement in film production. Indeed, the Canadian experience with government film production is unique. Since 1900, the federal and provincial governments have sponsored the production of films. (Morris 1974, 127)

The fact that Manitoba farmer James Freer made his turn of the (19th) century C.P.R.-sponsored films in order to advertise in England for immigrants to the Canadian west is usually the first chapter of this narrative of state intervention.[1] The establishment of the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau in 1917 and of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau in 1918 form the other early chapters of this well-known narrative. This story then frequently leaps ahead to 1968 with the

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[1] See for example Gene Walz (1986, 3) and Christopher E. Gittings (8), both of whom cite the originator of this observation, Peter Morris in his *Embattled Shadows*.

establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (hereafter, CFDC), a sea-change moment in the history of state intervention in the film industries, with the 1940s, '50s and early '60s utterly dominated by the National Film Board (NFB) (Morris 1980). Alongside these markers, it is customary to remark on the Massey Royal Commission and what it had to say about the foreign control of cinema in Canada, and on the establishment and maintenance of state-run broadcasting with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The so-called "Canadian Co-operation Project" of 1948, which has been treated by historians of the Canadian cinema rather like the tax shelter boom has (that is, largely through repeated claims of failure and with heaps of scorn, while the material effects of the scheme go largely unremarked upon), is another symptomatic element of the extant history of state involvement with the cinema, where in this case we have the apparent egregious sell-out of the Canadian Cooperation Project positioned against the heroic nationalist institutions such as the NFB and the CBC. Michael Dorland writes: "As Véronneau has remarked, 'the Canadian Cooperation Project remains one of the great mystifications of Canadian film history,' not

only because of the public relations spin successfully given to it at the time, but particularly because of the mythological status it holds in nationalist film historiography" (1998, 78). I suggest that the reputation of the tax shelter boom in that same "nationalist film historiography" is of a similar stature. The tax-shelter boom period is generally in the extant account treated as a transitional moment between the birth of feature film-making, and the maturation of the industry associated with the establishment of Telefilm Canada in 1983. Most accounts of the Canadian cinema treat the post-Telefilm era (from 1984 to the present) as the "modern" period in this narrative. Of considerable significance in this version of the history is the fact that the private producers who emerged then still relied, indeed depended, upon state initiatives such as huge tax breaks, bridge-financing, low-interest loans, and outright grants of state funds. In fact, even the largest, most successful private producers in Canada today still rely upon (or take advantage of) government assistance of various kinds, to varying degrees, and this is characteristic of Canadian cultural industries in general. In the film industry, for example, even the

largest most successful firm, Toronto's Alliance-Atlantis, still takes full advantage of government programs including Telefilm Canada's Feature Film Fund, Distribution Fund, and especially the Telefilm-administered Cable Television Fund.

The other important broad strokes of this account include the presumption that American dominance of the various elements of the film industry -- production, distribution and exhibition -- have necessitated some state involvement in the industry to prevent complete American dominance. Parallel to this fear, was the idea that American control of film industries meant American control over an important aspect of Canada's national culture. This fear was behind so much government subsidy in the cultural industries then as now.

But returning to the historical narrative I just briefly sketched, it is interesting to observe that -- as Michael Dorland makes clear -- state participation in, or promotion of, indigenous *feature* film-making was not seen as a priority in Canada until the 1960s. Feature film-making itself has long been associated with foreigners (chiefly Americans, of course), and, it can be argued, the historical record shows that other

kinds of film production were held to be a more appropriate form practiced by Canadians. These peculiar views can be seen in the pronouncements of John Grierson, founder of the National Film Board of Canada, in the report of the Massey Commission, in statements by Ray Peck of the Government Motion Picture Bureau and even in the remarks and actions of the important early private film producer Ben Norrish, founder of Montreal-based Associated Screen News (A.S.N.), one of the most important and long-lasting private film production firms in the history of the Canadian Industry. Again, here is Peter Morris:

> Despite the continued success of the Canadian Cameos (after A.S.N.'s successful *Rhapsody in Two Languages* (1934) and the Grey Owl films of the early-mid 1930s), Norrish resisted all pressure to undertake feature film production. It is interesting to note that Ben Norrish shared this attitude with Ray Peck of the Motion Picture Bureau. Both men, in their time, were in better positions than anyone to do something about establishing a feature film industry in Canada. Both were adamantly opposed to it (1974, 232).

In fact, the undesirability of feature film-making has historically been linked to the threat of American domination and fear of mass culture which is seen to run through Canadian cultural life in the 20th century. Feature film-making is connected to commercial film-making, whereas films of shorter lengths and of

other kinds (documentary being the most obvious example) are made for other, non-commercial, purposes, often to educate and inform, and have been seen therefore, to serve a more valuable purpose than providing mere entertainment.

This observation made, it must be remembered as well that while biases against popular forms such as feature films did (and do) exist in the discourses surrounding the Canadian film culture, the primary obstacle to feature film production in Canada was certainly a paucity of capital, compounded by a lack of the entrepreneurial spirit which takes such expensive risks on ventures as unlikely to succeed in the marketplace as independently-produced feature films. The fact that feature film production has been closely associated with Hollywood, and therefore with an "alien culture" (to use the language of the Massey Commission Report) is one that has arguably played some role in the inclinations of Canadian film producers (as the quotes from Peck and Norrish above make plain), but the major reason that there has been little or no feature film production in Canada until the 1960s really has to do with capital. For example, one of Canada's most successful private filmmakers and producers, Budge

Crawley, did produce two early 1960s feature films, *Ville Jolie* (René Bonnière, 1963) and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (Irvin Kershner, 1964), both of which received encouraging reviews, but neither of which turned a profit, returning Crawley to the television and industrial production which was his firm's bread and butter (Gittings 93). As Gittings points out, paraphrasing Ted Magder, "if a 'well-capitalized and able producer' such as Crawley could fail, what were the chances of success in feature film production for any independent producer?" (93).

The National Film Board Of Canada (NFB)

When seeking to historically situate the height of the tax-shelter boom in 1979, it is worth remembering the central position of the NFB both institutionally and as the central character in standard accounts of the Canadian national cinema. While Joyce Nelson (1990) and Charles Acland (1994) have begun taking large steps toward "rethinking the Grierson legend," the centrality of the NFB in accounts of the national film culture remains more or less absolute. The significant articulation of the role of the NFB,

through Grierson, was that film should *do good*, not merely entertain. From the earliest wartime propaganda films such as the Academy Award winning *Churchill's Island* (Stuart Legg, 1941) -- and, indeed, throughout World War II -- the NFB established itself quickly as an internationally recognized and prominently representative example of the Canadian state's active involvement in the creation of films. These films had a social purpose beyond "mere entertainment" and were therefore seen as operating in the counter-Hollywood mode apparently deemed appropriate by the federal government.

The post-war period began with the dark spectre of the Red Scare hovering over the NFB -- Grierson himself had been (falsely) implicated in the Gouzenko affair, and after thorough screening of the staff of many hundreds by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, three NFB staff members were dismissed for alleged communist affiliations. However, when Arthur Irwin, the former *Maclean's* magazine editor, was brought in as national film commissioner, the board enjoyed a considerable turnaround, and, in fact, in 1953 it won the Best Animated Short Academy Award for Norman McLaren's *Neighbours*, a British Film Academy award for Best

Documentary (for *Royal Journey*) and an award for Best Animated Short at Cannes for Colin Low's *Romance of Transportation in Canada* (Clandfield 23). Typical of the board's output, these three films are all short, all adopt an alternative format (that is, they are not conventional narrative films), and are decidedly unlike the films of commercial Hollywood, both formally and thematically.

Throughout the 1950s, the NFB's best-known work consistently shared these contra-Hollywood features. At the forefront of the revolution in documentary aesthetics in the 1950s, film-makers associated with the Candid-Eye movement and cinéma direct including Michel Brault, Claude Jutra, Roman Kroiter, Colin Low and Wolf Koenig attained international recognition for the innovative forms of their alternative films including *les Raquetteurs*, *Corral*, and *Lonely Boy*, to name just three of the best known examples. As had been the case since 1939, at this time, Canadian government participation in the film industry was channelled solely through the institution of the N.F.B. which produced films almost exclusively in alternative formats (short, documentary, animated and experimental), although a small number of narrative

films were also made at the board.

With the 1960s came more change and more stasis for the NFB. On the one hand, the seemingly-radical experimental program called Challenge for Change sought to bring the means of production to the disadvantaged and the unrepresented, by providing training and equipment for people to make their own films about their own communities and their own problems. In Patrick Watson's succinct and evocative terms, the Challenge for Change program was certainly a radical change for an institution which had been educating and edifying, speaking in the voice of the state, for decades. He wrote, "once the dispossessed have access to the means of information, they can no longer be misled by Establishment Bullshit. And that is in itself a revolution" (119).

While this practice may be seen on the one hand as revolutionary, on the other it can also be seen as a seamless continuation of the high-minded idealism of the NFB's goal of using film to a different, and, to their way of thinking, unambiguously better, purpose than the crass commercialism of entertainment films -- the sort produced in Hollywood. So while the Challenge for Change films may appear on the surface to reveal a

paradigm shift -- from the state dictating representations to the state empowering weak others to voice their own self-representation -- the formal and thematic distance of both kinds of films from commercially-calculated film-making remains vast, and intentionally so.

At the same time as these changes were taking place at the NFB, momentum had been growing for some time for the existence of a feature film industry in Canada. Discourse in both the public sector and in the private film-making industry in the 1950s and into the 1960s showed there were ever-increasing calls for the creation of this industry in Canada, and for the, presumably necessary, government assistance needed to facilitate this birth. As Michael Dorland makes perfectly clear, this movement toward state participation in a feature film industry was gradual, and began in an "economy of talk" -- whereby discourse surrounding the idea of a feature film industry contributed to its creation insofar as this discourse insistently created the impression of the existence of an industry long before it was reasonable to speak of one. Early in Dorland's disquisition on the emergence of feature film policy in Canada he quotes the report

of the Massey Commission, which stated,

> The cinema is not only the most potent but also the most alien of the influences shaping our Canadian life. Nearly all Canadians go to the movies, and most movies come from Hollywood...Hollywood refashions us in its own image (1998, 15)

Dorland goes on to note that the Massey Commission Report, one of the most important and influential documents in the history of Canadian cultural policy, acknowledges that Canadians seemed to want to see commercial features, while at the same time praising the NFB's role as national film educator, recommending an expanded role for the board in order to protect Canadians from the "effects of commercialization coming from a foreign nation which 'puts its faith in the machine'" (1998, 15). This language from the Massey Commission Report demonstrates the degree to which the voice of the state itself saw the frame of reference for discussions of culture: as a division between the forces of civilization and the uncultured forces of commerce. Dorland also observes the militaristic language of the state which did speak of a "battle" for soul of the nation. These Arnoldian presumptions about Canadian cultural life have many antecedents -- including for example in the formation of the National

Film Society of Canada in 1935 as Charles Acland demonstrates[2] -- and the point of my drawing attention to them here is that they have obvious implications for a state film policy utterly transformed into a commercially-oriented one, as was the case with the CCA and the full flowering of the tax-shelter boom in the late 1970s.

State-Sponsored Features

Interestingly, as the move toward a feature film policy gained momentum in the 1960s, the discourse surrounding this seemingly desirable and perhaps inevitable eventuality showed the stake holders steadfastly opposed to Canadian film artists attempting to mimic the crass commercial nature of Hollywood's feature films. The world was awash in the emerging international Art Cinema with Bergman and Fellini and Godard and Kurosawa attracting international attention to films which were cultural, films which were literate, and not shallow, as the American cinema was

2 See Acland 1994.

seen to be, representative as it was of the emptiest of mass culture. The simplistic dichotomy of crass Hollywood vs. the profound, ambiguous works of the art film tradition held particularly strong sway in Canada since the American cinema was also held to be so predatory and invasive in the national consciousness, as the Massey Commission Report makes plain. Not surprisingly, the fiction features that did emerge from the NFB in the 1960s, most notably Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and Gilles Groulx's *Le chat dans le sac* (both 1963), were very clearly much more indebted to the French New Wave than they were to Hollywood. As two important Canadian feature films (representative of "the beginning of the beginning" in Peter Harcourt's words), their thematic and formal ambiguities and loose, improvisational, feel were at odds with the tightly plotted and classical formal features of Hollywood in the declining years of the studio era, evincing affinities for the didactic confrontational formalism of Jean-Luc Godard (in the case of Groulx's film) and of immediacy and humanism of François Truffaut (in the case of Owen's). It should be noted here as well that the other best-known features of the period -- including Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre*

(1962), Michel Brault's *Entre la mer et l'eau douce* (1967), Larry Kent's *The Bitter Ash* (1963), and David Sector's *Winter Kept Us Warm* (1965) -- while all privately produced, independent and low budget features, also shared with the NFB's 1960s features much stronger affinities with the emerging art house styles, which favoured ambiguity and looseness over the gloss of Hollywood and its reliance on strict cause-and-effect narratives. That this should be true is not surprising, since the major impact of the emergent international art cinema was the fires it set under numerous minor national cinemas in an era where films from even the most unlikely places (Czechoslovakia, for instance) were suddenly achieving international recognition in a climate which recognized contra-Hollywood aesthetics.

This said, while clear distinctions can be drawn, in general, between the classical Hollywood style (which was certainly on the wane in the 1960s)[3] and the relatively open texts of the art cinema, it is nevertheless essential as well to point out the participation of the American cinema in the stylistic

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3. David Bordwell dates the classical period as 1917-1960, describing it as one of considerable stylistic consistency with in an elastic range of aesthetic

and thematic experimentation characteristic of international art cinema, an experimentation which had many prominent articulations throughout the 1960s in both independent and studio production. John Cassavetes' 1960s films and even some studio productions such as Arthur Penn's Warner Brothers features *Mickey One* (USA, 1965) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (USA, 1967) are examples of the degree to which American film production participated in the evolution of film style in 1960s much more so than the usual false opposition of Hollywood to Europe allows for.[4] Despite this degree of stylistic experimentation on the part of American cinema during the 1960s, it remains the case that other, minor, national cinemas -- cinemas which consistently defined themselves against Hollywood style -- were at the forefront of emergent narrative film forms, and that national cinema as a category is nearly entirely reliant upon a formal and thematic distance from so-called mainstream (or Hollywood-style) film production, and that Canada's features of the 1960s are representative of this.

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norms.

[4] David Bordwell's "Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" provides a useful summation of this relationship.

Towards a Feature Film Industry

Michael Dorland reports that at the second meeting, on January 21, 1964, of The Interdepartmental Committee on the Possible Development of Feature Film in Canada, an important initial matter was decided when, "'the consensus was that the film industry should be primarily economic with ancillary cultural effects,' though the committee noted that the cultural effects "might be quite important'" (94). As well, this committee's initial report also spoke directly to the shifts in international cinema towards art house production identified above:

> The conclusion may be drawn that the diversification of the feature film industry into new types of production...now afforded possibilities for two types of Canadian-made production: the kind of film which receives good distribution in the art houses of Europe and the U.S., and the fairly low budget second features in a double-bill program, which could be made here as well (Dorland 1999, 97).

The committee, in other words, endorsed both industrial and cultural feature film-making options, tacitly acknowledging that the art house cinema was commercially successful, making contributions to national economies, while also recognizing, even

drawing attention to, the market niche of schlock, or in the committee's words, "low budget second features." While the vagaries of cinema exhibition in the late 1960s and early 1970s rendered the double bill defunct for the most part, the market for such fare by no means disappeared, recovering strongly, in fact, in the early 1980s (when many of the tax-shelter boom movies entered the marketplace) with the rapid rise of videotape distribution, and with the new broadcast avenues for feature films provided by the then-emerging pay-TV systems.

The government's participation in the feature film industry became concrete with Bill C-204, an Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which, though passed in March 1967, did not result in any active assistance to the industry until 1969. The idea behind the CFDC was that the primary obstacle to the establishment of a private feature film industry was the availability of capital, and the new agency sought to ameliorate that problem. Their initial policy objective was, in the words of their first annual report, "to foster and promote a feature film industry in Canada" (CFDC 1968-69, 9) which they attempted to do by providing seed capital in

the form of loans to producers. Beginning with an endowment of 10 million dollars, the agency was conceived of as an industrial bank which would lend capital to producers, who would, in turn, provide the agency a return on their investment when the films turned a profit. This removed the first stumbling block to the creation of a feature film industry - the paucity of capital -- and the agency would maintain an ever-available pool of finds, replenished regularly by repayment and returns from profitable films. However, because the agency recouped so little, by 1971 its original ten million dollars had been spent, and in November of that year, the CFDC received from cabinet an appropriation of its second ten million dollars which came with a request for a clarification of the agency's investment strategies and goals. This request presumably came as a result of two nearly simultaneous, if somewhat contradictory, occurrences: namely, the failure of the agency's investments overall, on the one hand, and on the other, the scandalous success of Claude Fournier's *Deux femmes en or* (1970). This notorious success in which the two golden women of the title sexually service the various callers to their home, caused shocked indignation in the House of

Commons and among the general public (though largely citizens of Ontario, Magder notes, 136) when it was revealed that it had been produced with the participation of the CFDC. The federal government, it was felt, had no business helping finance the production of such soft-core pornography. One Member of Parliament complained of "words that vilely sully the beliefs of a majority of Canadians" (qtd. in Magder 136). What is most interesting about this moment in the history of state intervention in the film industry, for the purposes of this thesis, is that the "maple-syrup porn" case (there were other films of this ilk, besides *Deux femmes en or*) shows how when the purely economic goals of state film policy are clearly successful -- Fournier's film was the biggest hit in Quebec film history until the very recent smash successes of films such as the *Les Boys* franchise (Saia, 1997-) and *Séraphin* (Binamé, 2002) -- the "cultural value" argument still trumps this goal in the public and political discourse. Clearly, this will return as a vexing, if not *the* vexing, problem of the tax-shelter boom period.

Part of the explanation for the culture vs. industry tug-of-war within the CFDC as an institution

has had to do with the fact that under the legislation which created it, parliament granted the authority to decide what exactly constituted a "Canadian feature film" to the CFDC itself. The CFDC's criteria for adjudicating "Canadianness" have been based upon a formula concerning the number of Canadian citizens in important creative roles, the percentage of the budget paid to Canadian firms, and a provision stipulating the Canadian incorporation of the production company. Slightly different rules applied for international co-productions.

The Government Begins to Create an Industry

At a talk before a screening which kicked off the 2001 Cinémathèque québécoise's Paul Almond retrospective, Almond began with an amusing anecdote about how his film *An Act of the Heart* (1970) came to be one of the very first in which the CFDC invested funds:

"Michael Spencer called me up and said that he'd heard Geneviève (Bujold) and I were starting another movie in Montreal, and that he was heading this new feature film funding agency, and that it wanted to invest in the

picture. I said,

"No.

"Mike, Universal is already behind us 100 per cent, the funding's all in place."

There was a long pause, and then I said,

"Well, I guess I can call up Lew Wasserman in Hollywood and see if they'll cut you in."

This anecdote is funny because, to reiterate, the goal of the CFDC was to tackle the problem of initial capital which was seen by the government to be the primary factor inhibiting the creation of a feature film industry. Almond, though, didn't need their money to get his film off the ground, itself an irony since the film is a rather obtuse, arty, narrative film that ends with an act of (difficult to comprehend) self-immolation by Bujold's character. In other words, *Act of the Heart* is exactly the kind of movie that is usually associated with Canadian feature film production, and yet was one which for unknown reasons a major Hollywood studio felt was worth gambling on.

This anecdote is also useful for explaining another rationale behind the establishment of the CFDC. The NFB could have been the government's chosen

instrument for feature film production in Canada, but it was recognized that private interests would object to direct state production in a for-profit industry, and further that NFB participation in the feature film realm would almost certainly inhibit the hoped-for rise of private industry producers, who would naturally be fearful of the unfair competitive advantage of a state-funded production house.

On the other hand, the government could have turned the responsibility for feature films over to another already existing agency, the Canada Council. However, as the primary function of the Canada Council has been to provide support for (generally non-commercial) art production, Secretary of State Judy LaMarsh stated in the House that the CFDC's role should be "quite different from the ordinary functions of the Canada Council, which makes grants" (Hansard, qtd. in Lyon and Trebilcock, 28).

In the end, an industrial bank model was selected over any of the other options as the appropriate instrument for the creation of this new industry. This choice has had broad-reaching repercussions since one of the most commonly cited problems with the feature film industry in Canada has as much to do with

distribution as it has with production, and since the CFDC as it was established had no impact or even attempted impact upon the distribution sector. This very fact, from the moment of the adoption of this model of state participation, is arguably one of the root causes of the various sorts of market failures observed by analysts of the Canadian feature film industry. Because the CCA did not consider or address distribution, it could be argued that the policy's apparent failure was simply a result of a then already-existing (and still, to this day, persistent) industrial impediment which has nothing to do with the CCA itself. This is to say that a feature film policy which did engage with the problem of distribution (and exhibition), through perhaps a quota, might have resulted in a radically different Canadian cinema than the one we presently find in existence, but also to say that CCA period should not be seen as having caused this already existing (and still persistent) problem -- the failure of many Canadian feature films to make it to screen for any period of time.

C.F.D.C. 1968-78

As Lyon and Trebilcock observe, "most of the corporation's 'investments' were, in effect, 'grants' since the films in which it invested had a negligible chance of returning their investments. Between 1969 and 1978, its annual revenues from equity investments never exceeded 20 per cent of its total film investments..." (31). The relative failure of this system of investment as is evidenced by such meagre returns was the primary motivation for the change in strategy which the new regime of Michael McCabe brought to the agency when he replaced Michael Spencer as the CFDC director in 1978. Beginning that year, the agency began offering bridge financing to producers both as a way of providing the earliest (and usually most difficult to acquire capital), and also in order to demonstrate to other potential investors such as investment firms, brokerage houses and banks, that the government was committed to the successful creation of this industry with the hope that this display of confidence might encourage them to invest in the industry as well.

One element of the CFDC's new strategy which began in 1978 which is overlooked by the received wisdom on

the tax shelter boom is the fact that the agency also restricted their equity investments in films to those with "100 per cent Canadian entrepreneurial, creative and technical content" (qtd. in Lyon and Trebilcock 33). According to Lyon and Trebilcock's study, the shift from providing mostly equity investment to becoming largely an interim-finacier, "has resulted in greater availability of funds from the CFDC's operating budget for investment in these high-risk but ostensibly culturally significant films" (33). This was because the percentage of the CFDC's financial participation in feature films, in total budgetary terms, fell from 37.5 percent in 1968 to 15 percent between 1975-78, because of the massive influx of private capital into the industry caused by the 100 percent tax write-off. It is therefore possible for policy analysts to argue, as Lyon and Treblilcock do above, that the tax-shelter boom in fact provided more and not less direct investment in "culturally significant films" than had been case before the tax-shelter boom. However, as I argued in Chapter One, the very notions of "cultural significance" or "Canadian theme" are clearly very difficult, up to impossible, to quantify and flawed as criteria for measuring the cultural value of a national

cinema because of their uselessness as measurements of anything. To demonstrate just how subjective such ideas are, consider Manjunath Pendakur's Table 14, entitled "Certified English-Language Feature Films, 1979" (180-1). The chart divides the films into various categories, but he only puts two titles, *Surfacing* (Claude Jutra, 1980), and *Suzanne* (Robin Spry, 1980), under the heading "Canadian theme." This category, he explains, is for films with "Canadian subject matter or other significant Canadian cultural content." He further explains that, "some films not listed under this heading have Canadian settings that are identified as such" (181). These criteria, therefore, rule out *Tulips* (Stan Ferris, 1980)[5], the Gabe Kaplan/Bernadette Peters romantic comedy which dotes over and makes much of its Montreal setting. But how Pendakur can justify leaving several other titles out of his Canadian theme category is more difficult to understand. For example, Larry Kent's *Yesterday* (1980, also known as *This Time Forever*[6]) is about a French-English couple in Montreal

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5 The film print and the videotape credit "Stan Ferris" as the director, but the original seven week shoot was directed by Rex Bromfield, and several weeks of re-shooting followed, directed by Al Waxman. See Turner 339.

6 The film was released as *Yesterday* in English

in winter. Hockey is a significant feature of the narrative as is the McGill University setting. This is a film I discuss at length in Chapter Six, and I would suggest that of all the tax-shelter boom movies, this one has one of the most direct claims on "Canadian theme" but it doesn't count to Pendakur.[7] Similarly, arguments could be made for the "Canadian theme" of several other films ignored by Pendakur's chart including Paul Almond's *Final Assignment* (1980) in which Geneviève Bujold plays a Canadian journalist, Allan King's *Silence of the North* (1980), or *Klondike Fever* (Canada-UK, Peter Carter, 1980).

Pendakur's book provides another excellent example of the difficulty posed by such a subjective idea as

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in Montreal and Tokyo, as *Gabrielle* in French-dubbed version in Montreal, as *Scoring* in Toronto, and as *This Time Forever* for foreign sales and Pay TV after May 1982. See D.J. Turner, p. 291

7 *Yesterday*, for some reason, is also a film which another recent book on Canadian cinema completely mis-describes. Mike Gasher, in his *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia* includes *Yesterday* in his table of "British Columbia Productions" despite the fact that the film was shot entirely in Montreal, and produced by a Montreal-based firm. One might guess that Gasher simply assumed the film was a B.C. production because the director Larry Kent started his career there, but one should also recognize that nobody who has actually seen the film could possibly mistake it for a "B.C. production." This case provides one more example of a tax-shelter boom film being referred to without having been

"Canadian theme" in his discussion of the domination of the distribution sector by American firms. Citing *The Silent Partner* (Daryl Duke, 1978) as an imitation of a Hollywood film that "could have been made anywhere in the world" (183-4), Pendakur's claim seems highly debatable given the centrality that Toronto's Eaton Centre shopping mall has to the film, in all its highly, and recognizable, Canadian glory.[8]

All of this is not so much to argue that the tax-shelter boom films are actually much more Canadian-seeming in character than the critics of the period allowed, but rather that the very evaluative premise behind such discourse is fundamentally flawed. Another way of looking at this problem is to return to the history of state intervention in the film industry and consider the case of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Canada-US, Ted Kotcheff, 1974). Here we find a Canadian-(co-)produced popular comedy which starred the up-and-coming American actor Richard Dreyfuss,

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actually seen.

[8] For example, one the mall's best known features figures prominently in the film: Michael Snow's majestic sculpture of flying Canada Geese "Flight Stop." As well, the prominence of specifically Canadian national firms such as the Eatons department store and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in the film indicate a degree of specificity which lends

fresh off his very well-received performance in *American Graffiti* (USA, George Lucas, 1973). Directed by Canadian Ted Kotcheff and adapted by Lionel Chetwynd from Mordecai Richler's popular novel, the film takes place in Montreal and the Laurentians. What is not clear, however, is if the film's thematic concern with the shallow pursuit of material gain over and above all else is as "Canadian" a theme as are the settings and key creative talents behind the film. Several other commercially successful, state-supported, English-language Canadian features which followed *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, including *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Allan King), *Why Shoot the Teacher?* (Silvio Narrizano), *Outrageous!* (Richard Benner) and *Rabid* (David Cronenberg) -- all of these released in 1977 - were indicative as well of the difficulty of measuring "Canadian-ness" in any way other than by the points the system used by the CFDC. They either starred Americans (Bud Cort in *Why Shoot the Teacher?* for example) or they dealt with nationally indeterminate themes (inexplicable natural phenomena in *Rabid*, for example). The success of these films also pointed to the

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local flavour to the narrative.

possibility of an emergent and mature, as well as profitable, private feature film industry in Canada. Production picked up further in 1978 as more producers took advantage of the tax-shelter, and that year saw, in addition to the landmark success of *Meatballs*, the production of more Canadian features than ever before. 1978's crop of Canadian features were often of an even more commercially-calculated kind than in the past, with straight-ahead genre films including the disaster film *City on Fire* (Alvin Rakoff), horror film *The Brood* (David Cronenberg) and the Bob Clark-directed whodunit *Murder By Decree* (UK-Canada) among them. The commercial success of many of these, coupled with the newly arranged opportunity for capital-raising provided by the sale of shares in productions to numerous small investors (as described in Chapter One) contributed directly to the high-water production boom of 1979. Canada, it seemed, had diverted its attention from the production of earnest educational films which might "do good" (as Grierson advocated), to the creation of a feature film industry designed to entertain the movie-going public.

CHAPTER THREE

Reception and Contexts

The tax-shelter boom was greeted with derision by the mass media in the late 1970s and a study of the media response of the day is essential to this thesis. An interrogation and interpretation of the contemporaneous critical reaction contributes to the historiographical analysis since it is clear that the treatment of the tax shelter boom by the media when it was on has had a tenacious hold on how the period has subsequently been understood by history. This historiography will be at least partly informed by Peter Morris's observation on Canadian cinema canon formation, which he shows to have been skewed by overtly nationalist critics and scholars (1994, 36). Even in the realm of popular criticism, and perhaps especially in this mode, there is an observable expectation of "national themes" and to formulaic narratives and styles. This is a fact which has clear repercussions for a full understanding of national

cinema in Canada, since films which do not meet critics' expectations thematically, generically, or formally are often discounted by critics as acceptable elements of the national cinema.

In this chapter I draw attention to prominent themes and directions in the critical and popular discourse surrounding the texts under examination here, as well as situate this discourse in the broader movements of international film practice and the global film industries of which Canada's boom were a part. What changes in cinema exhibition are observable? Of other cinema-related cultural phenomena such as television? Further, it is revealing to examine other recurrent motifs of the talk surrounding the boom, including the discussion of producers as stars, the characterization of CFDC head Michael McCabe, and of the intensity and the venomousness of the coverage of Canada's performance at the 1980 Cannes Film Festival, an occasion which annually marks, as Robin Spry notes, the end of the film "fiscal year" (x). Finally the business press warrants, and shall receive, attention here as well,

telling as it is of the general attitudes held by business people and the mass media toward the issues swirling around the tax-shelter boom as an investment opportunity and economic strategy.

The Discourse Surrounding the Tax-Shelter Boom

This chapter examines the critical contexts surrounding the films of the tax-shelter boom from three distinct directions: through reviews of the films, and at least as importantly, through media coverage of the phenomenon of the tax-shelter boom itself; through industry discourse, especially that of the major disseminators of industrial news, *Variety*, and the Toronto *Globe and Mail* (especially their Report on Business section), and through an examination of other major national and international contextual factors, such as the prevalence of economic nationalism which was a prominent element of the national political debate in late-1970s Canada.

Media Accounts of the phenomena of the Tax-Shelter Boom

Not surprisingly, the prominent threads running through all of these various commentaries on either specific films themselves or on the boom as a whole are locatable in the vicinity of the dichotomy art vs. commerce. Laurence O'Toole of *Maclean's* magazine, in his review of *Nothing Personal*, offers this perfect example of this critical tendency:

> *Nothing Personal* with Suzanne Somers and Donald Sutherland, the fruit of last year's crop of Canadian movies, could have been made with rubber gloves there's so little evidence of personal in it. It's a deal, a way to make money and has nothing to do with showing an audience a good time (May 12, 1980 54).

The critical premises behind such a remark are revealing: *this* film is "a way to make money" in a way that other, presumably more personal ones are not. One would like to ask O'Toole, which commercial features with stars, exactly, are those? Furthermore, a critic such as O'Toole should surely realize that

the most commercially successful films -- the ones, in other words, which make the most money -- have everything to do with trying to "show an audience a good time." It's just that some films are more successful than others in this regard, but O'Toole maintains there is something structurally wrong with the conditions under which this film was produced which renders it unable to please an audience. With claims such as these bandied about by one of the nation's leading print film critics, it is no wonder that the reputation of bad films created by failed policy has been so prevalent and longstanding.

A good example of the typical treatment of the tax-shelter boom by the press is provided by "Canada among the victims in the Big Canadian films," a *Globe and Mail* feature from March of 1979, which states,

> murderous doings are afoot in this picture and ironically -- for *Bear Island* is the biggest Canadian film to date -- the first victim is Canada herself, no trace of the lady having been allowed to jeopardize producer Peter Snell's frankly stated aim of selling the picture to the American market." (Plommer 13).

While set in the Norwegian arctic, it does seem a little odd to describe an arctic adventure picture

starring Donald Sutherland as having "no trace" of its Canadian pedigree. In any case, the point here is not to go searching for the hidden "Canadianisms" in the tax-shelter boom movies, but rather to demonstrate that even in the case of a 50-50 Canada U.K. co-production such as *Bear Island*, the discourse surrounding the film was one which emphasized both its crassly calculated commercial motivation, and the commercial imperative of camouflaging how truly "Canadian" the production was. So many other ways of describing the production could have been accurately mobilized, including the very large influx of capital into the local economy of Stewart, British Columbia provided by the 9 million dollar budget, or something about Donald Sutherland as a Canadian star, or about the skills and training of the crew of 123 Canadian film technicians who worked on the Canadian half of the production (scenes were also shot in England's Pinewood Studios). From a journalistic perspective, where the positive aspects of potential commercial success for a big-budget Canadian co-production could have been the angle for the story, it focussed instead

on the claim that the film's commercial imperative necessarily made "Canada herself" the film's "first victim." In Chapter Six I interrogate the premises behind the expressed anxieties over "location masquerade," but for now, in this case, it is worth asking why a big-budget action-adventure film with an international cast should necessarily have to foreground its Canadian location (especially as a film set in the Norwegian arctic), as Plommer suggests.

While by the height of the boom these tendencies to dismiss out of hand the commercial films of 1979 are everywhere evident in the popular press -- through regular denunciations of the quality of the films, through constant complaints about disguised Canadian settings, through caricatures of producers, and especially of CFDC head Michael McCabe, as slippery wheeler-dealers -- back in 1978, when the extent of the movie boom which would occur was still not fully realized, the tax-shelter policy received a slightly more sympathetic hearing. In fact, in yet another long feature article on the Canadian movie business, this one from March 25, 1978, while Jay Scott does manage a

few asides of the sort he will later become best known for ("Michael McCabe...doesn't talk a lot about esthetics," for example), he also provides McCabe a platform from which to clearly and directly explain the new rationale at the CFDC. McCabe is quoted as saying:

> It makes no sense to pour millions into a picture 11 people are going to see. Will making commercial pictures aimed at the American market further erode Canada's identity? You certainly run that risk, but if the film is made by Canadians and springs from the Canadian sensibility, there is a fair chance it will be a Canadian cultural product. The alternatives are hideous: a subsidized cottage industry catering to elitist audiences, or no industry at all" (Scott 1978, 35).

McCabe's candid willingness to directly confront elitist taste distinctions about cultural products is also notable in the piece where, for example, discussing promotional strategies for the year's movies, he quips, "let's get Michael Douglas (star of *Running)* (Steven Hilliard Stern, 1979) on the cover of *Runner's World;* let's get *In Praise of Older Women* (Kaczender 1978) in *Playboy."* This populist language opposes quite directly the sort of elitism on display in the later *Globe* article by prominent figures in the

publishing industry (an article I shall discuss shortly); figures who, one can surmise, would disapprove of any promotional opportunities provided by *Playboy* magazine. As well as providing McCabe the opportunity to transparently and logically defend the CFDC's new strategy, Scott also comments approvingly, concluding with the observation that "...many people in the Canadian industry are convinced that [McCabe]'s asking the right questions" (38). This tempered optimism was extremely short-lived, however, and by 1979 it was nearly impossible to find any press account of the tax-shelter boom at all (outside of *Variety*, as I shall discuss shortly) which did not attempt some kind of joke about its crassness, and which did not make some negative remark about the "American-style" films associated with it.

Another fascinating document of the prevailing attitudes toward the tax-shelter boom is a December 1979 episode of C.B.C. television's *The Fifth Estate*, including a feature item entitled "Movie Madness" on that year's film production boom. "Movie Madness" contains incredibly revealing interviews with Micheal

McCabe (who Eric Malling describes in voice-over as "the flashiest wheeler-dealer in the whole public service"), producers Bill Marshall and Pierre David, University of Toronto tax expert Neal Brooks, and Hollywood agent Robert Lipman, among others. Shown driving down Hollywood Boulevard, Malling's not-surprising view of both commercial film-making and of the booming Canadian industry is evident: "the core of Hollywood is actually a pretty tawdry place these days, but that's alright, the actual movie business is pretty tawdry itself. The hucksters and promoters far outnumber the people interested in quality pictures." As we shall see, this habitual characterization of people involved with the commercial film industry by the Canadian media as "hucksters" was an important part of the explanation for the understanding of the period as lamentable, as a disgraceful failure.

However, another of the segment's experts, Neal Brooks, does make a precise case for why the Canadian taxpayer, through tax-breaks to investors, should not be subsidizing film production of any commercial kind. As he bluntly remarked, "I'm not sure the Canadian

tax-payer should be subsidizing good business that enriches high-income entrepreneurs." A similar argument could, of course, be made about the tax-shelters for investments in oil and gas exploration, and in rental housing construction as well, but these arguments would ignore the existence of the market failures of various types that had created the need for investment-encouraging policies in these sectors of the economy. It is certainly the case that before the CCA, there was a severe shortage of investor capital in the high-risk Canadian feature film industry and that the tax-shelter solved this problem. However, in typical *Fifth Estate*-style, "Movie Madness" sets out to make ridiculous the tax-shelter boom, and in the course of doing so it vividly highlights the assumptions and taste distinctions at play in arguments about why commercially calculated feature film making is a less than valuable pursuit. The program also entirely ignores the potential economic and cultural benefits of the establishment of a thriving feature film industry.

Malling sets the tone for the report early on

when he quips, "these days when a producer has a script, it is often his stockbroker's opinion that matters most." And shortly after this, introducing Canadian television audiences to the cause of the boom, Malling explains, "there are only three industries in Canada so important to our future that parliament has given them this extraordinary advantage (the Capital Cost Allowance): oil drilling, rental housing construction, and feature length movies." Both of these comments, delivered with Malling's trademark acid tongue, do not require explanation as to what is wrong with a country pursuing such a policy, it is taken to be self-evidently ridiculous. Malling's mockery never lets up, but the program did give voice to prominent figures in the boom, and some of their exchanges with Malling are illuminating as well. For example, after Pierre David, one of the most prominent producers of the period, explains, measuredly, "I don't think the public goes for movies which are, you know, pure shit. I think the public goes for films which are entertaining," Malling returns with, "we're one step up from schlock then?"

The direct equivalency that Malling sees between David's word "entertaining" and Malling's word "schlock" is as clear an example there is of the premise behind so much of the critique behind the tax-shelter boom that popular cinema is a low form, not worthy of Canada.

Film Reviews: From Ridicule to Back-Handed Praise

The prominent threads running through reviews of tax-shelter boom movies were that they either were not as terrible as was expected, or that they *were* as terrible as had been expected and that their status as Canadian is therefore either unfortunate and embarrassing or is the full explanation for the execrable nature of the film in question. Generally speaking, the national pedigree of the film is called attention to by critics, a practice which may simply result from the novelty of so many Canadian feature films appearing at once, or may indicate a degree of critical bias on the part of newspaper and magazine

film reviewers against the tax shelter boom movies. Here is Bruce Bailey in the *Montreal Gazette* on Gilles Carle's *Fantastica*: "this Quebecois musical filmed in Shawinigan is not quite as bad as it was cracked up to be at this year's Cannes festival." (43). Clyde Gilmour begins his *Toronto Star* review of *Death Ship* (Alvin Rakoff, 1980) like this: "A press kit prepared by Avco Embassy Pictures Corp. of Los Angeles reports that *Death Ship* is "predominantly Canadian." That's a terrible thing to say about Canada, but evidently it's true." (April 19, 1980 F5). A sampling of reviews of *Prom Night*, *Agency*, *Suzanne*, *Bear Island* and *The Changling* from major Canadian dailies repeat this pattern of either lamenting the national origin of the films as an embarrassment or drawing attention to it as some explanation or indicator of a film's poor quality. Bruce Bailey's *Montreal Gazette* review of *Agency* is representative of this tendency, where he begins a later paragraph in his luke-warm review with, "Still, it's not painful to watch this Canadian-made product." (September 8, 1980 29). Another example of this critical practice, that is, assuming the national

origin of the film to part of the explanation for its badness, is provided by The *Globe and Mail*'s celebrated critic Jay Scott, in his review of *Bear Island*, which warrants quoting at length because of the way in which Scott mobilizes the notion of national film failure along with heaps of the scornful back-handed praise so characteristic of the criticism of the period:

> The way things have been going in the Canadian film industry lately, one could perhaps be excused for expecting (*Bear Island*) to be a major disaster. It isn't: the arctic landscapes are breathtaking, and some of the action sequences are not only active, but also exciting. Truly, wonders never cease. This is not to imply, however, that *Bear Island* is a good film, or that it is worth walking across a narrow street to see (July 6, 1980, E7).

Also representative of the premises at play in journalistic film reviews of the period, here is the *Toronto Star*'s Sid Adilman in an article -- which discusses, and utterly dismisses, several specific titles -- entitled "Canada a laughing stock at Cannes": "many of Canada's so-called producers should go back to making documentaries about wheat fields and the Inuit and stay away from feature movies until they

really know how to make them" (B1). Lamenting the embarrassing quality of Canada's entries at the festival, Adilman goes on to point out how other nations are represented at the Cannes festival by "some of the world's top directors," but then goes on to list names solely from the European art cinema tradition, including Jean-Luc Godard, a figure who could scarcely be described as a "top director" in 1980, despite his re-emergence that year with a better received production than he had been involved with for some time, *Every Man for Himself*. That Adilman never even mentions Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (USA, 1980), which shared the Palme d'Or that year, is telling of the distinction he clearly draws between popular cinema and art cinema. As well, it seems hard to imagine a more straightforwardly stated model for what Canadian film directors *should* be doing than Adilman's evocation of the stereotype, "documentaries about wheat fields and the Inuit." Not only does this practice seem appropriate, to Adilman, to the skills of Canadian film-makers, but also appropriate to their inclinations.

In the case of some other films, national origin is treated as if it may be a liability. For example, in his generally positive review of *The Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1979), which he notes won the Genie award for Best Canadian Film in 1979, Dave Chenoweth opines that, "overall, this Canadian production deserves to be a success," suggesting perhaps that the film's national origin itself may be an inhibitor of whatever commercial success the film may achieve (96).

While my study of the reviews in the popular press does reveal a certain consistency in the way nationality is treated, there are some notable and perhaps surprising exceptions. *Mr. Patman* (John Guillerman, 1980), for example (one of the few Canadian films Adilman sees some merit in, in his tirade quoted above), also receives a sympathetic reading from *Maclean's* critic Laurence O'Toole, who, strangely makes no mention at all of the film's national origin. O'Toole's practice at that time was to regularly and consistently raise a film's Canadianness (in usually negative reviews), even in such cases as Canada-U.S co-productions such as *Middle*

Age Crazy (John Trent, 1980) where he describes it as a "Canadian made movie" but leaves this fact entirely uncommented upon, and which adds nothing to his, in this case, luke-warm, evaluation of the film (September 29, 1980, 62).

Finally, one anomalous review merits mention here. Headlined "*Meatballs* a tender delight," Bruce Kirkland's long and exceedingly positive photo-illustrated review which fronted the *Toronto Star*'s entertainment section on June 29, 1979 exists as the only review of any of the films of the period which neither complains about the national origin of the film, nor uses it as a partial explanation for the film's failure. Kirkland does specifically refer to *Meatballs*' national origin, in an entirely non-judgmental way. Nevertheless, Kirkland's review does still participate in the commerce vs. art argument, concluding, "*Meatballs* will never be included among Canada's finest artistic achievements on film. But it's a funny, friendly movie; a soft touch that will certainly touch most of its audience." (D1). I discuss the importance of *Meatballs* to the height of

the tax-shelter boom in 1979 in Chapter Four.

Cannes 1980

The press coverage of the 1980 Cannes Film Festival merits special attention here for a number of reasons. First, buoyed by the huge amount of investment that the CCA brought to the industry, not to mention the unprecendently large number of Canadian films which were brought to the Cannes Market that year, the CFDC mounted an enormous $200,000 publicity campaign, making the Canadian presence at the festival by far the most visible.[1] The CFDC bought the cover and a huge glossy insert in *Variety* during the week of the festival's opening, and with numerous other extremely prominent public relations manoeuvres attracting the attention of the press. Indeed, it was the "flashy" nature of the publicity which made the

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[1]Only Gilles Carle's *Fantastica*, which opened the festival, Dennis Hopper's *Out of the Blue* and Micheline Lanctôt's *The Handyman* were in competition,

Canadian films immediately suspect in the eyes of the national press. Rather like shooting fish in a barrel, several reporters could not resist making fun of the apparent absurdity of a government-funded yacht hosting champagne and lobster parties with scantily-clad starlets, movie producers, and federal bureaucrats all moored in the Cannes harbour.

Accounts of the 1980 Cannes festival reveal something of a siege mentality on the part of both government officials and Canadian film producers, who were consistently faced with questions of the credibility, sustainability and even the benefits of 1979's seemingly outsize movie boom. Jay Scott's *Globe and Mail* feature on Cannes 1980, headlined "Yachts and tax breaks do not good movies make," begins with this quotation from Bruce Beresford, the Australian director of *Breaker Morant*: "We have been watching Canada very carefully. We want to avoid the same disaster," to which Scott rhetorically asks, "what disaster?"(E3). Scott goes on to recount the hail of scorn rained upon the Canadian entries in the

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while close to twenty films were at the market.

festival, and on view in the market, while also calling into question numerous of the business practices of the CFDC including the hiring of public relations specialist David Novek to handle the huge Cannes P.R. push without putting out tenders or any due process at all. He also gripes that at a CFDC-funded P.R. event, "the squid, the booze, the interview opportunity," were all paid for by public money." In addition to this, Scott writes,

> the nation's producers rent yachts in Cannes and announce - as Robert Cooper did at an expensive press luncheon at The Majestic Hotel - that their projects are "real" and not merely patched-together items conceived to take advantage of the tax-shelter laws (E3).

That a producer of feature films should have to make such a public declaration at all is telling of the swirling public controversy over the change in direction at the CFDC and the resulting effects in both the Canadian film industry and in the Canadian industry's place in the international film culture, insofar as the Cannes festival is representative of these.

In another piece filed from Cannes the week

before, Scott described Canada's entries in competition at the festival as,

> two films from Quebec and one that may be declared American (or without nationality, which is as good a description of the current state of English-Canadian films as any: the cinema without a country). For all their talk and for all their commercial successes with *Meatballs* and the like, Canada's English producers still are sitting out in the cold as far as esthetic acceptance is concerned (May 12, 1980, 17).

In fact, such was the degree of the media outcry over the scandalously bad government-subsidized Canadian product at the 1980 Cannes festival, that Carole Laure, star of the first Canadian film ever to open the festival, Gilles Carle's *Fantastica*, "has taken Canada's press to task for not asking to interview her at the Cannes Film Festival and for allegedly misrepresenting the picture's reception." ("La Laure rebukes hometown press"). The article goes on to note that, "European critics reacted to her film negatively in the intellectual press, while popular publications were mildly positive." Indicative as well of the treatment by the press of the tax-shelter boom, the same unsigned *Globe and Mail* piece, which was almost certainly by Jay Scott (from the "Briefly"

column in the entertainment section), concluded with the following cutting observation:

> Meanwhile, the Canadian Film Development Corp. has come up with a new way to let the press in on upcoming activities. Today at Cannes, the CFDC has invited certain members of the fourth estate aboard the yacht Don Juan for what is described as a "three-hour luncheon cruise."

A *Toronto Star* article from just after Cannes noted as well that Peter Snell, producer of the widely lambasted *Bear Island* shared Laure's complaint about unfair treatment of Canadian films by the press: "Snell is riled by what he calls unfair criticism of the Canadian movie industry...`everywhere you go, people are putting Canada down. It's just bull,' he said" (June 7, 1980 F5). The coverage of Cannes 1980, where so many of the productions of 1979 were on display, shows us that the Canadian movie press was entirely suspicious of film promotion as a process and had an inherent mistrust of the commercial aspects of feature film-making in general.

Wheeler-Dealers I: The Producers

It is striking to note the frequency of the observation during the tax-shelter boom that it is producers who are the "stars" of this historical moment. Numerous popular publications such as The *Globe and Mail*, *Chatelaine*, and *Saturday Night* actually ran feature articles in 1979 on what was almost invariably called something like "the new breed of Canadian film producer." The contemporaneous depictions of sleazy producers (and, as we shall see, of CFDC head Michael McCabe as villain) are as telling as the reviews of the films themselves about the general attitude of the press to the burgeoning film industry in Canada. Joe Medjuck describes this phenomenon clearly:

> usually stories [about the film boom] concern the American stars of the film, but if a Canadian is mentioned he or she is most likely to be that uniquely Canadian phenomenon: the film producer as superstar. Articles about film producers have become an established genre (37).

The frequency with which producers are described as the "real stars" of the movie boom is most striking,

and since the producers in question are all self-promoters and entrepreneurs, the prominence with which they are treated feeds quite directly into the art vs. commerce dichotomy which always surrounds discussion of the boom.

The notion that producers are business-people first and foremost, with money-making their primary or only interest in the film industry, is one that recurs often in the press of the day and is revealing of premises and attitudes toward the cultural industries in Canada at the end of the 1970s. In Martin Knelman's long *Saturday Night* article in the producers as stars genre, the section on Jon Slan provides a useful example of the prevalent tendencies. In it we learn that "only a few years ago, Slan was writing his PhD thesis, under the supervision of Northrop Frye, on the poetry of W.B. Yeats. Now, he jokes, he can't even remember what the W.B. stands for." Not surprisingly, "Slan is also a shrewd operator, with a talent for gambling and deal-making" who "wears open-neck shirts, winks at good looking waitresses, and loves to hustle" (1979, 35). Seen in this light, Slan

clearly personifies the art vs. commerce divide, having shucked his highbrow academic credentials so thoroughly, he can now nonchalantly refer to his film *Fast Company* (Cronenberg, 1978) as "a piece of crap."

Of course, the thing about producers is that they are usually *not* directors, and the wheeler-dealer producer is consistently held up in the press of the day as the opposite of the more desirable auteur, the figure for whom artistry (and presumably, for some reason, national expression) is the paramount concern. While this might not be the place to debate utility of auteurism as a critical or theoretical position in the interpretation of films, it does merit mention here at least that in a series of ways the role of producer has been seen elsewhere as a supremely positive and creative force. For example, Thomas Schatz's study of the movie moguls *The Genius of the System* demonstrates clearly how in a high-risk, capital-intensive, cultural industry such as feature film-making, producers made frequent and significant contributions to the realization of countless classical Hollywood films, the "artistry" of which is no longer in any

doubt. Nevertheless, at the height of the tax shelter boom, the fact that it was producers and not directors who were celebrated as the stars of the moment, and the fact they were so consistently treated by the media in the manner that they were, points to some of the premises behind the dismissal of the tax-shelter boom films: these films were not art, they lacked personal vision and conviction, and they were not acceptable examples of Canada's national cinema. This in spite of the fact that *Goin' Down the Road* (Don Shebib, 1970) had a producer as much as *City on Fire* had a director. It is the emphasis on one role apparently trumping the contribution of the other in this discourse which is most interesting and revealing of prevailing attitudes and assumptions. A producers' cinema is customarily held to be a degraded cinema: one in which commerce trumps art. The history of Hollywood - not to mention the case of figures such as Roger Corman or Carlo Ponti (who, as producers, launched countless creative careers) -- provides examples of the enormous catalytic and creative potential of the producer function in the creation of

feature films. But in the press accounts of the tax-shelter boom, producers were always treated as nothing more than philistines.

Wheeler-Dealers II: Michael McCabe = Bob Guccione

It is revealing that examples abound in the press accounts of the tax-shelter boom of Michael McCabe, the new chief executive at the CFDC, being described as a sleazebag hustler. Here are a few examples: first, from *Chatelaine* Magazine in 1980,

> Where [former CFDC executive director] Spencer had the subdued style of a career civil servant, discreet and almost invisible, McCabe had a swinger's flair; he sported a jaunty beard flecked and streaked with silver, he had a predeliction for shirts worn open to the sternum a la Bob (*Penthouse*) Guccione...half pitchman half bureaucrat." (Snider 44).

From an unsigned article in *Saturday Night* magazine (which, judging by the style and the subject, is almost certainly by Martin Knelman), tellingly titled "The New Canadian Movies: Hype and Chutzpah -- The Wheeler-Dealer Becomes Star," we get the following description: also explicitly comparing McCabe to the

aristocratic civility which surrounded his predecessor Michael Spencer, McCabe "has the air of a playboy on the lam," with, "chatty saloon-style ebullience." This unseemly character is nevertheless humanized by the end of the article which asserts that "he is bound to be destroyed for the simple reason that Canadians have an instinctive distrust of a smart operator who loves to win."

A final example of the ubiquitous characterization, this time from a Peter C. Newman editorial in *Maclean's* magazine entitled "The lively roadrunner in a safari jacket: Mike McCabe hustles his cinematic creed," McCabe is:

> a lively roadrunner with panache to burn, he disguises himself in the trade's standard costume - sincere eye contact, bushy beard and safari jacket - flirting from deal to deal, splitting the percentages, hustling his creed. (5)

McCabe, thus, becomes the personification of the tax-shelter boom. Like the movie boom itself, McCabe is inherently untrustworthy, all flash, no substance, and entirely inauthentic. McCabe isn't a real Canadian civil servant just like these movies aren't real Canadian movies. It was civilized Michael

Spencer who brought us *Goin' Down the Road*, and it was Michael McCabe who brought us *Prom Night*.

Television

Another of the critical biases on display in the discourse surrounding the tax shelter boom is found in O'Toole's review of *The Kidnapping of the President* (George Mendaluk, 1980), which was found on the very same page as his *Middle Age Crazy* review which I cited earlier. It begins with the prefatory comment "if people are forsaking movies for TV, it's because they can find as good (or better) entertainment as *The Kidnapping of the President* on the small screen" (62). Clearly TV movies are generally inferior to real cinematic features to O'Toole and the fact of this (again, "Canadian-made") film's early exhibition on TV, despite the fact that it did receive a minor cinematic release as well, lowers its quality off the bat. Televisual presentation is assumed to be a marker of inferior quality, one of the premises behind the

consistently repeated outraged complaint that many of the tax shelter boom films were never even released (in movie theatres). The fact of pre-sales to American television networks for millions of dollars (*City on Fire* (Rakoff 1980) to CBS, *A Man Called Intrepid* (Peter Carter, 1980) to NBC for a three consecutive night's screening, for example) was taken as evidence of the crassness, of the low vulgarity of commercial production rather than in any of the positive ways these sales could have been viewed in a feature story in *Saturday Night* magazine (28). Audiences in the millions, which American network television virtually guaranteed, was not seen by commentators at the time as desirable, with the reputation of television vs. the cinema considerably lower.

This matter was specifically addressed in a prickly interview with Michael McCabe by Eric Malling of CBC television's *The Fifth Estate*. From the "Movie Madness" episode mentioned earlier, the value of television sales are argued:

> Eric Malling: "If half of the 1978 films are going to be profitable, as you say, that seems to

> be primarily from T.V. sales to the American markets, not because anybody is going to see them and pay money at the box office."
> Michael McCabe: "The dollars are the same colour."
> Malling: "Was it really the intention of parliament to subsidize movies for the American networks?"
> McCabe: No, the intention of parliament was to create an industry."

This exchange speaks directly to the premises behind so much of the critique of the tax-shelter boom. First, we can note the taste-based hierarchical assumption that theatrical release is somehow "better," more important, or more valuable than televisual presentation. One problem with this line of thinking is that Canadian films enjoy far larger audiences on Canadian television than they do in theatrical release, and the inclusion of American network exposure means far, far larger audiences in the United States as well. Is the television audience less important for some reason than the theatrical one? As well, Malling assumes that the films in question are not receiving market value in their sales to U.S. networks (are the American networks being "subsidized"?) which is not supportable by the facts. *City on Fire*, for example, was pre-sold to C.B.S. for

2.65 million U.S. dollars, and *A Man Called Intrepid* to N.B.C. for 4 million U.S. dollars, perfectly respectable sums for such transactions. While it is true that the (almost entirely Canadian) producers are subsidized by the tax break provided by the Capital Cost Allowance, the sale of films such as these to U.S. networks is not. In fact, *City on Fire* was pre-sold for these millions on the basis of an 11 minute-long demonstration tape, which along with the sale of its theatrical distribution, guaranteed the project a profit before it was even released. It is the case that a subsidy through waived taxes lead to the creation of this film, but it is not accurate to claim that the American network benefited from any subsidy from the Canadian government. The films were sold for fair market value.

Television's status as a form "lower" than the feature film comes into play in another important way in analyses of the discourse surrounding the tax-shelter boom: the huge surge in production, and the necessity of producers to hire "stars," or at least well-known names, to front the projects in order to

attract investors, meant that television had to be mined for its stars as well, real movie stars being in high demand and relatively short supply.[2] As a result of these factors, many of the top television stars of the period star, often in their first major movie roles, in Canadian films of the tax-shelter boom. Representative of this phenomenon is the case of Mariette Hartley, who co-stars with Alan Arkin in *Improper Channels* (Eric Till, 1980), and was known as a television star at the time, not for her appearance on any television program, but for tart performances in a series of commercials for Polaroid cameras, and it was this celebrity with parenthetical explanation "of Polaroid commercial fame" which followed her name in the promotion of the film. *Welcome Back Kotter*'s Gabe Kaplan in *Tulips*, *Six Million Dollar Man* Lee Majors in *Agency* and *The Last Chase*, Charlie's "smart" Angel, Kate Jackson, in *Dirty Tricks*, *Three's Company*'s Suzanne Somers in *Nothing Personal*, and

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2 One oft-repeated story in the business press about the boom is about how the investment prospectuses named stars as the most likely means of attracting investors, and of starry-eyed dentists and lawyers over-looking potential shortcomings of the deal in

Vince Van Patten from *Eight is Enough* in *Yesterday* are some of the more prominent examples of television's leading stars in tax-shelter boom feature films. In almost every case, these television stars failed to "break out of the small box" in the opinions of critics, and almost none of these actors, hugely popular though they were on television, managed much of a movie career. Laurence O'Toole of *Maclean's* magazine once again provides a good example of the typical critical treatment of the television actors in these films:

> part of [the film's] dumb impersonality comes from its inspiration, television, because the TV stars now turning up...are bankable. They can hold their own in a series by falling back on their familiar, winning, mannerisms, but their personalities peter out in a movie: they haven't acquired a range and don't have the emotional resources to draw upon - television has conquered them and conditioned them" ("Now the Blonde" 54).

There were exceptions, however, as *Meatballs* was the first film role for Saturday Night Live player Bill Murray, who has subsequently enjoyed a celebrated career as a film actor.

Finally, a comparison between the Canadian

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order to associate themselves with show people.

industry's film production for televison broadcast with Hollywood's for television will be useful here. Feature films on television had been a significant part of Hollywood's revenues since the emergence of TV, and by the 1970s all of the major studios were also producing made-for-television films (Cook 22). By 1978, the Hollywood majors were making five times more films for television each year than they typically produced annually for theatrical release. As David Cook notes,

> while feature film production (for theatrical release) remained Hollywood's salient and culturally prominent role in the 1970s, its main function within the American media industry became that of TV producer and film distributor, shifting its posture dramatically from the classical era, but completing a transition that had been ongoing since the consent decree (22).

The characterization, therefore, of a lowly Canadian industry producing films for television with an American one making "real" theatrical features, was inaccurate. Canadian production, in fact, mirrored more or less directly the activities of Hollywood, itself another fact of the tax-shelter boom completely obscured by the extant account. It may not be a

natural law that cinematic exhibition is more important or influential to producers than broadcast is, but it is a commonly held assumption. Nevertheless, the fact is that the Hollywood companies which were held up as the producers of "real" movies in 1979, were producing far more content for the little screen than they were for the big one, and the Canadian industry simply mirrored this arrangement.

National Business Press and Industry Discourse: International Finance in an Atmosphere of Economic Nationalism

It would be hard to imagine a more direct address of the art vs. industry (or culture vs. commerce) dichotomy apparent in the Canadian film industry of the tax-shelter boom than "2-tier system urged to show kinds of film," a business section article from the *Globe and Mail* (Westell B2). The piece begins by quoting Garth Drabinsky, at that time better known as a film producer than as the exhibitor he became, who in a speech to the Toronto chapter of the Investors Dealers Association called for a split between what he called "cultural and industry pictures." Suggesting

that investment in "cultural" films should receive a more than 100 percent tax write off, but that investment in "industry" pictures receive a less than 100 percent write off, Drabinsky tacitly acknowledged the sense of cultural failure which surrounded 1979's enormous productivity, and proposed that his two-tier system of tax breaks would "allow the emphasis to go in both areas as it should go."

Drabinsky's suggestion for the film industry resonated in discussions of other cultural industries in Canada as well, since movies were not the only cultural commodities in Canada wrestling with this apparent commerce vs. art split. For instance, in a feature on the Canadian book publishing industry, William French in the *Globe and Mail* reported a sudden fundamental shift in the Canadian book market, describing it like this:

> at its most obvious level, the shift is evident in the current emphasis on mass-market fiction best-sellers, aimed at the lowest common denominator. There is an abundance of them this season - suspense thrillers, doomsday scenarios, plots that exploit drugs sex and violence. At the same time, writers of serious novels, the kind that appeal to intellectually sophisticated minority, are finding it increasingly difficult to locate publishers...

Incredibly, the article goes on to report that,

> the writers union is so concerned about the trend that it has established a special committee under novelist Timothy Findley to investigate. Findley, whose committee members include Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence, is currently canvassing 30 people in the literary community who may have constructive ideas about how to stop what appears to be the debasement of CanLit. (18).

Unsurprisingly, the habitual equation of "popular" with "American" and of "challenging innovation" with "Canadian" is trotted out here as in the film world, with language used eerily reminiscent of the discourse surrounding the Canadian film scene, as well as of Dwight Macdonald's mass culture critique of the 1950s:

> in the past, much of the undemanding escapist fiction read in the country was American. But now the growth of a domestic PopLit industry, encouraged by Canadian publishers, threatens to undermine literature of quality (18).

Interestingly, other cultural industries in Canada of the period seemed not to face this vexing problem of commerce vs. culture, at least insofar as the *Globe and Mail* was concerned. For example, in a Report on Business section feature on the recording

industries, the difficulties of Canadian recorded popular music companies to succeed in the international arena had nothing to do with pandering to low, American-style, tastes. In fact, according to this article, the saviour of the industry might just be greater success in the U. S. market through more money for developing Canadian talent, and it even goes on to point out that, "Secretary of State David MacDonald, while he was in opposition, said a Conservative government would help generate more money for developing Canadian musicians through a 100 percent capital cost allowance for investment in a Canadian recording venture." (Taylor B4).

Another element of the film production industry also benefited from the Capital Cost Allowance, and in a feature in the *Globe*'s Report on Business on the Canadian animation sector, the pros and cons of the tax shelter as an investment-encouraging strategy are discussed by Michael Hirsch, vice president of Toronto-based animation house Nelvana, and Allan Guest and Jean Mathieson, who operated Rainbow Animation of Toronto. Hirsch argues that the tax-shelter was

terrific for the industry and that the flood of new capital provided from investors seeking a tax shelter have allowed companies like Nelvana to create big expensive productions which could compete in the U.S. market and which have been successfully sold in the states, including *Romie-O and Julie-8*, a science-fiction Shakespeare adaptation, distributed by Viacom and picked up by 150 stations in the U.S. and by the CBC in Canada. On the other hand, Guest and Mathieson are opposed to the Capital Cost Allowance program because they believe there should be no interference of the government in a free market industry. As well, their arguments are also premised on a belief in the distinction between culture and industry. Mathieson explains, "The problem is that we consider film as part of culture. Well that's nonsense. It is a business and should be treated like one." (Taylor, B10).

Still other sectors of the production industry were affected by the Capital Cost Allowance as well. For example, Sports Dimensions Limited of Toronto issued a prospectus in May of 1979 that offered

investors the opportunity to buy $10,000 units in a package of five sports compilation features which were made for television, not theatres. A *Globe and Mail* story, again from the Report on Business, indicates that "it is expected that the series will qualify as a certified production under the Income Tax Act, allowing a deduction of 100 percent of the investment for income tax purposes" ("TV Packages" B2).

Putting aside rock 'em sock 'em hockey videos, pop music and mass-market pulp fiction, even those with an interest in cultural practices more closely associate with "high" culture began in 1979 to seek out possible industry connections, with an eye toward greater dissemination of -- that is, larger audiences for -- the arts. In mid-June of 1979 the *Globe and Mail* reported that the Canada Council, lead by chairman Mavor Moore, was considering ways to "join private investors in financing show-business ventures." The article goes on to explain Moore's view, on behalf of the Canada Council, that, "just as publishing and film production are dealt with in the same federal tax and other incentive laws as

industries, the larger theatres and orchestras in the country, as well as arts enterprises, must be dealt with from industrial point of view." Incredibly, the article concludes with the following assertion from Mavor Moore: "we will be proceeding cautiously, but there is a possibility that someday, the council could start making money" (Canadian Press 14).

The very thought of the Canada Council being a profitable organization rather than a disseminator of grants to (normally) completely uncommercial arts production is one which is very hard to imagine, and the fact that this proposal was put forward in the summer of 1979 is perhaps telling of movements in the attitudes of, if not Canadian citizens at large, then by those of the federal bureaucrats overseeing the arts and cultural industries. It should be noted here too that Joe Clark's Progressive Conservative government had just been elected, and that the desire for movement of all kind was in the air, after the long tenure of the Trudeau Liberals.

The Tax-Shelter Boom as Seen from Hollywood

The contrast in tone and emphasis in the coverage of Canada's movies boom between *Variety*, the Hollywood trade paper, and the Canadian press coverage I have just described could not be more striking. The premises behind Canadian press coverage -- that commercially calculated film-making was low, un-Canadian, disreputable and only ever resulted in lowest-common-denominator pap for stooges -- led *Maclean's* and the *Globe and Mail* and others to consistently highlight what they saw as the downside of the movie boom, whereas, on the other hand, *Variety*'s language was exultant. Trumpeting huge sales figures, touting Canadian product as successful and saleable, even in those instances where there was some industrial downside, *Variety* generally chose to see the glass as half full. For example, the article "Canadian Distribs Fighting Mad Over Producers' Sales to U.S. Majors; Local Angels," begins like this: "At a time when the Canadian feature film scene has never been healthier, Canadian distribs feel left out in the cold." (74). This was a story which played in the

Canadian press as just another example of the egregious sell-out of the nation when *Running* was sold to Universal for distribution in the U.S. and Canada, leaving the Canadian distributors howling, understandably bristling at the fact that certain Canadian productions are only finding their way onto Canadian screens through U.S. distributors. This was a serious issue for the industry, but what is striking about *Variety*'s coverage of this particular story is the way in which they manage to see it as a small problem in an industry that has, as they say, "never been healthier."

Indeed, many of the habitual complaints against the boom found so commonly in the Canadian press were more or less routinely rebutted in the pages of *Variety*, if not by *Variety* contributors themselves, then at least by providing a conspicuous venue for Canadian producers and for CFDC to make their voices heard in an environment friendlier to their views. For example, in an article on the production of his *Circle of Two*, which stars Richard Burton and Tatum O'Neal, producer Bill Marshall, discussing the fact

that the film didn't need pre-sales to television because of its luxurious financial position, is quoted as saying, "we did not want an outside source to dictate any standards or requirements that would have gotten in the way of our creative work as producers" ("Consortium" 106). As we have seen, the very idea that the "creative work of producers" might involve anything other than deal-making and winking at waitresses was not something the Canadian press ever seemed to have occasion to consider, while *Variety* consistently provided those involved with the Canadian industry a positive spin. The October 24th, 1979 edition of *Variety* provides another excellent example of the typical treatment. In the wake of Gerald Pratley's attack on CFDC policy and on Michael McCabe specifically in the pages of the *Globe and Mail*, *Variety* ran a story headed "McCabe a Hero, but not Perfect" (p.5). The article does go on to discuss how McCabe has become "the favourite whipping boy from those film people still preoccupied with "Canadian content and identity" in feature films" (with those withering quotation marks found in the original), but

rebuts this characterization, clearly, forcefully: "McCabe is committed to the fundamental business philosophy of making the Canadian film industry financially practical." For another example of the same tendency of *Variety* to see the glass as half-full, in stark comparison to the Canadian press, consider the large headline "Will its film success 'unnerve' Canada?" (Landry 47) This article which discusses the fear that "Canadian identity may be vandalized or vulgarized, Hollywood style," and while it does note the misgivings of certain elements of Canadian society, and even those of Canadian film people, the article shares none of the animus, hand-wringing, or lampoon of the sort typical of similar articles in the Canadian press.

One last example of the generally celebratory nature of *Variety*'s (extensive, by the way) coverage of Canada's movie boom is provided by the opening paragraph of an article from November 21, 1979:

> There's never been a year like 1979 for Montreal filmmakers. Pick a sector, pick an indicator, no matter how you cut it, more money was spent making films, and more money made in return, than ever before. Period. The explosion of film

> production in the city has been the cause of concern in many quarters, but even as the industry glances nervously over its shoulder, fearing a burst in the bubble, 1979 stands there undeniably in its accomplishments, a touchstone. Montreal shared in the year that Canada could - And Did" (Grigsby 50).

Of note here again is the willingness by *Variety* writers to acknowledge that there are some misgivings about the movie boom (like heroic McCabe being "not perfect"), while presenting the same story that the Canadian press treated as a disaster in a more or less positive light, based on the same evidence and aware of the same issues.

Never Even Released

Variety readers were greeted on facing pages 54-5 with a full spread ad from HBO ("The future is Now"). On the left, we find one of those congratulatory full pages familiar to regular readers of the magazine, except this one read, simply, "Home Box Office, America's leading pay TV network salutes the Canadian film industry." Facing on the right, "We back you up

with more than just talk. We act! Here's the people. Here's the product," which is followed by a long list of titles and producers of Canadian films which HBO has bought or has a stake in. HBO's director of product acquisition, Kenneth Badish, was quoted in *Variety* as saying, "we have become a critical first piece of the pie for Canadians. They're using our contract to get financing and now we're looked on more as financing folks than buyers." The article goes on to speculate that HBO was paying in the neighbourhood of $150,000 to $200,000 for broadcast rights per picture, which means, multiplied by 20 films in 1979, HBO's investment in the Canadian film industry was at least $4 million. This is interesting for a number of reasons, not least of all the fact that a major new player in film exhibition had such a large stake in the tax-shelter boom, a fact utterly obscured by the "never even released" complaints so typical of histories of the period. As well, *Variety* speculated that there may have been a strategic explanation for HBO's significant participation in the Canadian film boom, one having to do with the fact that the debate

over how pay-TV was going to be organized in Canada was complicated and ongoing, and that HBO honchos felt they might be better positioned, at least insofar as appearing attractive to Canada's notorious broadcast regulators, if they had a strong record of supporting and broadcasting Canadian content which they could point to. Whatever their motivation, HBO was a significant participant in the Canadian movie boom of 1979, a fact which is interesting not only because the received wisdom obscures it, but also because pay TV was seen then as a degraded medium, a reputation which has undergone a significant rehabilitation in recent years. That HBO is now seen as a producer and broadcaster of excellent, even prestige, film and television programming shows us how the claim that the *form* of television as less worthy than theatrically released films was based on a faulty premise.

The Broader Contexts

1979 was an election year, and one in which Canadian economic nationalism was a prominent issue.

The Foreign Investment Review Agency (F.I.R.A) which the Trudeau Liberals had established in 1975, to regulate, and Conservatives argued, to unduly restrict foreign investment in Canada was an election issue, as was the Tory plan to privatize Petro-Canada, the nationalized oil and gas company that was created during the 1972-74 minority government, where the support of the New Democratic Party (who advocated for nationalized industry) was necessary to the survival of the Trudeau government. When the Progressive Conservatives under Joe Clark did defeat the Liberals in May of 1979, very little actually changed in the cultural or film policy file, quite possibly because the minority government was so short-lived. Nevertheless, the debates over aspects of economic nationalism such as those surrounding the proposed dismantling of the F.I.R.A. and privatization of Petro-Canada certainly resonated with the tax-shelter boom since it was an issue in which cultural nationalism and economic nationalism seemed sometimes to get confused. While the sudden establishment of an enormously capital-rich national feature film industry

would seem to be something economic nationalists would get behind, it is possible that the cultural nationalists' arguments against the "American-styled" film produced then contributed to the complaints of the booming film business as yet another U.S. "branch plant" economy which disproportionately benefited its foreign masters. While it is certainly the case that foreign, mostly, of course, American firms did benefit from the boom, the economic benefits were chiefly derived in Canada by Canadians. Not only did the tax-shelter itself create far more economic benefit than it cost in lost taxation revenue, but the benefit to communities and film industry workers, not to mention all the ancillary economic benefits, were concrete and significant. It was reported that for every $1.70 in lost tax revenue caused by the tax shelter, $100 in economic activity was generated (Stinson R2). This matter will be taken up again in Chapter Seven on the material effects of the policy, but I raise it here as relevant context in which to historically situate the tax-shelter boom.

The National Film Board of Canada

In 1979, The National Film Board of Canada won its 5th Academy Award, for John Weldon's animated short "Special Delivery." It was also one of the biggest years for production in the board's history, with a whopping 230 films produced. This in spite of the siege mentality which gripped the board in the wake of the 18 percent budget cut imposed on the NFB in 1978 by the Trudeau Liberals. Two *Variety* headlines are telling of the crisis: "Money troubles mar NFB's 40th happy birthday to you, film board. Now tighten that belt." (December 1, 1979 E3), and "Prestigious Nat'l Film Board In Humiliating Fiscal Crisis" (Nov 21, 1979 48). This latter piece quotes from a *Montreal Gazette* feature written by David Sherman: "It's doubly ironic the board should be on its knees this year when the Canadian feature film industry, financed largely through tax credits, and

therefore by taxpayers, is enjoying its busiest year ever." Albert Kish, NFB film-maker, in the same article opines, "If you remove the CBC and the NFB, there is no Canada. The only way you know there is a distinctive country is by the CBC and the NFB." This astonishing assertion, of course, takes no account of those millions of Canadians, many of whom presumably believe in the existence of Canada, who have no contact ever with either of the cultural institutions which Kish cites as the "only" evidence of the existence of a nation. Deeply rooted, this kind of cultural nationalism plays directly against the establishment of a feature film industry since it conveniently places the struggling and heroic NFB directly at odds with the flashy wheeler-dealers, who are personified as the anti-NFB.

The response to the Canadian production boom of 1979 by film reviewers, entertainment writers and business commentators in Canada and by Hollywood (as illustrated by *Variety*) exhibits a high degree of scepticism and scorn by those writers in Canada, and

measured congratulations from *Variety*. This chapter has shown how the premises underlying these judgements in Canada - an exhibited disdain toward flashiness, promotion and commercial-orientation - are based on biases against popular forms such as genre films, and that commentators such as those at *Variety*, who do not share this negative bias, see the production boom of 1979 in an entirely different light.

SECTION TWO
Texts

The first three chapters of this thesis have situated the height of the tax-shelter boom, contextually. So far, I have examined the "received wisdom" on the period, identifying certain recurrent premises and ideas circulating in the scholarly discourse which has addressed this historical moment. In Chapter Two, I looked at the emergence of this historical moment, considering the progression of state involvement in the film industry. Chapter Three demonstrated the treatment of the height of tax-shelter boom in the media of the day, paying particular attention to what the business and industry press had to say about the movie boom of 1979.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the preceding discussion is that despite the existence of a degree of interest in this historical moment by scholars and by the media at large, there has been thus far very little attention paid to the actual films themselves produced at the height of the tax-shelter boom. In addition to examining the premises behind the blanket dismissal of the tax-shelter boom,

and demonstrating what these premises and this dismissal might tell us about the way national cinema has been understood in Canada, another of this thesis's goals is to do exactly what others have not done: look at the texts themselves. The following three chapters are comprised of textual analysis of several of the Canadian films shot in 1979, almost none of which have received any critical scrutiny whatsoever. I have grouped the films according to some prominent thematic threads which I see running through them. The first of these text-based discussions is concerned with the relationships between genre and nation and genre and gender, as these ideas have been understood in terms of the Canadian cinema. The primary texts considered here are ordinarily categorized generically, as horror films and as teen sex comedies. Here, films such as *Terror Train* and *Prom Night* are examined in the context of the then-emergent, extremely commercially successful, sub-genre known as the slasher film. As well, some of the juvenile comedies of 1979, including *Pinball Summer* and *Hog Wild* are situated in a trend toward what Timothy Shary describes as "raucous

comedies featuring goofy and/or hormonal youth pursuing pleasure…" (7).

The second thematic grouping contains several of 1979's films which are all, in various ways, concerned with the theme of "selling out." These are a series of films where characters are tempted to do the wrong thing for material gain, and frequently do. In films such as *Deadline*, *Fanstastica*, among others, the narrative turns on the willingness of characters to put aside pecuniary or other forms of personal gain, in the interests of others. Acknowledging that the sell-out narrative is a very common one in western popular culture at large, my examination of its treatment by this cluster of films reflects broader anxieties over the issue in this particular time and place in history.

The third thematic grouping in this section connects a handful of the films shot in 1979 which are all concerned with the place of Quebec in Canada. These films (all made in English) all contain allegorical treatment of the relations between French Quebec and English Canada, using the device of the bi-cultural couple. What is most interesting about this cluster is that these three films were all produced at

moment of high tension in the separatist debate in Canada and Quebec, just a few months prior to the sovereignty-association referendum of May 1980. As well, it is striking to observe how these films all provide conciliatory conclusions to the problems between the English and French. I argue that these films should probably have been noticed by scholars of the national cinema because of their Canadian location and, more importantly, because of their clearly nationalist thematic, but that the appearance of these films at the height of the tax-shelter boom contributed to their obliteration from the national film history. These films, in other words, are perfectly representative of the failures of the nationalist film historiography in general and of the extant historical account of the tax-shelter boom as abject failure in particular.

What is "Canadian Cinema"?

Before beginning the textual analysis section of the thesis, it will be useful first to consider what contribution the following chapters can make to the overall argument of this thesis, and to situate the

practice of textual analysis in a discussion of how notions of national cinema have been and should be understood in Canada. The very idea that by studying the texts (of any sort) produced in a particular place one can learn things about that place's culture, is one which has a common-sense and longstanding appeal, but is also one which should be considered with caution. Applications of this practice have taken many forms, some much more convincing than others. For example, it has been argued that the emergence of the dangerous femme fatale in 1940s films noirs reflected the growing fear of feminine social power which resulted from large numbers of women working in the manufacturing, and other male-dominated, sectors of the wartime economy (Place 35). Similarly, many critics of 1980s American cinema discovered a latent nostalgic conservatism at the heart of several films of the period, apparently mirroring the turn to the right in U.S. politics (Wood, chapters 8 and 9). Reading ideology directly off of texts is appealing because of its simplicity, but is also complicated by several factors which need to be kept in mind. The first and most important of these has to do with the polysemic nature of film texts and the

unpredictability of audience reception. That films might be understood by critics to be deeply conservative, but read by some audiences as profoundly progressive, illustrates directly the problem of using textual analysis or interpretive criticism to draw direct connections between texts and social conditions. This is not to say, however, that -- because what sense people make of texts is unpredictable -- interpretive criticism and textual analysis are useless tools. In fact, in the case of national cinemas, it should be easy to demonstrate why the films produced in a particular nation state and at a particular time -- while perhaps open to various understandings by audiences -- are nevertheless reflective of prevalent social concerns. The polysemic nature of film reception is not the complete answer to the question about the relationship of texts to the contexts of their emergence. While it is unreasonable to claim that an individual film-maker should somehow be seen as the vessel through which social conditions or anxieties are funneled, it is equally the case that films can express the prevalent, and even hidden, social concerns of a given place and time. The

following chapters seek to demonstrate just this in the case of late-1970s Canada.

CHAPTER FOUR

Genre and Nation, Genre and Gender

Structural and historical similarities between the Australian and Canadian cinemas notwithstanding, Canada has never produced a *Crocodile Dundee* (Australia, Peter Faiman, 1986). While it might be argued that national specificity is to some degree evident in, and perhaps a small part of the appeal of, a hit film such as *Meatballs*, it nevertheless clearly does not carry the same national significance for Canada that *Crocodile Dundee* does for Australia.[1] I begin my discussion of genre in this way because of what this example shows us about the relationships between genre and nation as theoretical ideas. On the emergence of what he calls "a straightforward genre film," Graeme Turner notes that *Crocodile Dundee*, "speaks from a particular cultural location, and with a recognizable national accent" (107). Many genre films were made in Canada during the tax-shelter

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1 "National specificity" is of course a difficult quality to measure. In the case of *Meatballs*, some might note the visible Ontario license plates on cars, while others will observe certain American turns of phrase. In any case, the film is not obviously Canadian in the sense that Crocodile Dundee is

boom (and some before and since it too), and while some of these, as I will demonstrate, speak "from a particular cultural location, and with a recognizable national accent," and while others have been commercially successful internationally, none have managed the *Crocodile Dundee*-style combination of national specificity and international appeal. As the position of *Crocodile Dundee* in the Australian nationalist film historiography makes plain, genre films, per se, are not the problem for scholars and critics of minor national cinemas.[2] Rather, what riles the nationalist critic is *either* commercially successful genre films with little or no trace of national specificity, *or* commercially unsuccessful genre films, of which Canada produced many during 1979. This observation is of course at the heart of the "received wisdom" on the tax-shelter boom period in general, as I have already shown. Jim Leach is one critic who finds nationally-specific genre films such as *The Pyx* (Harvey Hart, 1973) and *Paperback Hero* (Peter Pearson, 1972) satisfying in themselves, and

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obviously Australian.

[2] In addition to Turner, see, for example, Stephen Croft's "Re-imaging Australia: *Crocodile Dundee* Overseas."

representative of a Canadian aesthetic, even though they did not attract significant audiences. In fact, Leach goes on to leave the blame for the commercial failure of these films at the feet of critics who "constantly bemoan the traditional virtues" of "a smooth-flowing narrative and aggressive pace" (1986 362). On the other hand, clearly successful Canadian genre films such as *The Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1980) are not seen to count as Canadian films.[3]

Leach continues from this to make the case that genre is essentially a conservative, and American, form, and that Canadian genre films can only demonstrate their Canadian-ness by undermining the principles behind generic film-making. He writes:

> "The reliance on established genres provides a general security blanket: the producer knows what he or she is investing in, the distributor has an "angle" to exploit, the director knows the film will find an audience, and the audience knows what to expect and how to respond. This sense of security is precisely what is lacking, almost by definition, in the more traditional (or progressive?) Canadian cinema that explores (often painfully) the uncertainties of the Canadian experience (358).

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3 In this same article, Leach complains specifically about *The Changeling* and *The Dead Zone* (Cronenberg, 1983) as examples of films made "after the body snatchers took over" (359).

In light of such commonly held views circulating in and forming the basis for the nationalist film historiography, here I want to more fully explore the premises which underlie the dismissal of genre films as somehow un-Canadian by critics and scholars, subjecting these premises to a theoretical consideration of genre as a concept. For example, while genre is frequently conceived of as merely a categorical tool, one which in most cases unproblematically lumps together films with similar aspects, recent reconsiderations of genre as a theoretical concept for film studies have turned a corner. Here is one:

> genre refers not to just a film type, but to spectator expectations and hypotheses (speculation as to how the film will end). It also refers to the role of specific institutional discourses that feed into and form generic structures. In other words, genres must be seen as part of a tripartite process of production, marketing (including distribution and exhibition), and consumption" (Hayward 165).

James Naremore agrees, writing that an individual genre,

> has less to do with a group of artefacts than with a discourse - a loose evolving system of arguments and readings, helping to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies (Naremore 14).

These contemporary and compelling theories of genre confirm that the reception of tax-shelter boom genre films, both within the critical discourse of their day, and in their subsequent treatment by Canadian film histories, are evidence of nothing more than a series of historically and geographically specific premises which tell us a great deal more about the period in which they were operative than they do about the actual texts themselves.

With this in mind, this chapter will consist of close analysis of several of the tax-shelter boom texts, specifically those which are customarily categorized under generic frameworks. My analysis is not exhaustive, and some of the films which most obviously belong under genre headings (*Deadline* as a horror film, and *Fantastica* as a musical, for example) are discussed more fully in the subsequent thematic textual analysis chapters on the "sell-out" films (Chapter Five) in the former case and those which deal with the cultural specificity of Quebec (Chapter Six) in the latter. This said, the films dealt with in this chapter are clearly illustrative of generic discourses then current internationally (and

especially in Hollywood), *Prom Night* and *Terror Train,* for example, as exemplary models of the late 1970s horror cycle of the so-called "slasher" subgenre. Interestingly, both *Prom Night* and *Terror* Train star Jamie-Lee Curtis, who was also the heroic "Final Girl" star of the *locus classicus* of the slasher cycle, John Carpenter's *Halloween* (USA, 1978). As well, the thematic and narrative similarities of such films as *Crunch* and *Pinball Summer* to anarchic youth comedies like *Animal House* (USA, John Landis, 1978) and *Meatballs* suggests the utility of subjecting them to generic analysis.

The central theoretical premise of the following examination of genre and nation and genre and gender is that while Canadian genre movies of the tax-shelter boom were largely dismissed because of premises underlying then-current theories of genre (about their conservative nature and about the homogenizing effects of formula), and while conceptual frameworks for the application of genre as a useful tool for film studies have dramatically changed, no such re-evaluation of the dismissed Canadian genre films has been undertaken. This chapter seeks to take account of these genre films from a renewed perspective on the

very notion and utility of genre as a theoretical tool. It is also useful to observe, before undertaking the analysis of actual film texts, the manner in which generic systems function in other national cinemas. The musical in India, for example, and the horror film in Italy are central elements of these national cinemas, with the very generic nature of these forms posing no problem for the national specificity of the genre film produced in these places.

Horror

In one of the most famous denunciations of generic film-making in the history of Canadian criticism, Robert Fulford, writing under his *nom-de-plume* Marshall Delany, blasted David Cronenberg's early horror film *Shivers* (1975) under the unambiguous headline, "You Should Know How Bad this Film is. After All, You Paid For it." While *Shivers* is a film which was produced before the tax-shelter boom, the twin points of Fulford's attack are resonant for the period under examination by this thesis. First, Fulford objected that a horror film which included, indeed was marketed based upon, such graphic gore as

exploding human heads was *prima facie* worthless. The premise that such "obvious" schlock as this was out and out execrable was not even a point Fulford felt the need to defend or explain, it was simply taken for granted. And secondly, that the Canadian government, through the participation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, should have spent tax-payers' dollars investing in it, was also, to Fulford, a clearly and inarguably gross misuse of citizens' money. In fact, he bluntly asserted: "If using public money to fund films like [*Shivers*] is the only way that English Canada can have a film industry, then perhaps English Canada should not have a film industry" (83). These twin complaints, as I have already demonstrated, proliferated as well at the height of the tax-shelter boom, and with so many genre films produced in 1979, critical attacks on the films based on Fulford's premises were certainly among the decisive elements of the discourse of national failure which surround the period. But why should genre films be so obviously unsuitable as elements of Canada's national cinema? And why should a state agency charged with the creation of a feature film industry

be lambasted for assisting in the creation of such cultural commodities?

As Mark Jancovich observed in 2002,

> in recent years, horror has taken over from the western as the genre that is most written about by genre critics. In many of these accounts, the horror genre is claimed to be interesting because of its supposed marginality, and hence subversive, status as a disreputable form of popular culture" (1).

With genre now understood as an idea entwined with notions of audience expectations and, as Naremore puts it, "a loose evolving system of arguments and readings, helping to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies," the contemporaneous critical discourse surrounding the tax-shelter boom genre films can be seen as participating in that "evolving system," but not as final arguments, since this system of arguments and readings has continued to evolve to this day.

While Jancovich goes on from the quotation above to argue that the imagined "subversive" status of horror as a genre is highly dubious, he nevertheless points out that critics who have generally looked down upon genre film-making as a simple cookie-cutter

formula made strictly for commercial gain, have been *especially* disdainful of horror, a genre whose depravity and misogyny were assumed. Indeed, some of the most important and influential examples of the fertile moment of feminist psychoanalytical film theory in the 1970s were specifically concerned with identifying the signifying power for male audiences and the outright fear and hatred of femininity said to be at the core of the horror cinema in general, and in the late-1970s "slasher" cycle specifically. Linda Williams' article "When the Woman Looks" - which uses examples from what she calls "classic" horror films, including the Lon Chaney *Phantom of the Opera* (USA, 1925, Robert Julian) and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (Germany, 1922) -- speaks in general terms about the phallo-centric address of horror films to spectators, and about the close associations between women and monsters in horror films, concluding that the narratively necessary (or inevitable) eradication of the monster which generally concludes these films graphically literalizes the position of women under patriarchy. Horror films, Williams concludes, demonstrate why society dictates that women

(especially those who attempt to actively assume the gaze) must be violently punished.

Barbara Creed's entry into the debates over the sexual politics of horror films, entitled *The Monstrous Feminine*, also, like so much of the academic film scholarship of the day, adopts Freudian psychoanalysis to her project, inflecting it with a sustained application of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Mark Jancovich provides a useful summary of Creed's thesis:

> In horror, Creed claims, the abject is coded as feminine and the narrative is a ritual through which the male subject reproduces itself through the renunciation and expulsion of the feminine. For Creed, the male subject is formed through its separation from, and rejection of, the initially close and powerful relationship with the mother and, in the horror film, this process of separation and rejection is repeated in symbolic form through the violent eradication of the abject monster (58).

Like Williams, Creed does not specifically address any of the horror films under discussion in this thesis. However, both of their theories are totalizing, suggesting applicability in all, or at the very least, in most, cases. High Theory of this sort which vilified horror films as intrinsically misogynist fit snugly with the commonsense journalistic accounts of

horror films typical of the late 1970s as clearly hateful toward women. After all, as Carol Clover states clearly in her celebrated work on the figure of the "final girl" in the slasher cycle:

> On the face of it, the relation between the sexes in the slasher films could hardly be clearer. The killer is with few exceptions recognizably human and distinctly male; his fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women, often sexually free, and always young and beautiful ones. Just how essential this victim is to horror is suggested by her historical durability. If the killer has over time been variously figured as a shark, fog, birds, gorilla and slime, the victim is eternally and prototypically a damsel (77).

Since, as I have observed, both *Terror Train* and *Prom Night* are clearly representative examples of the horror sub-genre which Clover discusses -- and since in the book cited above she specifically mounts a rebuttal to the psychoanalytically-based theories of horror as necessarily misogynist advanced by Williams and Creed -- I want to begin my discussion of some tax-shelter boom horror films by examining the sexual politics of these films, especially as these sexual politics diverge from and converge with the customary treatment of gender in the Canadian cinema by the received wisdom. This discussion, however, should not be understood as one which I undertake in order to

demonstrate these films distance from or proximity to canonized Canadian cinema, but rather to show how gender is treated by the films in generic terms, and how the films themselves are treated in the discourse which surrounds the tax shelter boom.

Terror Train

Jamie-Lee Curtis's status as the "scream queen" in the late 1970s was born with her performance in John Carpenter's hugely influential *Halloween*, a film which histories of the horror genre usually cite as the progenitor of the "slasher" cycle.[4] As the first of a long series of films in which a group of teenagers are terrorized by a lone apparently male maniac who methodically kills them off one by one, *Halloween* also initiated the recurrent tropes of privileging the killer's point-of-view (which was said to create a spectatorial, identification with the killer), rather than that of the victims, who were

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4 It is sometimes argued that Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (USA, 1973) is really the originator of the slasher cycle, but the appearance in the immediate wake of Carpenter's *Halloween* suggests that whatever Carpenter's film owed to Hooper's, it was the latter which was by far more influential and more

generally attractive young women who frequently had just before their murder had sex. It was on these grounds - the apparent identification with the murderer, and the punishment of sexually active young women - that this cycle of films was argued to be deeply conservative, disturbing, and clearly misogynist.

Jamie-Lee Curtis plays yet another of these young women in *Terror Train*, which takes place in the course of a college graduation party being held on an old-fashioned steam-engine driven train which has been hired by the students for one last blow-out before they embark on their adult lives.[5] The methodical killer in this instance, in keeping with the generic trope, does prey on at least two sexually forward young women in the film. As well, because his mission is revenge for having been sexually humiliated at a "freshie" party at the beginning of the group's college years four years prior (he was subsequently institutionalized, the film informs us, such was the

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frequently imitated.

5 Or rather, their *more* adult lives, since while some of the students are planning on moving onto careers, the two male protagonists, Doc and Kenny, are both beginning medical school, as they tell female characters repeatedly in the course of the film.

profound psychological impact of having been humiliated for his virginity), he seeks to murder all of the perpetrators of the nasty prank, regardless of gender, and does succeed in killing several boys.

Not surprisingly, Curtis's character is the last remaining and endures a torturous terrorization for the closing twenty minutes of the film, until she finally defeats the monster, who had revealed himself to be the transvestite glamorous assistant of the on-board magician (played by David Copperfield). It is her sensitivity to the cruelty of the original prank, her insight, ingenuity and bravery which ultimately allow her to defeat the menace where her witless classmates have singularly failed. Curtis's character is, thus, perfectly in keeping with the paradigm Clover explores in the slasher cycle; she is the heroic "Final Girl" so typical of these films. As Clover demonstrates, despite the surface clarity of the treatment of gender by the slasher cycle, the fact of the recurrent trope of the final girl would appear to upend this clear reading since it is ultimately an empathetic and knowing young woman who triumphs in these films, oftentimes in unambiguously heroic and ingenious ways. If audiences are expected to identify

with the maniac killer (because of the film's formal privileging of his point-of-view), the killer's ultimate demise and the final girl's triumph present a reversal which the customary readings of these films as misogynist does not account for.

This short application of Clover's reading of the Final Girl figure in the slasher cycle to *Terror Train* demonstrates the range of possible readings of such films; a range which need not necessarily assume the misogyny of the text, and which should therefore not necessarily damn these films as ideologically perverted. Seen this way, *Terror Train* (and other contemporary Canadian horror films as well) might stand a better chance at entry into the national canon since they may not so obviously be enacting a hatred of women felt common to the genre. As well, the increasingly prevalent reading of horror in general and of the slasher cycle in particular as transgressive, might further advance the case for inclusion as an element of the national cinema since the nationalist historiography seems to prefer films which exhibit some distance from the "mainstream" of feature film practice. This is to say that all the Canadian films of the tax-shelter boom need to be

taken into account for a full understanding of the contours of the nation's cinema, and that a re-examination of them in contexts such as I suggest here might aid in their inclusion in a scholarly formation which has historically ignored them.

Another of the recurrent tropes of the slasher cycle is the frequency of gender confusion surrounding the killer. As Clover demonstrates,

> (t)he gender identity game…is too patterned and too pervasive in the slasher film to be dismissed as supervenient. It would seem to be an integral element of the particular brand of bodily sensation in which the genre trades" (57).

With this in mind, since *Terror Train* features -- like so many other slasher films, as Clover shows -- a "gender identity game" with respect to the killer, Thomas Waugh's intervention into the Canadian nationalist film historiography should be useful as an analytical tool. One aspect of Waugh's argument is that there is, in Angela Stukator's terms, a "sustained heteronormative bias which characterizes our national cinema and, further, Canadian film scholarship" (3). Clover's compelling reading of the "gender-identity game" at play in the slasher cycle is mobilized to demonstrate the cross-gender identification slasher audiences engage in, where the

final girl does triumph, and that her triumph motivates the generally male slasher audience to identify with her through an occasional but sustained play of cross-gender identification in the text at large. Meanwhile Thomas Waugh compellingly shows how such troubling of gender, common though it may have been -- and Waugh demonstrates that it has been -- has been an important element of the Canadian national cinema almost totally disregarded and often simply misread by the nationalist film historiography (22). Waugh's argument that the themes of sexual difference and queer identities have been prominent and recurrent in the history of Canadian cinema -- and all but ignored by the extant nationalist account -- contributes, especially in collusion with Clover's observations, to part of the explanation for the automatic dismissal of *Terror Train* and films like it by Canadian film scholarship, since the gender identity game which Clover shows to be essential to the operation of the genre happens also to be an element of the national cinema which Waugh shows to have been ignored or at best misunderstood (Waugh 1999).

Prom Night

Paul Lynch's profitable and not-entirely negatively received entry into the cycle, also starring Jamie-Lee Curtis, can be examined through a similar lens. This is another slasher film in which a group of young people are methodically killed, and where the heroic and resourceful Final Girl, Curtis's character again, restores order to the world of the narrative by ultimately defeating the mentally deranged murderer. *Prom Night*, thus, is another film which demonstrates that Clover's intervention into debates over the sexual politics of slasher films can be a useful way of repositioning the text in the ongoing evolving discourse about the genre, considering the film as less obviously misogynistic, and perhaps as one which participates in many then-current tropes of, for example, cross-gender identification and perhaps even, in Robin Wood's terms, an examination of "surplus repression" in Canadian society (Wood 70).

Many of the tropes from the slasher cycle re-appear in *Prom Night*, so much so, and so obviously derivative of the slasher cycle, that this vernacular

critic was provoked to begin her or his review of the film on a horror fansite by observing, "*Prom Night* is, perhaps, the quintessential early 80's slasher movie- it may be no darn good, but it has every bloody cliché present and correct" (Hysteria Lives).[6]

A search of the world-wide web in fact reveals many such commentaries, on not only *Prom Night,* but on several other of the films being discussed here as well. Because of the frequency and volume of the discussion of this film on horror, cult and schlock fansites, I'd like to use this particular example of tax-shelter boom film-making to examine a series of questions relating to the reception and post-release afterlife of texts such as films like *Prom Night.* Examining this contemporary discourse provides insight into the "evolving system of arguments and reading" which Naremore shows to be at the heart of the very idea of genre as a theoretical tool.

It is significant that the turn to reception studies and the related privileging of context and intertext over texts themselves which animates such

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6 With no existing academic criticism at all on the film, the voluminous fan criticism on horror websites seems an appropriate place to look for some discussion, often highly literate and informed, on the

work arrives in humanities scholarship (via cultural studies) shortly *after* the tax-shelter boom. As Barbara Klinger notes, "in the early 1980s, Tony Bennett called for a revolution in literary study, in which one would no longer just study the text, but 'everything which has been written *about* it, everything which has been collected on it, becomes attached to it -- like shells on a rock by the seashore forming the whole incrustation'" (107). That Bennett's suggestion, supported by Klinger, follows the tax-shelter boom films and their original reception is of particular utility to this discussion of genre as an evolving discourse since the ways in which films are received, understood, and consumed are mutable, and the relative prominence of films which in their day were individually embarrassing to nationalist critics and scholars suggests their reconsideration as artifacts both of a time and place -- and forever evolving into the future -- in the ways in which they make meaning for audiences.

Echoing both the sentiment and the rationale of several other fansite discussions of *Prom Night* (compare the quotation from the Hysteria Lives review,

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film.

above), here is a sample of the discussion of the film on the expansive and generally thoughtful "Oh, the Humanity" horror fansite:

> This horror movie is just so-so, but does provide enough laughs (provided completely unintentionally) to make it worth watching late at night some time. The early 80's Queen of Scream, Jamie Lee Curtis (who looks about 30 here), is here along with every horror movie event which has now become oh so cliche. It's never really scary but the various means in which the killer goes after his victims are entertaining enough. Leslie Neilsen is in it so go crazy with the Airplane and Naked Gun references and don't forget the rules: Never have sex, never say "I'll be right back", and never hit pause while watching Jaimie (sic) Lee undress (you'll be disappointed) (Oh The Humanity).

Like the fansite review of *Deadline* which I quoted in Chapter One, we see here advice for connoisseurs of trash on how to gain full enjoyment from the text ("go crazy with *Airplane*… references," recognize all the standard tropes of the slasher cycle), demonstrating how certain taste cultures revel, seemingly perversely, in the scandalous badness of failed texts such as *Prom Night*. This spectatorial strategy, however transgressive its proponents may believe it to be, is not that far removed from the ways in which audiences of other, perhaps successful, genre films

have been theorized to participate with those texts.[7] The fulfilment of expectations, the spectatorial satisfaction which comes from the experience of the familiar -- these are said to be at the heart of the explanation for the success of genre formats with audiences. What is interesting for texts under consideration here, however, is that while at the time they might have been understood and received as utterly conventional (if less adroitly executed) examples of genre film-making, now, some years later, films like *Prom Night* are consumed as cult texts, as out-of-the-ordinary. This peculiar aura is an important facet of what J.P. Tellotte calls "the cult film experience." These are films, in other words, which are consumed by fans, for the reason opposite to their original dismissal; they are consumed because they are "peculiar" (26). Evident in these fan accounts that I have cited is that particular cultish position, celebration of the "bad film." This is a response which Jeffrey Sconce has shown is not taken to celebrate movies for their "artistic independence

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7 See, as well, www.badmovies.org, The Cavalcade of Shlock (http://www.geocities.com/tyrannorabbit/pit.html), or Video Graveyard

or political sophistication, but for the complete failure to conform to the artistic or political mainstream, a failure that is often seen as revealing the conventionality of mainstream norms" (Willis *et. al.* 2). While it is true that, in fact, relatively few tax-shelter boom films have approached cult film status, the fact that several of them are routinely discussed in this way by fans of horror and other degenerate forms is notable insofar as these phenomena, like the texts of the tax-shelter boom in general, remain so poorly regarded by "legitimate" critics. As well, cult reputations are generated partly through the passage of time, as styles and formal practices change certain modes of address and thematic terrains become gradually less "conventional" and increasingly peculiar. Finally, as Corrigan also points out in a section of his essay where he ruminates on what the typical contributing factors to cult status tell us about this formation, "the economics of production and distribution become a means for distinguishing these (cult) films from typical Hollywood production" (27) . While the budgets for tax-shelter boom movies might have been

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(http://www.geocities.com/vidgrave.html).

considerably higher than the previous national average, it remains the case that budgets were relatively low compared to those of Hollywood films. Furthermore, the economics of distribution forced a film like *Terror Train* into different pathways of exhibition and ancillary markets, a fact which is yet another of the defining features of the Canadian films of the period.

***The Pit* (Lewis Lehman, 1981)**

An interesting comparison to the two slasher films just discussed is provided by *The Pit*, another Canadian horror film shot in 1979. This film, while exhibiting some similarities to the sub-genre, does not fit in the slasher cycle, and is more typical of other, more traditional, horror movies insofar as the threat in it is not provided by a lone killer, but by inexplicable, supernatural phenomena. Nevertheless, the film remains a telling document of the era and is fruitfully examined as illustrative of the generic evolution of horror.

Textual and extra-textual evidence suggests that *The Pit* is a low budget exploitation horror film: it

was distributed by Roger Corman's New World Pictures, a noted producer and distributor of exploitation cinema, it contains elements which characterize such films including nude scenes featuring a twenty-something baby-sitter, gory scenes of the carnivorous monsters (inner-earth-dwelling "Tra-la-logs," the film's young protagonist calls them) eating meat, live animals, and eventually people, and it was released for drive-in movie exhibition in the summer of 1980. As well, the young boy protagonist fits in the 1970s horror cycle dealing with disturbed youth, and the film's suggestion of perverse sexuality, especially through the device of hinting at mother-son incest as the root of the twelve-year-old boy's troubles, not to mention his preternaturally advanced sexual interest in his twenty-ish babysitter, are all themes which Robin Wood identifies as typical of the expression of repressed sexuality (and children's sexuality specifically) common to many horror films of the period (Wood 72).

Contemporary discourse surrounding *The Pit*, much like that surrounding *Prom Night* and other Canadian films of the period (including, as I have mentioned, *Deadline*, as well as *Death Ship* and *Terror Train* also)

is found voluminously on websites which deal with cult, shlock, horror, and just plain "bad" movies. Since *The Pit* was a cheaper film than the others discussed here (typical of exploitation cinema, it had no stars of the stature of Jamie-Lee Curtis or George Kennedy, captain of the *Death Ship*), and more obviously concerned, by virtue of its exploitation pedigree, with the more prurient elements of its genre, it comes as no surprise that present-day afficionados of such work are particularly effusive in their praise/damnation of the film. For example, Brian J. Wright concludes his perceptive review of the film on the "Cavalcade of Schlock" fansite like this, "(d)amn, damn, DAMN funny! If you're a fan of so-bad-it's good, rush out and see it now. If you're not, this will make you one." I cite this example not to endorse the junk culture fan's reading of these failed texts as the "correct" one, or to make the claim that the films were simply misunderstood upon their release, their true excellence as so-bad-they're-good not yet recognized then. Rather, these examples point to the changing reception practices of audiences, and how the meaning of films, and therefore their cultural significance, is transitory. Upon release, these were

utterly conventional failures, but they have taken on a new status, as weirdly transgressive, emblematic of Corrigan's observation that cult films are always "foreign" films in many senses (27). In this sense, then, these films can be seen to be performing a totally differently cultural function than was imagined for them when they were originally critically dismissed -- deemed to be nothing other than merely failed genre films -- their new status as exemplary trash evidence of how the "loose evolving system of arguments and reading" by which we should understand genre as a discourse calls into question the blanket dismissal which greeted them upon their original release.

Why Horror?

Laurence O'Toole began his long *Maclean's* magazine feature on the horror craze of 1979 ("The Cult of Horror") like this:

> North America is hell-bent for horror. The hottest ticket in every town is terror. In a society splintered by cults and stunned by crises, remembering Jonestown and awaiting Skylab's shower of metal, the cult of horror has metamorphosed into the biggest cult of them all(46).

O'Toole's article goes on to document the huge surge in popularity for horror films and fiction (and even horror-themed content in popular music, television and Broadway shows) and seeks to connect the emergence of this phenomenon to societal reaction to various forms of paranoia and alarm apparently caused by nuclear meltdowns, the energy crisis, cult mass-suicides, and other strange phenomena. (He even cites a case of bubonic plague in California and the first ever recorded snowfall in the Sahara Desert). The enormous commercial success in the late 1970s enjoyed by horror films of a wide variety of types, from slashers to more traditional ghost stories, and knock-offs of *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* is clearly one reason that the entrepreneurial producers who wished to take advantage of the tax-break provided by the Capital Cost Allowance should have placed their bets with horror films such as those discussed above. But the popularity of these films must be at least partly attributable to their having tapped into some kind of cultural zeitgeist. In this sense, the formulaic nature of genre film-making which Leach and others have claimed is antithetical to expressions of the

Canadian "experience" performs the opposite function: these films do express anxieties (over unknown and inexplicable threats, for example) prevailing in Canadian (and American) society.

Teen Sex Comedies

For the same commercial reasons that Canadian producers should have been attracted to the popular horror genre in 1979, it is equally unsurprising, in the wake of two hugely profitable teen formula comedies, *Animal House* (USA, John Landis, 1978) and *Meatballs*, that producers hoping to make profitable films while taking advantage of the Canadian tax-shelter should have resorted also to films which ape the style, sentiment, tone, characters and "anarchic" qualities of those two major hits.[8] Many of the films of this type produced in Canada in 1979 -- including, for example, *Pinball Summer*, *Crunch*, and *Hog Wild* -- share several thematic and stylistic features both among themselves, and with the hit versions they mimic, and here I propose to examine these texts in

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8 *Animal House* was produced by Canadian Ivan Reitman, his first American production.

terms of what these thematic and stylistic similarities and differences can tell us about how we might understand their appearance in Canada at this point in time.

The first observation to make about this cycle of films is that while films about teenagers have long been popular, a new kind of teen comedy emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the popularity of these films has generated a long series of similar works which continues to the present day. Timothy Shary's recent book *Generation Multiplex: Images of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* contains many insights into the emergence of youth-oriented films, and he succinctly describes this emergence:

> A handful of other films truly inaugurated new cycles: two 1978 American films, the low-budget sensation *Halloween* and the college farce *Animal House*, as well as two unassuming Canadian films, *Meatballs* and *Porky's*. These were the starting guns of the new youth subgenres of the 1980s. *Animal House, Meatballs* and *Porky's* were raucous comedies featuring goofy and/or hormonal youth pursuing pleasures at college, summer camp, and a 50s-era high school respectively, and their success spawned numerous imitations over the next few years (7).

These films ordinarily feature characters grouped into factions, one of which is led by a charismatic,

often zany, figure, such as Tripper (Bill Murray) in *Meatballs* or Greg (Michael Zelniker) in *Pinball Summer.* Many teen films are about anxieties over social status and fitting in, and usually side with underdog characters. This is the case with the more successful of these films, and it is interesting to note how the failed versions of this formula miss the boat in this regard. For example, *Pinball Summer* makes the mistake of making its ostensible heroes, Greg and Steve, into a pair of grossly sexist bullies. These two do get most of the funny lines, and they do "score" often, but they also push wimps around and treat women like objects. *Pinball Summer* is a film, in other words, that completely failed to understand the appeal in so many teen films of the little guys' triumph. The film leaves no room to root for the victims, and its heroes are so unsympathetic as to be repugnant. Conversely, Tim, the hero in *Hog Wild* is a standard-issue underdog who ultimately wins the girl of his dreams and triumphs over the bikers who have been terrorizing his high school. As a result of these successes, Tim even wins back the respect of his macho army colonel father. *Meatballs,* too, sticks closely to the generic trope, and turns to a large

degree on its us-against-them narrative, where the enemies are the spoiled rich kids of Camp Mohawk. Councilor Tripper fully realizes the inadequacies of his Camp Northstar team and their certain defeat in the annual Summer Camp Olympiad (his kids are losers in just about every way), a realization which provoke his inspired pre-Olympiad pep talk. Tripper begins by enumerating what the other team has going for it (a lot) and what their team has working against it (a lot). Gradually escalating, and working himself into a lather, he winds up his talk shouting "It just doesn't matter! It just doesn't matter!" The campers all join in, spiritedly. Of course, now that they've acknowledged that "it just doesn't matter," they eventually do win the Olympiad in a last-minute squeaker.

The relationship between the troubled boy Rudy (Chris Makepeace) and Tripper also lends *Meatballs* a certain degree of warmth. The film never actually tells us what's wrong with Rudy, but he does not seem to belong at Camp Northstar, and tries to leave. By coincidence, as Rudy is making his escape, Tripper bumps into him and convinces him to stay. Rudy

ultimately wins the Olympiad for Northstar by winning the cross-country race. Since none of the other films from this cycle share a story element such as this, it is notable how early films in a successful cycle both closely resemble, and deviate, from each other. For instance, *Pinball Summer* is also organized around a contest of competing factions (a pinball contest, of course), but its last-minute underdog saviour is not a hero. He only manages to make it possible for Greg and Steve to claim the trophy, while remaining the butt of joke after joke about his size.

By far the most commercially successful Canadian film of 1979, *Meatballs* -- which cost $1.6 million to produce and grossed over $40 million - was just one of a series of similar films which emerged then. Its success spawned numerous imitators, and generated a great deal of enthusiasm for the Canadian feature film industry, and for the tax-shelter which contributed to the boom. Not especially original -- it features, for example, comic loud-speaker announcements just like Robert Altman's *M.A.S.H.* (USA, 1970) -- *Meatballs* nevertheless managed that strange alchemy of elements which defines successful genre films. It had familiar

elements and novel ones, and as a film set on a lake in the woods in Canada, it is also a film which seems in many way among the most obviously "Canadian" of cycle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Selling Out

> "1776: They were people who cared. They gave a shit. About everything. Its called moral values. They had the same problems as we have. Now you all have a decision to make. They had a decision to make, and their decision was to fight in the name of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and against the forces of injustice and wrong."

This is Professor Colin Chandler, played by Elliot Gould, lecturing in his freshman history class at Harvard, in *Dirty Tricks*. In this film (clearly titled to refer to the Watergate scandal and the failed Nixon presidency), a somewhat "zany" romantic comedy, nearly every element of the narrative turns to some degree on characters faced with choices between outcomes which may benefit them personally, and choices of integrity, of doing the right thing. Here is the story, in a nutshell: a letter apparently by George Washington is discovered which implicates him in complicity with the British and lying about it, but before the researcher who discovers it can authenticate it with Chandler (the celebrated Harvard historian), the man is murdered and the letter goes missing. Guessing that the letter must be in

Chandler's possession, a gang of criminal thugs led by a creepy rare books and manuscripts dealer (who wants the letter for its cash value), and an up-and-coming investigative journalist, Polly Bishop (played by Kate Jackson), try to catch Chandler. Eventually, the F.B.I. are on his trail as well. Naturally, Polly does eventually catch him, and protects him from the criminals and from the F.B.I. Despite seeming a mismatch (he's a stuffy, absent-minded professor, she's plucky, fiery, and lives by her wits), the two fall in love. Now a team, they locate the letter, and after a mad chase through various Harvard buildings, including the operating theatre in the medical school, Chandler, trapped, realizes that he faces a choice between revealing the letter to the F.B.I. or to the assembled news media, Polly's colleagues and competitors. To the former, he has already said, "if the contents of this letter are made known, it would turn the entire United States upside down." Not surprisingly, Chandler is loath to turn it over to the media either. Earlier, when he first met Polly, he said, "I despise television." When she replies, "I do too, I'm in news," he retorts, "between the deodorant

and car commercials?" In the end, Chandler decides to eat the letter.

There is a subplot in this film that also deals pointedly with the selling out theme. Chandler's colleague professor Robert Brennan, played by Rich Little, is a comic figure who exists almost solely as a sell-out stereotype. Once brilliant and distinguished like Chandler, he now writes "pop history" which sells very well, and at one point boasts, "I've been on three major talk shows." Brennan has an agent, is a cad, makes a lot of money, and early in the film boasts to his stuffy friend Chandler, on their divergent career paths -- in a scene where he tries to coax Chandler into selling out also -- "tits and ass are better than stars and stripes." In contrast, Chandler, author of *The Relevance of American Values in a Multinational, Corporate World*, is earnest and lovable, obviously doing the right thing by staying true to his intellectual pursuits, as opposed to the loathsome and nasty shadow cast by his sell-out friend Brennan.

The mass media also faces regular attack by the film, as crassly commercial, pandering to "low" tastes, and ultimately largely responsible for the

cultural malaise that the film registers. Kate Jackson, who at the time was just finishing an enormously successful run as a television star in the series *Charlie's Angels*, as Polly, makes repeated reference in the course of the film to the shallowness of television and about her own complicity (as a television journalist) in its baseness. Once Polly and Chandler begin to warm up to one another, they describe themselves to each other like this: "I was an incorrigible kid from New York who was lucky enough to get a good education and become a teacher at Harvard." She replies, "I was an Alabama WASP whose tits and ass were good enough to make me a TV star. Mostly ass. I have a great ass." In light of her fame as a star in what was then called a "jiggle show," it is difficult to read this moment in the film as anything other than self-reflexive. David Cook notes, "as Noel Carrol, J. Hoberman, and others have pointed out, a distinguishing feature of 1970s film style was "allusionism…," a practice which relied upon the expectation that audiences had broad-reaching knowledge of film and related media, knowledge which allowed them to bring intertextual information to

enrich their understanding of the text itself. (Cook 284).

Polly does redeem herself, however, which is where some of the film's complexity arises, since, as we discover, she is actually more than just pretty; she is a serious, devoted and hard-working investigative journalist. We learn of her earnest liberalness when she explains to Chandler why she lives in a kind of skid row: "I was doing a series on the neighbourhood, and after I learned about it, I moved in." As well, the casting of Rich Little as the sell-out side-kick should have resonated for some audiences, since one of the bits the then-famous comic-impressionist was best known for was his Richard Nixon impersonation.

While typical and easy targets such as skirt-chasing talk show regulars and television are lampooned by the film, the matter of what it actually says about 1970s society is rather more complicated. For example, while it is true that Chandler is the film's hero -- he seemingly does the right thing by refusing to sell-out, and he gets the girl -- the fact that he destroys historical evidence which would have totally undermined the reputation of one of America's

greatest heroes, solely in order to maintain that reputation which he knows to be false, we can begin see to some shades of grey in the film's attitudes. As well, elsewhere in the film, Chandler, in keeping with his always-critical persona, says about the American Revolution: "one man's traitor is another man's patriot. One man's hero is another man's villain." Arguing about the wisdom of releasing the letter, he claims that "truth, especially historical truth, depends on who does the writing." In light of the revelations of broad-ranging conspiracy and cover-up by the Nixon administration, and in light of the subsequent valourization of the heroic news media in a free society like America's (as evidenced, for example, by the success of *All the President's Men* (USA, Alan Pakula, 1976), the position *Dirty Tricks* stakes out on 1970s cultural malaise is far from clear. On the one hand, the film acts out the critique of the usual suspects, but on the other, it introduces a relativism (was Nixon a villain or a hero? Traitor or patriot?), which, it argues, depends upon who is in the position of power to dictate meaning. In the end, the film shows that where the F.B.I. (and by extension, the entire U.S. government)

is not to be trusted, and where the news media is certainly not be trusted, it is a Harvard history professor who should hold this power. *Dirty Tricks* is a star-driven film which complains about the shallowness of celebrity culture. It is also a film which complains about the profit-driven superficiality of the news media, while featuring, as one of its heroes, a TV journalist. The film, thus, like so many of these featuring sell-out narratives, participates in self-critique, as a crassly commercial confection of the cultural industries, but it also pats itself on the back for taking a critical stance opposed to the government and the media.

Deadline

As I have noted, a large number of the tax-shelter boom films shot in 1979 are concerned specifically with conflicts between honest, earnest, maybe even "good," citizens and nefarious commercial interests, where what may be seen as an "American" way of life is juxtaposed with somehow more "genuine" concerns. In several films, we actually find direct conflicts between art and commerce.

Deadline is one of these, dealing specifically with the apparent incompatibility of art and commerce. Steven (looking decidedly Cronenbergian in big square glasses and with longish dark hair)[1], a former University of Toronto English professor turned horror novelist and schlock screenplay writer, tires of spoon-feeding his audiences and satisfying his greedhead producer's demands for more of the same. At one point, the producer is heard to blurt, "look, leave "different" to the Europeans. They're good at it. You've got a million dollar formula. Use it!" Steven instead wants to write a "valuable" and "artistic" horror story. Like so many genre films, the narrative conceit here is one of a deadline (can Steven beat the writer's block and finish the screenplay in time?), but in this case, the deadline is specifically imposed by an un-named financial imperative that production begin before the year's end -- exactly as the Capital Cost Allowance tax incentive worked, dependent as it was on the necessity of

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[1] Many students in a course on horror films I taught at the University of Nottingham, in which we screened *Deadline*, assumed that the film's protagonist was modeled on Steven King. There may be something to this, but the character certainly resembles Cronenberg at least as much.

investors' year-end tax-dodges. What is so fascinating about *Deadline*'s mode of address is that it apparently invites audiences to sympathize with Steven's attempts to do the right thing and quit being a shlockmeister, but it also, through the clever device of incorporating clips of Steven's previous "films" into its diegesis, provides gratuitous gore and exploitation fare including a farmer pushed into a threshing implement with splatterific results, and of nuns lustily eating the flesh of a naked priest.

Like *Dirty Tricks*, *Deadline* is a film which evokes simplistic divisions between right and wrong, between the valuable and the worthless, and then complicates these divisions. Yet as a commercially-calculated genre film formally indistinguishable from similar Hollywood product, it suggests its own auto-critique, only to deny its culpability in the end, deflecting criticisms of the banal mass media onto other, seemingly even less worthy, products of the culture industries. An incredibly conflicted work, the tensions inside and outside the text between imagined cultural value and the lure of filthy lucre battle each other explicitly, with no satisfactory resolution. Steven's producer exclaims at one point

that he does not want "some artsy-fartsy bullshit that's not going to make a nickel," expressing straightforwardly the imaginary split between schlock and art which *Deadline* itself seems trapped by.

Deadline was one of those failed texts of the tax-shelter boom which was never released in movie theatres. It was exhibited in the market (not in competition) at the 1984 Cannes film festival, some four years after the shoot wrapped, and panned, in a pithy review in *Variety*. In fact, the *Variety* review is useful for demonstrating the tensions (and their lack of resolution) between the film's treatment of the split between art and schlock: "lacking in imagination and immersed in moral speculation about the role of the writer in society and filmmaking, it wallows in self-consciousness worthy of a novice attempting to mask artistic pretensions in gore" (July 18, 1984, 16). After pointing out the gratuitous gore, and its accidentally hilarious narrative justification (as excerpts from the master of the macabre's previous works), the review concludes, "pic may be too arty even for the drive-in circuit." (16)

In an early sequence in the film, Steven is giving a talk at the University of Toronto Cinema

Studies department, discussing his novels and films. Attacked by students with the charge that his work is socially degenerate, he cites James Joyce as an artist who was similarly attacked, but has been vindicated by history. Speaking here is the protagonist of low-budget horror film in which two children light their bound grandmother on fire, making an argument for the artistic merit of narratively unmotivated gruesome and horrific images. Prodded further by the student, Steven retorts, "You needn't buy my books or attend my movies. That's your choice. That's the freedom of the marketplace." The moderator, an English professor, intervenes: "Are you admitting, Mr. Lessey, that you write only for the marketplace?" He does and doesn't. He's an artist and he isn't, in a film with both artistic pretensions and plainly superfluous gore. *Deadline* is another tax-shelter boom film which ponders the theme of selling out, does so itself (on its own terms), then attempts to redeem itself with pretensions of artistry.

***Fantastica* (Canada, Gilles Carle, 1980)**

This Canada-France co-production, an official entry in competition at the 1980 Cannes Festival, is a musical about a travelling band of Quebecois musical theatre show-people, which begins with their arrival in Shawin, a logging town bent on turfing Euclid, a local mystic/philosopher, off of his idyllic and arty homestead for the construction of "the most modern paper mill on earth." Announcing the grand plan, Jim McPherson (a mighty loaded name for an anglo capitalist in a Quebecois film),[2] begins, "ladies and gentlemen, here is your new best friend -- the biggest bulldozer in the world. It's going to put this town on the map." It should be easy to see the parallels between McPherson's apparently exaggerated claims and CFDC head Michael McCabe's stated intention of transforming Canada into a film power, even if at the potential expense of artistry.

The bulk of the film is taken up with scenes of Lorca (Carole Laure) conspiring with like-minded

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[2] Famous among René Lévesque's fiery late 1960s speeches leading up to the foundation of the Parti Quebecois in 1968 was his "White Rhodesians" tirade in which he denounced anglo capiltalists, nearly spitting the names "the McPhersons and the McConnells." See Donald Brittain's *The Champions* (1986) for this excerpt of the speech.

locals to prevent the bulldozers from coming in, and of their attempts to save Euclid's Thoreauian paradise, inter-cut with musical numbers, or rather, rehearsals of musical numbers for the upcoming show. Here, we have a typical Bad Big Business vs. The People narrative, and in this case the automatic affinity the show people have with the backwoods philosopher against big capital should be seen as representative of attitudes of Quebecois artists in the late 1970s.

Nothing Personal

In addition to these more or less obvious cases of analogy between the texts themselves and contexts from which they emerge, several other of the films shot in 1979 share similar, if less direct, treatment of the issue of selling out. For example, in *Nothing Personal*, Donald Sutherland plays a law professor who is up in arms about the ability of a huge property developer to break the law (they're killing seals at a lake-side development, because the animals are "in the way"), and about the apparent inability of anybody to stop them. Seconded by his little college to go to

Washington to lobby congress, he is stymied again. Only after he a meets plucky, and legally blonde, attorney played by Suzanne Somers, does he get anywhere in his battle with the evil capitalists. The equation is even made by a U.S. senator in the film: "10,000 jobs vs. a bunch of seals? It's no contest." It should be easy to see how this mutually-exclusive opposition between jobs and seals could be read as symbolic of the sort of industry vs. art equation often made in reference to the feature film industry in Canada.

Other subtle signs of awareness of the apparent perversity of the Capital Cost Allowance are elsewhere evident. For example in the British-Canadian co-production *A Man Called Intrepid* (Canada-UK, Peter Carter, 1979), our young protagonist meets the German cultural attaché at a party, who responds to, "I understand you are a film artist" with, "well, I work for a film studio. I'm not too sure about the "artist" part." While it is certainly true that the pressure to do right in the face of powerful forces, and the desire to be true to oneself when tempted by personal gain, are deep structures of all popular culture, films included, the Canadian films of 1979 do

seem particularly attracted to this theme. These examples point to the ways in which the anti-establishment attitudes of so much post-1960s cinema became inflected in the tax-shelter boom movies with an awareness of the concern over the relationship of film as art vs. film as industry in Canada.

***An American Christmas Carol* (Canada-US, Eric Till, 1979)**

Based on Charles Dickens' Christmas classic, this film is also specifically concerned with the theme of selling out, in this case, in reverse. The Scrooge figure, here called Slade (the story is transposed to depression-era New England), played by Henry Winkler, doesn't "sell out," but "buys in" to humanity by learning the virtues of generosity and kindness after visits from the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future. The Dickens story upon which this film is based was written in 1843, and the point of it remains unchanged by this adaptation, so drawing conclusions from this text -- and specifically about its address of the selling out theme -- about the period in which it was made may seem spurious.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the decision in 1979 to mount an adaptation of this particular story, in the midst of a large cycle of films dealing with similar thematic terrain, was one which perhaps points to then-prevalent social concerns having to do with greed, corruption, and the willingness of individuals to look past their own personal gain in the interests of others. It is worth remembering that in this version, Slade is quite within his right to repossess the furniture from debtors on Christmas Eve, as their payments are seriously in arrears. Nevertheless, Slade does embrace the generosity to help others less fortunate than himself, a universal message of hope for society, but one which seems to have been particularly acute, because of the frequency of its recurrence, at the end of the 1970s.

As well, given the alarming economic climate of "stagflation" prevailing in late 1970s North American life, the decision to set the Dickens classic not only in America, but during the Great Depression, is one which would seem to suggest links between the selected setting and the social and economic conditions of the

day.[3] The economies of Canada and the United States faced in the late 1970s the first almost inexplicable, and undiagnosible, crisis since before World War II. It is therefore quite unsurprising that a film like *An American Christmas Carol* should place its protagonist -- a man who chooses charity and generosity over personal gain -- in that period when individual kindness seemed the only solution to an economic crisis that appeared beyond the control of governments.

Selling Out Sub-Theme: The Popular vs. "Real" Art

Several other Canadian films from 1979 are primarily or secondarily concerned with the relationship between popular culture and "real" art, a sub-set of the selling out theme. All three of the

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[3] "Stagflation" was the name given to the, until then unheard-of, combination of high inflation with stagnant growth and relatively high employment. In every other previous economic cycle, North American economies had endured either one or the other; either high inflation with near-full employment and rapid growth, or stagnation, with high unemployment and slow growth. The "stagflation" of the 1970s did not fit the Keynesian economic model and as a result had governments stumped as to what to do about it.

films considered in this section provide somewhat nuanced treatment of this relationship, with each at various times proposing the superiority of high art (or in one case, of tradition), but concluding by tempering this attitude by tentatively redeeming the popular.

This relationship of the popular to art is one that is frequently at the heart of the very idea of "selling out," where artists must choose between staying true to their own vision, or watering it down, simplifying, or in other ways sullying, it in order to achieve mass appeal, or indeed to find an audience at all. Transformations in the film industry point to explanations for the heightened interest in the selling out theme in films of the period. The 1970s was a time of enormous change for Hollywood, with two distinct and contrary tendencies prevailing. The first half of the decade is usually associated with the New Hollywood renaissance beginning in the late 1960s which resulted from the simultaneous final collapse of the studio system, the recognition of the youth audience, the influence of foreign art cinema, the emergence of the film school educated "movie brats," and the new classification system, which

together contributed to a fertile moment of formal and thematic experimentation by a new generation of film-makers. These film-makers considered themselves, and were received by critics as, artists. The early '70s, thus, were characterized as a period of experimentation, freedom, and artistry. In contrast, the second half of the decade witnessed the rise of countervailing tendencies, and it is usually held (See Cook, 4-6, for example) that the rise of the blockbuster, which led to much wider releases, much higher budgets, much more expensive national (rather than local) promotional campaigns, and fewer films produced by the studios, resulted in a retrenchment of producers' and executives' power, and a reduction in freedom, creativity and artistry for directors. This very brief summary of these transformations was a part of the discourse of the day, and it is unsurprising that these anxieties and tensions should have become prominent and recurrent themes in the feature films of the era. This fraught relationship of artists to industry in commercial film production flared up concurrent to a flurry of films dealing with this theme, indicating a degree of social and cultural anxiety over the status of art and popular culture at

the time, an anxiety that was particularly acute in Canada, as the films produced then indicate.

***Circle of Two* (Jules Dassin, 1980)**

In Jules Dassin's *Circle of Two*, Richard Burton plays a famous 60 year-old painter (Ashley St. Clair) who has an affair with a 16 year-old schoolgirl played by Tatum O'Neal (Sarah Norton). The film opens in the locker room at a girls' school, lingering over the panties and bras of the girls changing out of gym clothes. We cut to two of the girls entering a porn theatre, which is filled with creepy old men, and St. Clair. Later, Norton notices St. Clair in a cafe, introduces herself (she's a precocious and inquisitive girl), he invites her to his studio, and she asks him about porn films. Not realizing that he had been recognized by her as a patron, and replying that "he can't bear those films, there's nothing erotic about them," she challenges him: "you've never seen one!" When he says that he has once, in Italy, she calls him a liar.

As their relationship develops, we learn that he is a celebrated, but long inactive, painter, and that she is an aspiring writer. He becomes her mentor, instructing her in the finer things in life: classical music, architecture, poetry and sculpture. But differences in taste and inclination between them -- which he confidently attributes to her immaturity -- begin to manifest themselves, and we find her saying things like: "Who's Columbo?! Are you from Mars? He's a detective on TV. I love Columbo." Later, when he asks her about an abstract painting he's working on, she replies, "I don't know the difference between the Sistine Chapel and the Burger King."

The film invites audiences to like each of these characters equally; both certainly have their finer points as well as their foibles. After their relationship is discovered by Norton's parents and she is forbidden from seeing him, we learn their affair has been much more meaningful to him than it has to her. When the manager of St. Clair's usual gallery proclaims his first new paintings in years, and his first abstract ones, unsaleable, the painter laments, "I can't go back to the well-made portrait. I can't go back to figure. She awoke something in me which

made me want to go to work again." St. Clair refuses to sell out, his renewed creativity (ironically, now abstract) inspired by the liveliness of the Columbo-watching, burger-munching teenager. Though she feels humbled and honoured by her learning experiences with St. Clair, the film suggests that her own experiences of the world, dominated much more by popular culture than by the high-brow art he foisted on her, will be the ones which will be most valuable to her as a writer, since her confession of going to a porn movie (in the face of St. Clair's denial) illustrates her self-awareness and honesty, the two qualities St. Clair had himself declared essential to an artist's life.

***(Hey) Babe!* (Rafal Zeilinski, 1980)**[4]

If the exposing of Tatum O'Neal's 16 year-old breasts in *Circle of* Two weren't alarming enough[5], *Babe* features 11 year-old Yasmine Bleeth as Theresa, a

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[4] The film version at the National Archives of Canada is called *Babe!*, but I can't find any evidence of it having been released. It was shown at the Los Angeles Filmex in 1984 (to potential distributors) and released on video as *Hey Babe!*

talented orphan, who wants to make it in show business. In the opening sequence, the camera occasionally lingers on her bottom in short shorts, and later she performs a strip-tease which reveals a flesh-toned body-stocking with breasts drawn on. Later still, she sensuously bathes Sammy Cohen, a character played by 55 year-old Buddy Hackett. Cohen is a down and out, alcoholic, former stage comedian who lives in an abandoned theatre in Manhattan. After he meets the aspiring young actress, she moves in with him, and his show business experience combined with her youthful enthusiasms and raw talent convince them that, as a team, they can launch her career and revive his. Using his last remaining showbiz contacts, and on the strength of their performance, the team does land a TV pilot for a variety show. Sadly, the sickly Cohen dies in an alley, but Theresa conscripts some of the tough kids from the orphanage she has escaped from, and the show goes on, with the film concluding with the rock-vaudeville number that Cohen and Theresa had worked up. The film ends at the conclusion of this

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[5] The film was shot in 1979 and imdb.com reports that O'Neal was born in 1963.

show-opening number, which seems to be wildly successful.

Babe!'s treatment of the relationship of the popular to art is in many ways the most straightforward of the films examined in this section. Basically a story about the relationship of traditions reinvigorated by innovation, Theresa's career is only able to be launched after she encounters and digests Cohen's instructions on the importance of understanding past styles. In this sense, the film makes the point that innovation, forward momentum in the arts, is dependent upon what has preceded it, and in the terms of popular cultural commodities like songs and films, it seems most at peace, of all the films examined in this section which deal with the relationship between art and popular, with its own status as pop text.

***Head On* (Canada, Michael Grant, 1980)**

In this strange, and somewhat stylish, psycho-sexual thriller (which was released on video in the US as *Fatal Attraction*), we have yet another professor character, this time a cocky young psych prof, engaged

in increasingly dangerous role-playing with an older woman, a child psychologist, played by Sally Kellerman. Germane to this discussion, however, is the subplot featuring the professor's father (played by the legendary Hollywood director John Huston), a celebrated sculptor whose career started with the French avant-garde of the 1920s.[6] Huston revels in the performance of this eccentric and charismatic character, a bon vivant who regales people with outrageous stories of debauchery and scandal from the good old days. A contradictory character, he is simultaneously comfortable in his wealth and position of power in the art world (earned, ironically, because of his iconoclasm), while also disdainful, perhaps simply by force of habit, of others who hold positions of power. Interestingly, in addition to making abstract sculptures, he also plays ragtime music, a popular form associated with the era of his most scandalous transgressions. Here too, we find the continuum of the traditional to the new of central thematic relevance to the film. This continuum may be seen as another of the important developments in

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[6] This film was shot in the weeks immediately preceding the shoot of the Huston directed, Canadian tax-shelter

Hollywood cinema at large, since the late-'70s move to "popcorn pictures" such as *Star Wars* (US, George Lucas, 1977) is illustrative of an industry looking backwards in order to move forword.

Furthermore, the very fact that the Huston character is an abstract artist directly associated with the heroic avant-garde, but that he is *also* a rich celebrity whose openings attract movie and pop stars (who collect his expensive pieces), draws attention again to the false divide between art and commerce, between the commodities produced by cultural industries, and those by "purer" artists. *Head On* itself, like so many other tax-shelter boom films, is a cultural commodity with artistic pretensions. Its treatment of the theme of selling out, through the lens of the art vs. commerce divide, is as conflicted as are so many other films of the era.

Location, Location, Location

Finally, another textual consideration of these films which falls under the category of selling-out has to do with the films' settings. Another of the

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boom film from 1979, *Phobia*

most commonly-made complaints about films of the tax-shelter boom era was that the real Canadian locations used in them so frequently masqueraded as American ones. It is one thing to claim that the films are insufficiently Canadian in "character" or in "theme" (this is the argument at the core of complaints against genre films as necessarily somehow not Canadian), but it is quite another to mount an argument about the masquerade of actual places. When films shot in Toronto or Montreal must always pretend to be Chicago or New York, so the argument goes, the on-going mis-identification of these places becomes a cultural loss. Places begin to lose their cultural specificity in the mediascape. Critics of Canadian films in which the setting is dressed up as American, usually fall back on a culturalist argument: the Canadian cinema must be set in and about recognizably Canadian milieu in order to contribute to a national consciousness, in order to make a contribution to national cultural life. The concern over the dressing-up of Canadian locations as American ones reflects broader anxieties over American exploitation of Canadian natural resources, as well as those having to do with the reliance of the Canadian economy on

branch-plants of American firms. In fact, location masquerade anxiety is even more specifically cultural in Canada since Canadian identity is so frequently claimed to be located in landscape and place. Once again, Jim Leach provides a representative example of this kind of complaint: after noting that Peter Medak's *The Changeling* (1979) was shot in Ontario and Vancouver, but its settings were identified as northern New York State and Seattle, he evokes Margaret Atwood's metaphor of American cultural imperialism, claiming that the "body snatchers were taking over" (1986, 259).

Since these complaints about location masquerade seemed based on undeniable concrete facts, when I began to look at the actual films of the tax-shelter boom, I was surprised at my findings. What we have here is a group of films which fall into one of these general categories: films set in Canadian locations (usually in Toronto or Montreal); films shot in Canadian locations, but set in a specific non-Canadian (usually American) location; a small number of films set and shot in primarily (such as *Atlantic City*), or even exclusively (such as *The Pit* which was shot and set in small-town Wisconsin), American locations; and

films shot in Canadian locations with no specific setting.

Of these categories, some interesting observations on the last one are provided by Jim Leach in his discussion on the settings of David Cronenberg's films. Leach points out, for example, the text designates the setting of *The Fly* (1986) -- which was shot like almost of all of Cronenberg's films in his hometown of Toronto -- " as a generic North American metropolis." But, as William Beard retorts archly, "...Toronto *is* a generic North American metropolis" (148, italics in the original). This is more than a western Canadian response to Canada's central city: it is also to point out that there are countless artistic reasons why a film-maker might wish to de-emphasize the specificity of location, or even to emphasize the anonymity of certain urban environments. Just as specific settings have many possible functions (decaying Atlantic City reflecting directly on the slow and tawdry decline of *Atlantic City*'s protagonists, for example), unspecific ones are clearly capable of aesthetic weight as well, suggesting typicality, blandness, or sameness.

Furthermore, in addition to the numerous films from 1979 which do exhibit demonstrably national-specific thematic material (all of the films discussed in the next chapter on Quebec, for example), it is striking to note how many of the genre films, of the kind discussed in the past two chapters, make specific reference to their Canadian setting. Here are some examples: From *Deadline*: Bert, the producer, speaking to Steven the writer, gazing at the CN Tower, says: "I like Toronto. It's clean y'know. Too clean. Still, it's the only city where you can walk around at 2 a.m. and not get mugged. They don't make good pictures though. I don't understand why you don't move to L.A. Steve." In the boxing picture *Title Shot* (Les Rose, 1979) Toronto seems a natural location for a heavyweight title bout, and Renzetti the crooked gambler (played by Tony Curtis), says early in the film, in case we hadn't recognized it, "Toronto, a beautiful city. I love it." The thrillers *Highpoint* (Peter Carter, 1984) and *Agency* (George Kaszender, 1980) are set unambiguously in Toronto and Montreal, respectively, both using civic landmarks prominently, particularly *Highpoint*, much of which takes place at the C.N. Tower. In *The Kidnapping of the President*, the deed takes place in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square, where, before the president is nabbed, a secret service agent has remarked to a mountie, "you

certainly have a lovely city here." A final example is provided by *Tulips,* the Gabe Kaplan/Bernadette Peters romantic comedy, in which the entire narrative is dependent upon the characters' sense of displacement and disorientation in the film's exotic bilingual Montreal setting.

As for those films which do disguise their Canadian location, it should be kept in mind that there are countless reasons why a filmmaker might prefer to set a film somewhere other than where it was actually shot. One might test the question by asking whether such decisions affect the status of films from outside Canada. Are Hollywood runaway productions somehow not American when Montreal plays Montreal, as in the recent Frank Oz caper picture, *The Score* (USA, 2001)? Should the Vietnamese (or the English, for that matter) be up in arms over Stanley Kubrick's staging of the Viet Nam War in dreary England for *Full Metal Jacket* (UK, 1987)? Why have few complained about Spain's masquerade as the American West in Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns? Doesn't suburban Pittsburgh resemble suburban Montreal (which Montreal plays in *Crunch*) in many important ways? These questions are meant simply to illustrate the complexity of the relationship of location to setting and to demonstrate that arguments claiming Canadian settings "masquerading" as other places are simply

indicative of a national "sell-out" might not fully consider the myriad possible reasons behind such a choice.

The notion of "selling out" has many permutations, and this chapter has looked at how many of the films produced at the height of the tax-shelter boom were specifically centered around this theme. As I have already demonstrated in Chapter Three, there was considerable panic registering in the media surrounding the entirety of the tax-shelter boom as a national sell-out to Hollywood. I have also shown that the discourse of selling out was also widespread in popular culture as evidenced both by shifts in the Hollywood film industry, and by the films produced, in the late 1970s. Given the frequency with which films of the period deal with this issue, I suggest that this frequency is at least partly an expression of these social anxieties in both Canada and the United States.

CHAPTER SIX

My Commercially-Calculated Cinema Includes Quebec

One of the more serious, and difficult to rebut, complaints made against the policies which led to the tax-shelter boom was that they virtually destroyed the French-language Quebec film industry, and seriously harmed the *québécois* cinema as a cultural formation. This is because with the emphasis on higher budgets and international sales (that is, to U.S. distributors), and because of the difficulty foreign-language films have in securing distribution in the United States, investor capital which might have found its way into the *québécois* industry instead gravitated toward the higher-budget, star-filled, English language productions. The Quebec industry experienced little significant growth during the tax-shelter boom, while the English-Canadian sector enjoyed triple-digit growth. Ted Magder provides some telling numbers:

> Between 1978 and 1980, the CFDC invested $3.7 million in 27 French-language films with combined budgets of $25.3 million. Of the CFDC's investments only $800,000 was in the form of interim loans. In contrast, between 1978 and 1981, the CFDC invested $17.8 million in 62 English-language films with budgets totalling

> $270 million. Of these investments, $15.1 million were in the form of interim financing (184).

Of particular note here is how many films were actually made in French as compared to the productivity of the English-language industry. Adjusting the figures so they actually compare (that is, considering the two year period cited for French-language production versus the two of the three years cited for English), these numbers tell us that French-language production equaled about 65 percent of that in English, in a country where less than half of that percentage speak French as a first language. On the other hand, Magder's figures show us that English-language production benefited by more than ten times as much interim financing as did production in French, and nine times as much in total budgets. This is unsurprising since, also according to Magder, only about one third of the production in French took advantage of the tax-shelter at all, and it was in Capital Cost Allowance-invested films where the CFDC distributed their interim financing, as well as where investors risked their capital to shelter their money from the tax man (184). While approximately one third of French-Language films of the period were financed

with tax-sheltered investments, nearly all of the English-language ones were.

So, as this demonstrates, many French-language films were shot in Canada in 1979, but they were of much-lower budgets than the average for English-language production, and they tended to be more in keeping with the traditional "cottage industry" production usually associated with the auteur cinema in Quebec and Canada in the 1970s. French-language films shot in 1979 include, for example, Micheline Lanctôt's directorial debut *L'homme à tout faire* (1980) and André Forcier's off-beat *Au clair de la lune* (1980). This is why this thesis is only concerned with the English-Language films produced in Canada at the height of the tax-shelter boom. Since, aside from the lack of growth in the French-language production sector, as opposed to that in English, (and aside from a large increase in the number of English-language films made in Quebec) there was very little effect on the kinds of films produced in French. This is simply to say that, as I have noted, the problem with the English-Canadian film industry according to commentators at the time, and according to the period's subsequent treatment by history, was the

profound transformation of the film industry -- from one producing auteur films with nationally-specific themes and locations, to a branch-plant churning out schlock genre films with American stars. Since the value judgments behind this central characterization are where my revisionist history is directed, and since this transformation was not evident in French-language production for the reasons I just pointed to, it makes little sense for French-language films to enter this discussion.

Nevertheless, Quebec remains important to the films of the period, and to this thesis. As I pointed out toward the end of the previous chapter, the city of Montreal contributes its complex presence to several films, even in some of the genre films which could have been set in any North American metropolis. As well, in the cases where Montreal *is* disguised, various landmarks -- some prominent (Place Ville Marie) and some obscure but unique (the orange-shaped Orange Julep drive-in on Decarie Boulevard) -- announce the city's presence even in narratives set in Pittsburgh (such as *Crunch*, for example).

More concretely, Quebec is important to consider in weighing the arguments which judge the tax-shelter

boom a cultural failure. On the one hand, this question could be approached from the standpoint of stake-holders in the Quebec industry. Here, it is demonstrably the case that while there have been an increase in "Hollywood-styled" genre films produced in English in Quebec (such as *Agency*, or *Hot Dogs* [Claude Fournier, 1980], a film I discuss shortly), in the main the French-language industry did not participate in the "sell-out" of national-specificity that is associated with the English-language production of the day. And where *québécois* producers did make films for the "international" (again, largely American) market, some of these were very successful co-productions, such as the Denis Héroux-produced *Atlantic City* (Canada-France, Louis Malle,1980) and *Quest for Fire* (Canada-France-USA, Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1981), the success of which helped solidify Héroux's position as a going concern as a producer, enabling him to go on in the future to produce several other reasonably successful Canadian films including the canonized *Black Robe* (Bruce Beresford, Canada-Australia, 1991). In fact, Héroux stands as an example, like David Cronenberg and Ivan Reitman, of a person whose early participation in the industry was with exploitation

fare (Héroux, afterall, directed some of the notorious *québécois* soft-core "maple-syrup porn" cycle, including the prototypical *Valérie* (1969) and *L'Initiation* (1970), only to springboard from these projects to the "legitimate" industry as a respected producer). These examples point once again to the potential value of schlock to an industry: as a training ground, and as a place where money can be raised in order to mount more sophisticated projects. This fertilizing role that schlock can play in the development of a film industry is one which I explore more deeply in the next chapter.

On the other hand, arguments for the tax-shelter boom as a cultural failure need to consider Quebec for another reason. This is because the period witnessed not just a transformation in the film industry, but also coincided with serious political events in Quebec, notably the movement toward a referendum on sovereignty-association. The vote was called for May 20th 1980, although political pressure had been building on Quebec premier René Lévesque for months and even years before this to act on the promise of a sovereign Quebec upon which his Parti Québécois government had first been elected in 1976. In other

words, the nation was gripped by the national unity debate throughout 1979.

While the received wisdom on the tax-shelter boom tells us that "American-style" genre films were the result of the policy, what the received wisdom totally obscures is that at least three English-language films of the period are specifically concerned with the political crisis in Quebec. Given that the tax-shelter-boom years coincided directly with heightened concern over the relationship of Quebec to Canada, the lack of attention paid to contemporaneous films that deal with *québécois* nationalism is surprising.

Suzanne

Robin Spry's *Suzanne* (1980) deserves close analysis in this respect. That the film has received next to zero scholarly attention is surprising for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it was the first privately-produced feature for Spry, a celebrated National Film Board documentarian, best known for his tense documentary, *Action: The October*

Crisis of 1970 (1973).[1] Given its thematic consistency with Spry's well-known and much-discussed documentary, *Suzanne* invites an auteurist reading of its treatment of a bilingual, bicultural Montreal and the difficulties and pleasures of French and English living side-by-side in Montreal's Plateau district. Furthermore, it starred well-known Canadian actors Jennifer Dale and Gabriel Arcand, was released widely, and reviewed by the popular press in Montreal and Toronto. Clearly, it bears none of the ugly marks conventionally associated with tax-shelter-boom films.

Suzanne makes explicit connections between the title character's identity crisis and the evolving senses of Canadian and *québécois* nationalism percolating immediately below the surface of 1950s and 1960s Montreal. Suzanne represents Canada, and in the same tradition as Barbara -- the Westmount girlfriend who plays English Canada to boyfriend Claude's Quebec in Gilles Groulx's *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964) -- the character's outward traits and metaphorical trajectory are ambiguously treated by two filmmakers who are, to

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[1] The only discussion of the film that I know of, aside from newspaper reviews, is found in Thomas Waugh's "Les Autres: English Quebec Cinema During the Parti Québécois Regime 1976 1985."

varying degrees, sympathetic to the idea, at least, of *québécois* nationalism. Groulx invites us to read his couple as a metaphor for the coupling of English and French peoples within the national boundaries of Canada. Claude and Barbara's ultimate incompatibility and separation is suggestive of Groulx's political stance on the destiny of Quebec in 1964 and cries out to be read as political allegory. An allegorical reading of *Suzanne* has to be slightly less clear-cut, although, as with Groulx's film, such an approach seems absolutely necessary. Here we find the whole of the state embodied in one character, who is, as she says, "caught in the middle. I didn't know who I was: half-Protestant, half-Catholic; half-English, half-French...there must be more to me than just being split in two-always wondering who I am." This plain statement of a search for identity is made in a voice-over accompanying a shot of a poster for war bonds. The poster has been graffitied, "Pour les Canadiens: la Mort! For the English: Profits!"

While Spry's documentary may have demonstrated sympathy for *québécois* nationalism, *Suzanne* provides an incredibly conciliatory conclusion to problems in the relationship between French and English Canada (in

stark contrast to the conclusion of Groulx's film). The plot involves Suzanne's relationship with Nicky, a local Anglo tough, and Georges, a kindly francophone academic aesthete. After being date-raped by Nicky, Suzanne has his child; Nicky goes to jail for a jewellery heist; and Georges agrees to marry Suzanne and raise the son as his own. Upon his release from jail, Nicky tracks down Suzanne, insisting that he needs to be a part of his son's life, and pinning the blame for his own troubled life on his absent father. The film closes with Georges, Nicky, and the boy cheerfully playing catch in a sunny park, while Suzanne gazes benignly on. Although their relationship may be unconventional, they agree to get along for the common benefit for all, and especially for the future generation. This up-beat, conciliatory conclusion becomes all the more significant when one considers that the film was shot just before-and premiered just after-the "sovereignty association" referendum.[2]

Because of its Canadian cast, undisguised Canadian setting, and the very fact of its release, *Suzanne* is not susceptible to the typical attacks on

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[2] The shoot took place in August and September, 1979, and the film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival of

tax-shelter-boom films. It also seems to meet the criteria for critical attention by offering the opportunity for an auteurist reading. Furthermore, it contains some of the threads Peter Morris finds running through canonized Canadian films. For example, there is specific and sustained consideration of the "French fact" in Canada; there is also a variety of severely flawed male characters, including the main ones: a foolish bully and an emasculated wimp. Another of Morris's criteria for canonization (and, hence, for recognition as an example of Canadian national cinema) is critics' celebration of what he calls "the winds of realism" ("In Our Own Eyes" 35). Here too *Suzanne* meets the mark by following all the conventions of the historically realist film text. Throughout, it shows careful attention to period detail. Spry boasted that his art director and set dressers grew up in the Plateau in the 1940s and 1950s and, therefore, had an especially acute sense of the prevalent decors, textures, fashions, and so on) (Malina D4). As well, the film is self-consciously culturally-specific in other details too. For example, after a title informing us it is 1952, we find Suzanne and some of

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September 1980.

her school chums at the movies, and up on the screen is Norman McLaren's famous pixilated cold-war parable *Neighbours*, and Spry even shows us the opening titles, beginning with "The National Film Board of Canada Presents." Despite all the reasons *Suzanne* might have attracted the attention of Canadian critics it remains totally ignored in a canon formation that consistently celebrates auteur art cinema-no matter how marginalized it may be for the majority of Canadian filmgoers-over films designed to offer the everyday pleasures associated with the consumption of popular texts.

In the midst of such anxiety over cultural value and national-specificity as is evidenced by the press at the time (as I showed in Chapter Three), The nexus of ideas about national cinema circulating around *Suzanne* -- a very Canadian-seeming film in the midst of so many "international-styled" thrillers and horror films and so on -- resulted in reactions such as this one, From *Maclean's* magazine:

> there was a time, not so long past (and not past at all in some quarters) when a film like *Suzanne* would have been given the benefit of the doubt because it was Canadian. Fortunately for the Canadian industry… movies made in this country are now judged by international criteria. And *Suzanne* falls woefully short (Gault 62).

It is unclear from the review what Gault means by judging films by "international criteria," but the comment does expose one of the central motifs of the felt pressures on the industry and by critics: that films with "international appeal" needed to hide their Canadianness, but also that films which *did* manage to accomplish this were no-good Hollywood knock-offs.

Yesterday

Another film strangely absent from Canadian film history is Larry Kent's *Yesterday* (1981). With its nationalist thematic, it seems like a natural magnet for the attention of Canadian film scholars. Like Spry's film, *Yesterday* is a period piece specifically concerned with the difficulties of the French and English living together in Montreal at a time of heightened *québécois* and Canadian nationalism: 1967. Also like Spry's film, *Yesterday* is by a celebrated Canadian filmmaker, thus inviting auteurist consideration.[3]

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[3] Kent's status as "celebrated Canadian film-maker" was made concrete with a retrospective of his oeuvre at the Cinémathèque québécoise in 2001 and similar

Again, a relationship between a French character and an English character living in Montreal serves as an obvious analogy for the political situation in Quebec. *Yesterday*'s spin on this device is to resolve the relationships between the *québécoise* Gabrielle and the English boys she meets by ultimately attaching her to Matt, an American who has come to Montreal to study at McGill University. Setting the action in 1967, not only provides the opportunity to highlight strife between French and English at a particularly formative moment in the separatist movement, but also to send Matt off to Viet Nam (while insinuating a rather strained equation of U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia with English-Canadian domination of Quebec's francophone majority.[4] The film's peculiar take on these relationships is everywhere evident; for example, the film opens with a hockey game between English McGill and French Université de Montréal,

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retrospectives at the Pacific Cinematheque and Cinematheque Ontario in the spring of 2003.

[4] This period is literally "formative" in the sense that it immediately followed the high-profile, mid-1960s FLQ letterbox bombing campaign in Westmount and immediately preceded other key events, such as the formation of the Parti québécois by René Lévesque and others in 1968, and the incident at the 1968 St. Jean

after which Gabrielle explains to a puzzled Matt (who has just arrived in Quebec and asks, "Why can't the English and French just get along?") that the centuries-long history of the French-English relationship is "not just a school rivalry."

Kent, like Spry, can't seem to resist a somewhat sympathetic treatment of the revolutionary aspirations of *québécois* nationalists. For example in an incident apparently designed to reflect badly on the moneyed McGill students, some of those students, shouting "the frogs are painting the campus gates," chase some separatist activists who have just graffitied the slogan "100 years of English oppression" on the stone entrance to the McGill campus. In another incident, Gabrielle's seperatist brother Claude is heard to parrot the then-current appellation from Pierre Vallières' infamous book, he refuses to be "a white nigger for the bosses."[5] Ultimately, though, *Yesterday*, like *Suzanne*, concludes on a curiously forced and conciliatory note. Gabrielle, pregnant with Matt's child, receives word that Matt has been killed in

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Baptiste Day parade in which Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was attacked by stone-throwing separatists.

[5] See Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec Terrorist*.

action in Viet Nam. However, three years later, she visits Matt's family in the States and learns that Matt was not killed, but severely maimed and perhaps psychologically damaged. Matt's grandfather tells her, "I guess he'd rather you thought he was dead." Nevertheless, Gabrielle and Matt and their child have a tearful reunion, suggesting, like the conclusion of *Suzanne*, that rapprochement between damaged and aggrieved parties, like making extreme compromises, is the only remotely satisfactory resolution to egregiously strained relations, especially when future generations are involved.

Hot Dogs

One of the central myths about relations between the French and English populations of Canada rests on the imagined dichotomy, Toronto-Montreal. The former is staid, conservative, safe, boring, Protestant, and English. The latter is scandalous, bawdy, uninhibited, transgressive, Catholic, and French. While historical conditions, including different regimes of moral regulation with regard to such practices as liquor licensing, are concrete, if partial, explanations for

these mythical reputations, there are other, more deeply ingrained, if imaginary, explanations for them. Chief among these is the notion that Latin-derived French Catholics are simply more "hot-blooded" than Toronto's repressed Protestants. Claude Fournier's *Hot Dogs*(1980) exploits this mythology in a comedy about a hyper-efficient moral crusader, Mr. McLean (played by porn star Harry Reems, obviously cast in the role because of the extra-textual "oomph" his reputation brought to the role), who, after having successfully "cleaned up Toronto," is appointed to head the vice squad in wide-open Montreal. Reems is perhaps best known as the co-star of *Deep Throat* (USA, Gerard Damiano, 1972), but his credits include over 100 films, which, judging by the titles, are predominantly porn films. This casting choice is another example of that increasing tendency of "allusionism" evident in popular 1970s cinema, and it would seem in this case to have a particularly commercially-calculated motivation. This is because *Hot Dogs*, while produced in English (presumably for the international market, like so many of the other tax-shelter boom movies) was directed by Claude Fournier, whose previous exploitation fare had proved controversial in English

Canada and wildly successful in Quebec, where it is said that one out of every three people (adults, presumably) saw Fournier's sex comedy *Deux femmes en or* a decade earlier (Morris, *The Film Companion*, 87). In fact, According to D.J. Turner, one of *Hot Dogs'* working titles was *L'Escouade en or* directly referencing the title of Fournier's notorious hit (306). And like the popular sex-comedies of the "maple-syrup porn" cycle which preceeded it, *Hot Dogs* is grotesquely sexist, and replete with gratuitous female nudity, largely naked breasts.

Here, in another film set unambiguously in Montreal, the setting and sympathetic, even loving, treatment of this cultural specificity is representative of English Canadians' fondness for exotic Quebec. Seen this way, the film is about scandalous, lusty francophone Quebec (as represented especially by the female lead, porn star Stella Moon, played by Nicole Morin) versus staid, moral English Canada (as represented by McLean), and the not-surprising message of the film is that sometimes the scandalous needs the staid as much as the reverse is also true. McLean's priggish, pathological fixation on morality and cleanliness (which is played for laughs)

is held up to ridicule, whereas the film indulgently celebrates the wild, anarchic antics of the film's various moral offenders. For example, Frank (played by Daniel Pilon), a Montreal vice squad officer, whom women find utterly irresistible, has sex with every female he meets, frequently while on the job. This said, it must be pointed out that not all "moral offenders" are championed by the film, as evidenced by the film's flagrant homophobia.[6]

Gradually, McLean is worn down, and whereas earlier in the film he announces that "morality is the cornerstone of sound society," later on he admits (sounding like many English-Canadians mulling over the aspirations of *québécois* nationalists), "I guess I just don't understand our times." In a predictable conclusion, McLean gives in to his more "natural" desires, and the film ends when yet another idealized coupling of English Canada and French Quebec is literalised in the marriage of McLean and Stella.

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[6] For a discussion of this ugly side of the film, see Thomas Waugh, "Nègres blancs, tapettes et 'butch': images des lesbiennes et des gais dans le cinéma québécois."

One of the reasons film studies most values the notion of national cinema is that it is held that a national cinema might reflect or reveal tendencies, ideologies, and attitudes culturally manifest at particular historically and geographically specific moments. Because the tax-shelter boom in Canadian cinema coincided more or less directly with one surge in interest and participation in the political debate over Quebec's future in Canada (as exemplified by the May 1980 referendum on sovereignty association), the lack of scholarly attention paid to contemporaneous films which deal with Québécois nationalism is very surprising. I suggest that one reason these films have been ignored is simply because of their unsavoury reputation as members of the disreputable tax-shelter boom moment in Canadian film history. But several of these films, until now absent from the historical record, respond to the threat of Quebec separation by espousing a political stance of "national reconciliation." In doing so they exhibit signs of the "nation-building" function more usually associated with the Griersonian legacy than with the "sell-out" films of the tax-shelter boom. In a series of ways, then, these films are most representative of the

failings of the nationalist historiographical project, and their existence clearly demonstrates some of the overarching claims of this thesis. First, the scant serious consideration of the tax-shelter boom, which resulted from a fear that the films made then were not worthy of the ideals of the Canadian cinema, and, indeed, of Canada itself, has been based on incomplete study of the films actually produced in the period. Secondly, the biases of the received wisdom have obscured more than they have revealed. While it may be true that many films of the period were of a kind -- genre films with American stars, where Canadian locations masqueraded as American ones -- it is equally true that several were not, and, in fact some even spoke to the most serious political and cultural issues then facing the nation.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Little Flowers Growing

I suppose there is a lot of crap being produced in this country right now…but crap is fertilizer. Who knows? On top of the heap, little flowers might grow. -Claude Jutra, *Montreal Gazette,* September 16, 1979. (Fitzgerald 39)

This chapter argues that Jutra's speculation, made at the height of the tax-shelter boom, was prescient. There are many ways of demonstrating that the little flowers now growing in the Canadian film and television industries are fertilized by the "heap" that was the tax-shelter boom. This chapter will show this in two ways. First, I draw direct lines from the tax-shelter boom to the success of the present-day industry in terms of industrial policy. Secondly, in the latter part of the chapter, I consider the "after-life" of the films of the tax-shelter boom, demonstrating how the on-going movement of these films through markets -- spurred often by fan communities, and in the films' ongoing appearance on television, especially as specialty channels such as the Drive-In Channel proliferate -- reminds us of their existence as artifacts of the time and place of their production. The continued presence in today's

mediascape of the films made then, thus, not only serve as frequent reminders of that historical moment but also contributes to the layers of the history of Canadian images that sediment to the present day and into the future.

Policy Considerations

The characterization of the tax-shelter boom as a cultural failure has already been discussed and interrogated in this thesis. However, the tax-shelter boom as an industrial policy failure is the focus here. The policies which lead to the tax-shelter boom -- to reiterate, a 100 percent tax write-off for investments in certified Canadian feature films, combined with a shift by the CFDC from acting as equity investor to interim-financier, and the establishment of the "private placement offer," the scheme which allowed producers to sell "shares" of a feature film to investors in blocks, allowing small investors like dentists and lawyers to risk as little as $1000 and shelter it from the tax-man -- have been seen as a failure historically because they did not result in a significant increase in the amount of

screen time for Canadian films in Canada. As well, the policy was considered a failure because, although there was a huge boom in production in 1979, this was followed by a bust, since so few of the films were profitable, investor confidence was shaken, and capital, for a time, dried up. The goal of establishing a private feature film industry in Canada seemingly was not met.

From a policy standpoint, the economic basis for the Capital Cost Allowance was what is called the "infant industry argument." The premise is that state participation is justified in a market economy only when an infant industry, be it building helicopters or making movies, can be nurtured to a mature state, where it will become self-sustaining and a contributor to the national economy in its own right. One aspect of this is the understanding that a mature industry will develop a sufficiently large industrial infrastructure and capable workforce to make the industry go. One question this chapter addresses is whether the tax-shelter policy did manage to mature an infant film industry in Canada. The literature on this aspect of the tax-shelter boom -- that is, on its industrial consequences -- is much less bilious than

are the discussions of the cultural consequences of this historical moment. Nevertheless, even though there is a grudging admission that the tax-shelter boom may have had positive industrial consequences, and may indeed have even contributed significantly to the creation of the feature film industry -- which was, afterall, the originally-mandated policy goal in the very creation of the CFDC -- much of the discussion of even this aspect of the tax-shelter boom is frequently couched in rather gloomy terms. This chapter, through an examination of some of the industrial infrastructure created then, and through a survey of a series of careers of film industry professionals, demonstrates that the tax-shelter boom may be seen in a much more positive light than the extant account of film policy in Canada allows.

I should begin by acknowledging that even the harshest critics of the period do agree that the period created employment for Canadians. Manjunath Pendakur, after citing the appearance of many American stars in the films, for instance, points out that, "undoubtedly, many jobs were created by the CCA (Capital Cost Allowance) (173). As well, Ted Magder, in a chapter on the tax-shelter boom which observes

some of the claims of policy failure which I just pointed to above, concludes his discussion by drawing attention to three beneficial results of the tax-shelter boom. First, he points out that the boom did result in an increased number of skilled film technicians and crews in Canada. Secondly, he notes that the tax-shelter boom did establish the careers of several producers. And finally, he shows how the effects of the tax-shelter boom -- a huge increase in production, but no increase at all in the screen-time for Canadian films -- shone the spotlight on the central problem of film policy: production stimulus was agreeable, but without dealing with the real problem, in the distribution and exhibition sectors, production stimulus alone should be considered a failure. This recognition of the need for an industrial strategy which addressed distribution, which resulted from the events of the tax-shelter boom, and is acknowledged in the Applebaum-Hébert Report, arguably led directly to the transformation of the CFDC into Telefilm Canada, a body which in many ways can be seen as making headway on the problem of Canadian film distribution and exhibition, chiefly by

recognizing the utility of broadcast to disseminate Canadian images.

My consideration of the issues Magder raises begins with the observation that Canada's film and television industries are, at present, largely successful. Furthermore, lines can be drawn from the establishment of industrial infrastructure and individual careers during the tax-shelter boom, to the present-day flowering of the film and television industries. According to Statistic Canada, revenues from the 729 firms in the film and video production industry were $2.59 billion in 2001. As well, the government statistics agency reports that the industry employed 37,180 Canadians in 2001, though the majority of these were free-lancers. That year, companies paid $596 million in wages to employees and free-lancers. Furthermore, post-production firms, which are not counted among the production companies cited above, generated a further $915 million in revenues (The Daily, December 19, 2003).

In addition to this, other sectors of the film and video industry have been enjoying outstanding growth recently. For example revenues for distributors reached an all-time high in 2002-'03 of

$3.3 billion, up eight percent from the year before. While Canadian productions accounted for just nine percent of the distributor's revenues, this still accounts for almost $300 million of distributors' revenues from Canadian production. (The Daily, May 14, 2004). Finally, it should be noted that the economic spin-offs of production for communities where film and television programs are made are estimated at several billion more than the $3.3 billion spent specifically on production itself[1]

Such a successful industry as this doesn't come from nowhere. It requires entrepreneurial skill and business acumen to accumulate capital from which to build a business and it requires a skilled, talented, creative and technical workforce. The production boom of the late 1970s can be compared in some senses to the position of both American International Pictures and New World Pictures in American film history. Both in his association with AIP and, after founding his own firm (NWP) in 1970, Roger Corman's involvement in exploitation film-making in the United States is legendary. As a director and producer of low-budget

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[1] See Heritage Canada, "The Film and Television Industry Profile 2002."

schlock, Corman is said to have launched the careers of numerous celebrated film artists. It is repeatedly pointed out by the critics and historians, and by the filmmakers, writers, actors and screenwriters who benefited, working for Corman was like a "film school." Among those people who wrote, directed or starred in career-launching films for Corman are Martin Scorsese, John Sayles, Ron Howard, James Cameron, Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, Peter Bogdanovich, Jonathan Demme, Joe Dante, Bruce Dern, and a host of others. In the practice of making schlocky exploitation pictures, these film artists also learned invaluable lessons about film-craft and used these experiences as a launching pad for the making of other kinds of, less schlocky, more "legitimate," films. Secretary of State John Roberts, in remarks to the parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcast, Films and Assistance to the Arts in April 1978, made a case for state film policy based on a rationale perhaps not explicitly informed by the case of Corman's employees and their subsequent careers, but nevertheless based on a related foundation:

> Artists cannot survive on art alone. Schlock -- to use an inelegant word -- is necessary as a solid base for creativity; it provides employment

> for talents which would otherwise not be able to survive, nor thus be available for projects of higher artistic value. The success of our policies will be in whether we go beyond an industry of commercial profits to an industry which also creates films which are a lasting contribution to Canada's cultural heritage (qtd. in Magder 167).

In addition to generating revenues of many billions of dollars last year, the industry today clearly does also create "films which are a lasting contribution to Canada's cultural heritage." Almost every single year for the past two decades there has been at least one internationally-acclaimed Canadian feature film, with these films very frequently produced by a person whose career was born or matured during the tax-shelter boom.

One company, which in many ways can link its very existence to the tax-shelter boom, illustrates this point. Alliance-Atlantis, a large Toronto-based media conglomerate, with consolidated revenues last year of $865 million, describes itself in its press material as "a leading vertically integrated broadcaster, creator and distributor of filmed entertainment." (Alliance-Atlantis, June 2, 2004). The firm produces feature films, children's programming, documentaries, movies of the week, and T.V. dramas. Its most popular

productions at present include *Trailer Park Boys*, which is attracting record audiences in Canada for a Canadian-produced program, and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, which it co-produces with C.B.S. Television and Jerry Bruckheimer Productions. The company also owns several specialty television channels in Canada including Showcase and History Television (both of which broadcast Canadian films every week, often several per week), and it is also one of the world's leading film distribution companies, with its distribution group contributing $398.2 million to overall revenues of $866 million last year (Alliance-Atlantic June 4, 2004).

The company was formed by the 1998 merger of the two leading film and television production companies in Canada, Alliance Communications and Atlantis Communications. Alliance was formed in 1985 with the merger of Robert Lantos' RSL productions, and Denis Héroux and John Kemeny's International Cinema Corporation. While all three of these central figures had film industry careers before the tax-shelter boom, all three solidified their positions as leading

producers then.[2] Lantos in particular, indisputably Canada's leading producer today, launched his career as a producer with three tax-shelter boom films from 1979, *Suzanne*, *Your Ticket is No Longer Valid* (George Kaczender, 1981), and *Agency*. Other producers whose emerging careers were given the experience -- and, it might be said, the opportunity to learn from their successes and their mistakes -- include Don Carmody, producer of *Terror Train*, *Yesterday*, and *Tulips* (all in 1979), who began working for Pierre David's Cinepix in the mid-1970s, but whose experience during the tax-shelter boom allowed him to form his own company in 1980. Carmody is perhaps best known as the producer of the notorious *Porky's* (Bob Clark, 1982), still Canada's top-grossing feature of all time, and as co-

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[2] While it is true that of the three, Kemeny had the most established career before the tax-shelter boom, as a NFB producer (where he produced several landmark productions including Donald Brittain's *Memorandum* and *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen*, both 1965), and as producer of the early English-Canadian hit *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Ted Kotcheff, 1974), it is equally true that his career as a commercial producer takes off with the beginning of his partnership with Héroux in 1979. Héroux's career, which I discussed in the previous chapter, though launched with the "maple-syrup porn" cycle, circa 1970, was solidified and legitimized (with the production of "serious" films such as *Atlantic City*) in the late 1970s.

producer of the Academy Award winning *Chicago* (USA-Canada, Rob Marshall, 2002).

Many other examples could be cited here of producers whose careers were launched or legitimized by the opportunity provided by the tax-shelter boom to produce several relatively high-budget feature films in a short period of time. One mark of a successful film policy must be the number of thriving producers which emerge from a policy shift. It is worth keeping in mind, when addressing the success or failure of Canadian film policy, how other, comparable, film industries perform in this respect. For example, a study by the Australian Film Commission on "repeat involvement in feature films" shows that over the past thirty years, Australian producers and directors have, on average, made exactly 1.9 films each, and screenwriters only 1.5. The study shows that while approximately twenty percent of producers and directors have made three or more films, around two-thirds (67.3 percent of producers and 65.9 percent of directors) only ever made one feature film over the past thirty years. Such statistics serve as useful points of comparison for the performance of the Canadian industry in this respect, and demonstrates

the difficulty of acquiring valuable hands-on experience for producers, directors, and screen-writers in minor national cinemas such as Canada's and Australia's (Australian film Commission).

Beyond the necessity of established producers for a viable film industry, crews and crafts-people are required as well. One way of demonstrating the effect of the tax-shelter boom on today's industry is to take the example of one film. Mario Azzopardi's *Deadline*, which I discussed in some depth in Chapter Five, serves as a suitable example for this exercise since it is so representative of the failed films of the tax-shelter boom as a genre film which was never released in theatres. A look at the principal participants of this film shows us the following:

Producer Henry Less has worked consistently in the film and video industry since *Deadline*, partly in television, but also in features (directing *All Shook Up* (1999) for example). As well, Less has also made over 250 industrials and commercials, currently for Players Film Productions in Toronto.

Director Mario Azzopardi's latest feature, *Savage Messiah* (2002) grossed over $1 million in Quebec. He has worked largely in television, directing dozens of

episodes of such programs as *E.N.G.* and *Highlander*, and other export productions. *Deadline* was his first feature.

While cinematographer Manfred Guthé's first screen credit was as a camera assistant on *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Allan King, 1977), his first job as a cinematographer was on *Deadline*, and he has been working steadily in this capacity in television since 1980.

Assistant director Denis Chapman has a long-established career as a television production manager. His first screen credit was on *Deadline*.

Editor Gary Zubick worked steadily in television from 1980 to 1994. His first screen credit was on *Deadline*.

Many other examples could be pointed to which illustrate the same point. For one which draws specific attention to that element of John Roberts' remarks (which I quoted earlier) about schlock providing employment which allows artists to continue to practice, consider the example of art director and production designer Michel Proulx. Proulx was the art director for Francis Mankiewicz's canonized *Les bons débarras* (1980) immediately after serving in that

capacity for Alvin Rakoff's *Death Ship*. Proulx, in other words, in a space of a few months, designed one of the most celebrated Canadian auteur films of all time and one of the most ridiculed and execrable genre films of the era. Interestingly, Proulx also worked as art director on Yves Simoneau's taut thriller *Pouvoir Intime* (1986), a film which could be said to take that rare step for a Canadian feature by bridging the gap between generic formula (it is a well-made crime thriller) and national specificity.

These career trajectories themselves do not tell the whole story. But using as examples this one failed, representative, film of the tax-shelter boom, and one seemingly schizophrenic career, we can see evidence mounting which might lead to a reconsideration of the mostly negative evaluation of the industrial effects of the period. These are perhaps modest careers in the film and video industries, but they are evidence of trained workforce and a surprising high percentage of established careers emerging from Canadian films shot in 1979.

After-Life

The second part of this chapter also reveals "little flowers growing." Here, I consider the "after-life" of tax-shelter boom movies in the present day. In Chapter Four, I explored the cult reputations of several tax-shelter boom films demonstrating the value of considering reception and the centrality of audiences to an understanding of how genre operates as a system. Here, I will draw attention to the fact that many films of the period, and not just cult films, maintain and even widen their cultural resonance with their movements through various ancillary markets. Video-tape and DVD sales, marketplaces such as eBay -- spurred by fan discourse and other propellants of media culture such as fluctuating star reputations and cycles of nostalgia -- and especially via continued repeat broadcast on proliferating specialty television channels, the films of the tax-shelter boom are as prominent in the mediascape as ever before. One question behind the relevance of the tax-shelter boom films to the national film culture in the received wisdom is this: if a film is made, but nobody sees it, does it make any contribution to the national cinema? In response

to this, I will show here that many people encounter the films of the tax-shelter boom on an on-going basis (perhaps without realizing it), even, and perhaps even particularly, ones which would seem to have had no cultural effect at all at the time of their production, because of their original failure in the marketplace for feature films. The persistent existence of these films in the media culture of the present day is a compelling reason for us take account of them as elements of the Canadian national cinema.

Ancillary Markets

Nearly every one of the 18 Canadian features films shot in 1979 that I own, I bought on eBay, the on-line auction house[3]. While the lack of other bidders for many of the tapes I bought this way would suggest an expected degree of indifference by the marketplace to failed Canadian features, there were some surprising exceptions. *Autumn Born* (1980, Lloyd

[3] Most of the other 21 films shot in 1979 which I examined in preparation for this thesis were screened at the National Archives of Canada. A small handful were rented from video shops, and one, *Your Ticket is No Longer Valid* was purchased from a junk shop on St. Laurent Boulevard in Montreal.

Simandl), an extremely low-budget, purely exploitative, soft-core porn film provides an interesting case study. No doubt because of the cult fan following of its star, murdered *Playboy* playmate Dorothy Stratton, *Autumn Born* regularly fetches at least twenty dollars (U.S.) at auction on ebay, a remarkable sum for so bad a film, indicating, as prices in the collector market always do, something about supply and demand. The scarcity of the film and the shortness of Stratton's career coupled by the size of the Statton fan community, renders the artifact somewhat valuable and therefore sought-after. *Autumn Born*, in other words, arguably one of the worst films produced during the tax-shelter boom, maintains a high degree of exchange value in the video marketplace.

As well, as I demonstrated in Chapter Five, fan communities drive the on-going market interest in certain horror films of the era, and their regular movement through this marketplace is evidence of their on-going, and their arguably increasing, importance as component parts of the Canadian national cinema. The release of many of these films in new DVD formats is suggestive of their marketability and of their growing

presence in the media landscape.[4] In addition to cult horror films, other seemingly disappeared artifacts of the tax-shelter boom are enjoying new lives. *Pinball Summer* is an example of a tax-shelter boom film which on the surface seems to confirm the argument that the films made then make no contribution to the national cinema since almost nobody ever saw it upon original release. But its recent release on DVD (as *Pick-Up Summer*, as it was renamed for the original videotape release in 1981 by Roger Corman's New World Pictures) suggests otherwise. In an extremely contemporary-looking package (that is, featuring a very 21st-Century-looking beach-babe, who is not, of course, in the film), it was released by the Platinum Disc Corporation of La Crosse Wisconsin. This company's catalogue suggests they are a firm trading almost entirely in failed genre films, ones which they must imagine are saleable to specialized audiences. The catalogue includes, for example: Lorenzo Lamas in *Good Cop, Bad Cop* (USA, John De Bello, 1997), Tom Arnold in *Golf Punks* (USA, Harvey Frost, 1998), and

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[4] The recent release on DVD of *The Changeling*, for example, was greeted with rapturous reviews in the DVD press. See www.dvdcult.com, or reviews on www.amazon.com for example.

Burt Reynolds in *Big City Blues* (USA, Clive Fleury, 1999). How successful these films are in their second, or, in some cases third, lives in the marketplace is difficult to know, but the fact of their on-going re-appearance suggests that the after-lives of these films, even in the face of their failure in the theatrical market, should be taken into account when evaluating their cultural impact.

Television, Again.

In Chapter Three, I investigated the premises behind the unequal relationship of theatrically released feature films to televisual broadcast exhibition in both journalistic and scholarly writings on film. Here, I suggest that a look at the on-going broadcast of tax-shelter boom films up to the present shows how these films, planted in the dung-heap of the tax-shelter boom can be seen as little flowers growing still. Using another film this thesis discussed in some detail, I will compare the audience of *Suzanne* on television to that for the theatrical release of the commercially-successful and critically-acclaimed Atom

Egoyan feature *The Sweet Hereafter* (2001).[5] According to industry-watcher Bruce Nash of The-Numbers.com, Egoyan's best-received work to date grossed $4,306,697 U.S. dollars in its domestic theatrical release (which includes Canada and the United States).[6] Even in the wildly unlikely event that it earned one-quarter of its box-office receipts in Canada (and dividing the gross by $10 per ticket to determine the approximate number of admissions), we arrive at a figure of 107,668. This is a very generous guess as to how many Canadians might have encountered Egoyan's film in a movie theatre.

Now, *Suzanne* was broadcast on the Showcase specialty channel, a channel which is a part of the basic package for a majority of cable TV subscribers in Canada, at 3 p.m. on Friday March 26th, 2003.

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[5] This Academy Award-nominated film's executive producer was Robert Lantos, and it was produced by Lantos' Alliance Communications. I selected this film for comparison because it is one of the best known and most successful films by English-Canada's most celebrated film-maker working today.

[6] Because of the inclusion of Canada in the U.S. domestic market by Hollywood for box-office figures, Charles Acland has described the difficulty of extracting Canadian box-office numbers from American ones as about as easy as "unbaking cookies" (*Screen Traffic* 7).

According to the Neilson Ratings for that day, the broadcast attracted 23,000 viewers.

Since Showcase and the other specialty channels which program such fare (including Bravo and the Drive-In Channel and even the Women's Television Network) generally buy the broadcast rights for films such as *Suzanne* (that is, old Canadian films) for 20-25 showings over two years (with a one year exclusivity clause), the potential broadcast audience for *Suzanne* suddenly rivals the size of the theatrical audience for a celebrated film such as Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter.* While Showcase seldom broadcasts a film like *Suzanne* more than five times over two years, their contract in this instance (and in most instances) allows them, should they wish to, to use the other 15 contracted showings on their digital channels Showcase Action, Showcase Diva and the Independent Film Channel Canada. Even so, with just the five broadcasts over two years on Showcase, and taking as an average the ratings the film received on a Friday Afternoon in March, *Suzanne* could expect an audience of approximately 115,000 as compared to the nearly 108,000 Canadians who I generously estimated

might have seen *The Sweet Hereafter* in a movie theatre.[7]

There are some methodological and statistical problems with this analysis. First, it relies on estimates and extrapolations based on available data. Secondly, the data itself, certainly the television audience ratings, are questionable as evidence of real audiences since they only measure whether a television is tuned to a station, not whether anyone is actually watching. Furthermore, it is impossible to really know what audience the film might garner in its second, third, fourth and fifth screenings over two years, and have chosen to merely multiply the first audience by five, which is a quite a large assumption. Nevertheless, even allowing for these problems with this comparison, my example is still useful for supporting the argument that the continued existence of tax-shelter boom films, and their on-going broadcast, means that whatever their failures in the theatrical marketplace of the early 1980s, their resonance as Canadian feature films persists and

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[7] All the information concerning the broadcast of *Suzanne* on Showcase comes from an interview with Laura Michalchyshyn, Senior Vice-President of Dramatic Programming at Alliance-Atlantis, April 15, 2003.

grows. The cultural impact of *Suzanne*, if measured quantitatively by audience numbers, would seem to rival that of one of Canada's best-known and most celebrated recent feature films.

Furthermore, it is useful to note that the tax-shelter boom films which have enjoyed the most prominent after-lives are typically those that were most mockingly received upon their original release. Conversely, it is noteworthy that the most highly regarded films of the period are those whose cultural resonance seems to be evaporating. I have found no evidence of fan communities celebrating the Academy Award nominated *Atlantic City*, for example, while horror films, teen comedies and other scandalous failures of the day enjoy increasingly prominent after-lives.

In conclusion, this chapter has considered the effects of the tax-shelter boom on the contemporary film and television industries in Canada from two different directions. First, by weighing the material effects of such a flurry of production on the establishment of skills and careers, I have shown how the tax-shelter boom made a significant contribution to the vigour of the film and television industry of

today. Secondly, through a consideration of the continued presence in the media landscape of the films produced then, I have shown how the material results -- that is, the films themselves -- of the policies which led to the tax-shelter boom should weigh much more heavily in the national film culture than the presently-existing account allows. Furthering Jutra's metaphor, this after-life of tax-shelter boom films in the present, thus, contributes continued nutrients for the soil in which today's industry thrives.

Conclusion

Hollywood North: Take One

Hollywood North (Peter O'Brien, 2003) is a film which takes a satirical look at the tax-shelter boom. It stars Mathew Modine as Bobby Meyers, an earnest lawyer in Toronto, who acquires the film rights to *Lantern Moon*, a much-loved Canadian novel, and decides to take advantage of the Capital Cost Allowance to shelter some of his income from the tax-man by producing a feature film based on this book. The film opens with Meyers and an agent on the grounds of the estate of an aging, once important, Hollywood star. From the voice-over we learn that Bobby's film project *Lantern Moon* must sign a Hollywood star or it will never attract enough investors to make the project go. When he does sign the star (Alan Bates, as a character called Michael Baytes), the actor turns out to be delusional, and winds up wrecking the movie. His first negative influence comes when he demands re-writes to the script, eventually utterly transforming it from a heart-warming novel full of Canadian wilderness to a political thriller set in central America, and re-titled *Flight to Bogota*. Those

familiar with the tax-shelter boom will recognize all sorts of references to many apocryphal stories of the period, and will, I imagine, get the most out of this failed comedy.

For the purposes of lending conclusions to this thesis, I'd like to point out two things about this film. First, it presents none of its characters in a particularly negative light, with the possible exceptions of the prissy Living Legend who wrote the novel *Lantern Moon*, and the sleazy agent who convinces Bobby not only to hire Baytes for the film, but also that it is "no big deal" to grant him script approval (which effectively allowed him to re-write the film). Bobby, thus, is not treated as an especially greedy or vain person (in the way that producers were treated by the national press back then), but simply as a naïve and well-intentioned schmuck who wants to make a film of *Lantern Moon* as much because he thinks it'll be fun to be in show-business, but also because he really loves the book. The subplot of the film involves a woman doing a "making- of" documentary on the *Lantern Moon* set (she's also making her own super-low-budget auteur film in evenings and on weekends), who naturally gets together with Bobby. In this aspect of

the story as well, Bobby is ultimately seen to be a generous and reasonable man, finally agreeing to bail the woman's project out, even after she'd been caught charging film processing for her little art film to the *Lantern Moon* project account. They become partners and a romance begins. As a fictional story loosely based upon real events, and especially given the treatment of this period by history, it is very interesting that *Hollywood North* should have such a soft touch, letting nearly everybody off the hook, blaming nobody for the perverted film that resulted from the putting *Lantern Moon* through the process of transformation into a commercially-viable feature film. It's as if the tax-shelter itself -- which as an abstract idea cannnot, of course, have a concrete presence in a film -- was to blame for the mangling of the much-loved Canlit treasure. The film ultimately agrees with Laurence O'Toole (in Chapter Four) with the argument that there was something *structurally* wrong with the process of production imposed by the CCA that made it impossible for good films to be made under those conditions.

The second thing this film is useful for, for the purposes of concluding this thesis, is that it is a

Canadian film about the difficulties of producing a commercially viable feature film without resorting to Hollywood stars. Itself starring Hollywood actors Modine and Jennifer Tilly, *Hollywood North* jokes, but only gently, about the necessity of name recognition to sell movies, but it really does seem comfortable with this imperative, suggesting perhaps that the degree of anxiety over such matters is lower now than it was during the tax-shelter boom. This reduced anxiety level could be seen as a sign of a maturing industry, confident in its successes and less anxious about minor details like a lack of home-grown stars. *Hollywood North*, in other words, is a film which makes connections between the tax-shelter boom and the present state of the Canadian film industry, demonstrating a degree of self-assuredness which comes from some success.

Hollywood North: Take Two

In January of 2004, Canada's leading film producer, Robert Lantos, gave the keynote address at the annual conference of the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association. In it, he argued

that the tax-shelter boom was not nearly the disaster that people seem to think, pointing out that despite the numerous positive aspects of the period, those years were referred to as "terrible, dark, bad, dark days of Canadian film, especially by the media" (Lantos 8). He goes on to point out how, "an extraordinary number of films found a commercial audience in Canada and abroad, more so than in many years to come after."

Lantos, who personally benefited enormously from the tax-shelter boom - so it is not terribly surprising that he should be singing its praises - went on in this speech to industry colleagues to claim that what followed the tax-shelter boom was a much bigger policy disaster than was the CCA. Noting that "we threw the baby out with the bath-water," Lantos describes the period of direct government funding of the 1980s as one dominated by the "dictatorship of the auteur." After agreeing that auteur films are a healthy and important part of all national cinemas, he complained that between 1983 (at the collapse of the tax-shelter boom) and until the establishment in 2000 of Telefilm Canada's Feature Film Fund, Canada endured 17 years of almost nothing but auteur films, with the

producer function severely curtailed. Tellingly, these seventeen years are considered by the nationalist historiography to be the heroic period of the maturing Canadian national cinema, which saw the emergence of Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema and Canada's other celebrated auteurs. But as Lantos says, "the problem with this is that one actually does need both producers and directors in order to make films that might be commercially successful" (12). Later, he jokes that while auteur films may be "good for us," a seventeen year-long steady diet of nothing else was not a balanced one, and he encouraged his colleagues in the audience to start thinking once again of ways of increasing audiences, of making more commercial pictures.

In this recent speech by Canada's most successful film producer -- while certainly self-serving in some ways, he is nevertheless a practitioner who has made an enormous contribution to the Canadian cinema -- Robert Lantos makes some of the same arguments this thesis proposes: that commercially-calculated film-making is a necessary part of a thriving national cinema, that the tax-shelter boom was much more successful in leading to the creation of such a

thriving national cinema than is presently acknowledged, and that the idea of what we even count as a "Canadian film" needs to be adjusted to include the popular.

***Hollywood North*: Take Three**

In autumn 2003, Michael Spencer's memoir *Hollywood North: Creating the Canadian Motion Picture Industry* was published. As the first director of the CFDC (his tenure was followed immediately by the appointment of Michael McCabe, and the radical transformations of the industry beginning in 1978), Spencer's book is full of insider knowledge and anecdotes about the various goings-on in the Canadian film industry. One reason that raising it is useful for the purposes of concluding this thesis is that while the book is in some ways uncomfortably self-congratulatory, it remains nevertheless measured in its assessment of the tax-shelter boom. Judging by the policies which Spencer did initiate as CFDC director from 1968-78, and by the radical departure taken by his successor Michael McCabe, one might assume that Spencer would be

more critical in his assessment of the results of the policy-shift at the CFDC. While Spencer does expend some effort describing certain apparent abuses of the system at the time, and complaining about the poor quality of so many of the films produced then, he also points out, as Lantos did in his CFTPA speech, that a great deal of good also emerged from the late 1970s.

Later, recounting a conversation with Lantos over the success of *Men With Brooms* (Paul Gross, 2003), Spencer quotes Lantos as saying:

> Almost all English-Canadian films are made for a narrow, elite audience. I don't think you can expect a mainstream audience to come to an edgy, independent, film which has a deep dark sinister ending. People want to have fun. They want entertainment: They don't want to suffer when they see a movie. They want to enjoy themselves (208).

Spencer's book (like Lantos's speech), as another "insider" account of the industry, contributes to this thesis's conclusion by stating once again some the arguments I've made here as well. State intervention of various kinds, including the CCA, has been very beneficial to the growth and maturation of the film and television industries in Canada, and that the present, relatively healthy state of these industries,

is directly attributable to past events, including the tax-shelter boom.

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Appendix
Canadian Feature Films Shot in 1979

The films are listed in the order of their production, with the earliest films listed first. The year of release follows each title. In some cases this date reflects, rather than theatrical release, the year in which the film was first broadcast on television or released on videotape (in the cases where the film was not released in cinemas or broadcast on television). Where no date is listed, I have no evidence of the film ever having been exhibited in any format. All of this data comes directly from D.J. Turner's *Canadian Feature Film Index 1913-1985*. More information about each of the titles listed is provided by Turner.

The Hero
See You Monday (1979)
Agency (1980)
Cauchemar (1979)
Title Shot (1979)
Contrecoeur (1983)
The Changling (1980)
Les jeunes québécoises (1980)
À nous deux (1979)
Yesterday (1981)
Double Negative (1982)
Au clair de la lune (1983)
The Arctic Adventure (1980)
The Intruder (1981)
Bear Island (1979)

Heart Break (1979)
Klondike Fever (1979)
La cuisine rouge (1980)
Tere Bina (1980)
Les grand enfants (1980)
Crunch (1981)
Tanya's Island (1980)
Death Ship (1980)
Suzanne (1980)
Pinball Summer (1980)
Girls (1980)
Surfacing (1981)
Nothing Personal (1980)
Strass Café (1980)
The Lovers' Exile (1980)
Autumn Born (1984)
Hot Dogs (1980)
The Handyman (1980)
Seasons in the Sun (1986)
Cries in the Night (1980)
Middle Age Crazy (1980)
Prom Night (1980)
Mary and Joseph: A Story of Faith (1979)
Hog Wild (1980)
Fantastica (1980)
Going For Broke
Highpoint (1984)
Off Your Rocker (1982)
Dirty Tricks (1981)
The Pit (1981)
It Can't Be Winter, We Haven't Had Summer Yet (1980)
Le château de cartes (1980)
The High Country (1981)
Head On (1981)
The Coffin Affair (1980)
Circle of Two (1981)
Final Assignment (1980)
Out of the Blue (1980)
The Last Chase (1981)
The Kidnapping of the President (1980)
Your Ticket is No Longer Valid (1981)
Silence of the North (1981)
Phobia (1980)
Improper Channels (1981)
Deadline (1984)
Scanners (1981)
Terror Train (1980)

Hey Babe! (1984)
South Pacific 1942 (1981)
Atlantic City (1980)
The Lucky Star (1980)
La revanche de madame Beauchamp (1981)
Justocoeur (1980)
Mr. Patman (1981)
Powder Heads (1980)