Filmmaking, Teaching and the Colonial Experience: an Immigrant's Account from "English" Canada of a Story of American Success

Evan Wm. Cameron

Professor Emeritus
Senior Scholar in Screenwriting

Graduate Programmes,
Film & Video and Philosophy

York University

[Written on 25 January 1992, the text was published within the *Journal of Film & Video* 44, Numbers 1 & 2 (Spring and Summer, 1992), pages 102-113.]

Filmmaking, Teaching and the Colonial Experience:
an Immigrant's Account from "English" Canada
of a Story of American Success[1]

> The motion picture is the epitome of civilization and the quintessence of what we mean by 'America'.
>
> Will H. Hays (1929)[2]

Prologue

On 28 December 1991 the Book of Common Prayer for the Tory party in Canada, otherwise known as the *Globe & Mail* of Toronto (or "Canada's National Newspaper" as its publishers wistfully call it), saw fit to review the country's cultural endeavours of the past year.

Having defended the party and its Prime Minister during the debacle of the Free Trade negotiations with the United States, misgauged the ensuing collapse of the economy and devoted itself thereafter to replenishing the hot-air escaping from the balloon of laissez-faire capitalism as social democrats (the New Democratic Party) took power in three straight provincial elections, the paper was hardly poised to give an untarnished account of the catastrophic climate for the arts in Canada. As its summary heading confirmed, however, a decade of disasters could no longer credibly be hidden.

> It has been a year of extraordinary destructiveness and self-destructiveness with the recession as a constant dirge in the background. Instead of building on the past, creating the structures of the future, we have seen a steady process of burning down the house.

Each of the reports that followed reviewed the state of one of our cultural industries, preceded by a headline accentuating the darkness: "Big was iffy and so too is the future" (architecture); "Recession that refused to die hurt the industry" (pop music); "Gradual starvation of the arts has done its work" and "Non-profit theatre in need of Perestroika" (theatre); "No champagne, no fast cars, no giddy getting and spending" (painting); "Avoiding fatal fiscal stereotyping" (dance) – each of them, that is, with one exception: the headline to the review of filmmaking read:

---

[1] I wish to thank my colleagues Seth Feldman, Jim Fisher, Peter Harcourt and Peter Morris for sharing with me their opinions on this essay.

[2] From *See and Hear: a Brief History of Motion Pictures and the Development of Sound* (Motion Producers and Distributors of America, 1929), page 4..

Canadian Cinema Reaches a Pinnacle.

And lest knowledgeable readers think it a joke, the subheading was even stronger.

> Nineteen ninety-one will be remembered as a landmark year in the history of Canadian cinema, a year in which the mountain of excellent Canuck product towered so high the fact that the most expensive Canadian film ever made (BETHUNE: THE MAKING OF A HERO) turned out to be a commercial molehill was of virtually no importance (except to its producers).

My hands trembled with astonishment as I read on. Could I and every producer, director, writer or technician known to me, every teacher of production, every distributor and even every other critic of my acquaintance residing in Canada be living on a different planet from the reviewer? Could we have misinterpreted so badly the historical trajectory of the Canadian enterprise to which we had committed the best years of our lives?

Were we, in particular, misinterpreting a decade's absence of Canadian feature films *important to Canadians* (within a country that had once managed to produce to local acclaim, and international as well, A TOUT PRENDRE, MON ONCLE ANTOINE, KAMOURASKA, LA CHAT DANS LE SAC, THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ, LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME, NOBODY WAVED GOODBYE, WEDDING IN WHITE, GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD, WARRENDALE, A MARRIED COUPLE, LES MAUDITS SAUVAGES, IN PRAISE OF OLDER WOMEN or THE GREY FOX)? Were we misreading the decline of the National Film Board (the onetime standard-bearer for documentary and non-commercial animation production throughout the world), or misconstruing the demise of *Cinema Canada* (our only national film periodical of record for the industry) or misunderstanding the implications, however ambiguous, of the transfer of the Cineplex-Odeon theatre chain from Canadian into American hands (the largest exhibitor in North America and the only one left of *Canadian* origin)? Had God shown upon the reviewer a light denied those of us fallen from grace?

Alas, no such luck! The "pinnacle" of Canadian cinematic achievement, the "mountain of excellent Canuck product [towering] so high", amounted to four documentaries that, in the reviewer's words, "went the distance" () and four enacted films (H, a $65,000 first feature about heroin addiction; PERFECTLY NORMAL, an honest comedy about "hockey, opera, transvestitism, beer, [and] Italian cuisine"; THE ADJUSTOR, the third film of a Toronto director that, by common consent, was worse than his second that had been worse than a promising first; and BLACK ROBE, an Australian-Canadian co-production, directed by the accomplished Australian, Bruce Beresford, from a script so embarrassingly bad that neither Beresford nor a fair ending could save it).

Have you seen any of the above films? Do you expect to see them? Of course not, or, if so, only by happenstance, and neither will most Canadians, citizens of their titular country of origin. Yet our only remaining independent producer/distributor of clout, Alliance productions, managed to secure distribution in Canada of each of the enacted films mentioned above, along with a half-dozen others of foreign origin, a feat of such celebrity under present circumstances that its head, Robert Lantos, was awarded a special Genie by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television for outstanding achievement – and the reviewer saw this as a reaffirmation of cultural vitality.

The importance of Alliance to Canadian film culture cannot at this juncture be overstated. The irony is that Canada is finding a specific film culture precisely at a time when it appears that the country is in danger of losing its culture.

Having survived the decade as a teacher and senior administrator within Canada's foremost training school for film and television production, I put down the paper in anger. My colleagues and I had entered the 1980s accustomed to seeing our better students enter the industry with hope, however slim, of surviving as players within a cultural game of unique value to *Canadians*. As the decade waned, however, we could only watch in exasperation as yet another government capitulated to pressures internal and external, reneging on promises, disavowing responsibilities, foreclosing whatever avenues of access remained to a viable *Canadian* film and television industry and therewith extinguishing every hope for it.

To understand why films made in Canada have become irrelevant to Canadians is to understand the constraints upon teaching filmmaking within its borders. To do so, one needn't trace the labyrinthine evasions, public and private, that have characterized the Canadian experience with respect to its media during the past half-century.[3] Nor need one wallow within the intricacies of the institutional flow-charts for film training. One must, however, comprehend summarily the geographical, historical and cultural traditions within which the story continues to unfold.

Only then will one be able to fathom how Canada's foremost film critic could so misread the plot of the drama circa 1992, substituting sanguinity for sanity, and how Canada's

[3] Those interested could well begin by consulting Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams & American Control: the Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990). The tale to date is simply told and Pendakur's Marxism, explicit throughout, defines rather than obliterates events even for those of us less inclined to the left. Significantly, the story of Canadian filmmaking in its economic context, as told by an Indian now teaching in America, had to be published by an American press before being picked up for paperback reprinting in Canada.

elite newspaper could reconfirm the misreading saliently through national distribution. For the roots of both responses lie deeply within the *colonial* experience of the Canadian peoples, pervading habits of thought, behaviour and the institutions that constrain them.

The Colonial Context

Three factors constrain the prospects for filmmaking in Canada, one geographical, another historical and the last cultural (or, if you prefer, socio-political). Each is interwoven with the others into an entangling mesh of neo-colonial dependency.

Geographical: Over 90% of the 27 million residents of Canada live within 200 kilometres of the northern border of the United States, the longest undefended and easily traversable national boundary in the world. To the near north lies unarable land, scantly populated, difficult to access and suited only for extraction of natural resources. To the immediate south, on the other hand, and readily accessible, lies the most powerful political, military, economic, social and cultural force in the history of humankind – a society of 250 million Americans.

Canada is divided into provinces strung out along the border, each separated from the others not only by distance but by communal traditions (having been settled by disparate immigrations), governmental proclivities (having been structured largely to protect diverse economic interests) and ofttimes linguistic barriers as well (overt in Quebec, subtle elsewhere).

Unsurprisingly, obstacles to the free exchange of goods, services and even ideas remain stronger today among the provinces than between any one of them and the United States, including Quebec. Movement of all things north-south is simpler than east-west. Unsurprisingly, 75% of Canada's exports go to the United States, and, in return, Canada is the largest single external market for American goods in general, and, since 1974, the largest market for American films in particular.

Of especial importance, however, is the fact that essentially all Canadians, including the francophones, have direct, immediate, constant and unmitigated access to the American media of television and radio through which the aspirations and hopes of the American people and its consumer-oriented economy are reflected, redirected and reconfirmed.

Geography alone would ensure that the United States would bias if not dominate whatever future enterprises Canadians undertake. When coupled with a history of

colonial compliance, however, permeating every aspect of Canadian culture and its institutions, domination is assured.

Historical: The economic, political, social and cultural institutions of Canada were created and have evolved to serve the economies of other nations (and therewith their political, social and cultural interests), firstly England and France, then England and, since WWII, the United States. By 1949, when Newfoundland, England's oldest colony, became Canada's newest province, the peoples of Canada had served the imperial interests of others for nearly 400 years, and the colonial legacy remains everywhere apparent a half-century later. Canada is a third-world country by tradition and inclination, distinguished only by a preponderance of first-world skin-colour, languages and pretensions.

Cultural: Canada added $22-billion to its foreign debt in 1990, pushing its accumulated foreign obligations to almost $260-billion. Relative to the size of the economy, this comprises the highest foreign debt, and the largest per capita foreign debt, among all major industrialized countries. When compared to its gross national product, indeed, Canada's foreign indebtedness surpasses even that of Brazil.

Concurrently, Canada's significant banks, businesses, and universities tend to be large, few in number, provincially centred, governmentally supported and unaccustomed to competition. Their directorships interlock and are controlled by remarkably few members of a wealthy elite whose fortunes were secured and depend for their continuance upon control of the administrative accoutrements of colonial dependency. Divided historically into British and French enclaves (with minor emulations within each of the succeeding immigrant communities), members within each attend the same preparatory schools and universities (often in the foreign country of the dominating imperial power of the time) and thereafter share the same clubs, vacation destinations, lawyers, bankers and investment counsellors. And their descendants occupy the upper-ranks of the governmental ministries having portfolios of economic consequence.

Our parliamentary governments at both federal and provincial levels, structured originally by imperial fiat to ensure stability, control and the absence of agitation, render it difficult for common Canadians to predict the behaviour, when elected, of parties sitting in opposition to the government, for the only identity permitted them, legally and by custom, is to "oppose" the policies of the government (whether good, bad or indifferent). Opposition members cannot participate in governing, have no responsibility for its consequences and hence can neither construct nor manifest tested alternatives. Voters at election time, by design, must either reaffirm what they have or gamble on a whim. Unsurprisingly, again by design, governments in office tend to stay there, or, if not, the civil service continues to run things as before with little impediment.

Lastly, but profoundly, education remains a provincial responsibility. There are no private universities anywhere in Canada. Yearly institutional funding by governmental grant ensures governmental control, and the aims and responsibilities of education at all levels, from professorial research to the socialization of children within elementary schools, coincide with the precepts required to sustain a thrifty and unquestioning subservience: consensus, stability, restraint, self-denial and propriety are valued whereas controversy, agitation, self-aggrandizement, extravagance and eccentricity are deplored.

Of the consequences of the colonial heritage of Canada, two are of especial relevance:

> **Centralization of Culture:** Control of Canada's enterprises remains firmly in the hands of a very few Canadians whose good fortunes, as corporate endeavours become increasingly costly and integrated, depend upon servicing the imperial interests of the United States. Significant economic enterprises require massive amounts of capital and hence can be financed solely through Canada's three centres of banking and exchange, the dominant cities of Toronto in the middle, Vancouver to the west and Montreal to the east.[4] Unsurprisingly, the financing and control of Canada's cultural enterprises accrue increasingly to these cities as well, and therewith increasingly the foci of its educational endeavours.
>
> **Lack of Private Support for the Arts or Education:** For over 400 years the *raison d'être* of the colonies of Canada has been to service the economical needs of foreign powers. Indigenous *artistic* or *academic* activity (except by the young or the marginal, and only then in moderation) has been considered by almost all Canadians to be wasteful at best and an unCanadian effrontery at worst, especially by those of the elite delegated by the colonizers to colonize the rest. They have commonly presupposed that, since it is the function of the government to ensure a useful supply of contented labourers to serve foreign interests, whatever artistic or academic endeavours are required is a *governmental* responsibility.

Unsurprisingly, Canada, unlike the United States, has no tradition whatsoever of private or corporate support for the arts or education. Neither, however, has it a tradition of strong *governmental* support for such enterprises, for unlike the imperial countries of

[4] Only Calgary and Edmonton succeed occasionally in playing a less-centralized game, but it is always a more American one, for the oil brokers of Alberta simply realized more quickly than other Canadians that our colonial allegiances had shifted from the European east to the American south.

Europe, its citizens have been conditioned always to look elsewhere for models of artistic and academic achievement.

The Innovation of American Imperialism

Given Canada's geography and its history of colonial enculturation, one can hardly blame Americans for playing the colonial game with it. If, however, we are to understand the rules of the imperial game now being played by the Americans *and their Canadians* in Canada, an additional lesson must be learned, for contrary to the misunderstanding of most Americans, the United States is neither a reluctant nor unsuspecting colonizer. Rather, it originated and perpetuates the most pervasive and sophisticated form of imperialism ever devised.

Classical imperialists relied, by and large, upon coercion to sustain the economic engine of colonization. Coercion costs money, however, and hence refinements were devised, the most effective among them being the British system of "responsible government" that sustained the Commonwealth for so long and entrapped Canada even longer: administration of the economy in the interests of Britain by an elite core of well-trained *Canadians* rewarded for their loyalty and answering directly to only a few representatives of the Crown.

Under "responsible government", savings were immense and control secure, but a flaw remained: support for the system was top-down, not bottom-up. Any one of the many on the bottom could see who was ruling whom and where the benefits were going, and hence the pain of colonialism, however dampened, was unextinguished.

A subtler system, however, was on its way. By the 1930s, the marketeers of the United States had devised and were mastering an unprecedented art, namely the selling of wants and hopes to masses of consumers through media advertising. They had discovered that, through advertising, one could generate wants indistinguishable from needs *without coercion.*

Powerful Americans soon realized that they held in their hands a tool of unprecedented power by means of which they could achieve a remarkable measure of imperial control over economies anywhere in the world *without coercion*, provided only that control over the *channels of film distribution* in those countries was assured. The most effective tool for generating awareness and demand for American *products* in other countries were American *films*, for by means of films one could generate demand for the accoutrements of the American lifestyle – a demand that would translate irrevocably into support for the American industries producing and exporting those products.

By 1950, therefore, the government of the United States had articulated as a central aspect of its foreign policy the domination of foreign screens by American films, and especially the screens of Canada – America's largest and most accessible film market.

Feature Exhibition, Distribution & Production

To control exhibition within a country is to control the distribution and therewith the production of its films, for films must be *seen* if they are to return their investment and spawn offspring.

By the 1920s, Paramount Pictures ran the core urban cinemas of Canada through control of its dominant theatre chain, Famous Players. By the 1940s, control of Famous Players had been extended to outright ownership, while other American majors exerted a controlling interest over its only competitor, Odeon Theatres. And from 1924 onward, the Motion Picture Exhibitors & Distributors of Canada, a cartel of the distribution subsidiaries of the American majors, coordinated the allocation of American features in Canada, assuring through block and blind booking that only the two chains would have access to lucrative first-run films, and that, in return, the remaining screen time would be taken up largely by excess American productions.

For over 75 years, therefore, the American majors have dominated first-run exhibition in Canada and therewith exhibition in general (for the spill-over from successful first-runs is the most lucrative and hence enticing option for second-run cinemas as well, requiring little if any advertising to secure audiences). By 1975, Famous Players and Odeon owned 40% of the screens in Canada and 60% of those in its largest provincial market, Ontario, including essentially all of Canada's first-run houses, and thus collected 60% of its box-office revenues. 100% of the first-run American films from MGM, Paramount, United Artists and Warner Brothers were exhibited by Famous Players; 100% of Columbia's and Universal's went to Odeon; and 100% of the first-run films of 20th-century Fox were divided between the two.[5]

[5] The only serious challenge to American domination of exhibition and distribution in Canada was raised by Garth Drabinsky and Cineplex, his independent Canadian chain, between 1982 and 1985. Through a series of daring expansions into the American exhibition market itself, coupled with lawsuits and the threat of them, Drabinsky succeeded in a startlingly short time in forcing the American majors to accept his biddings for a share of their first-run films. He purchased Odeon Theatres in 1985, forming the Cineplex-Odeon Corporation that by 1987 had become the largest theatre chain in North America controlling 1500 screens in 21 American states and 6 provinces of Canada. Unfortunately, the expansion required massive amounts of borrowed capital that could only be secured by accepting a 50% investment by MCA, the American theatre conglomerate. By 1990 MCA had forced Drabinsky out of the corporation –

Domination of first-run exhibition assures control of indigenous distribution and production as well. Canadian producers and distributors must have access to the American market, for they cannot recoup their costs within Canada alone: the market is too small. To the American majors, however, Canada is considered part of a single, unified North American market for which all rights, if any, must be secured – and they alone control access to the *American* market, for only they can afford to distribute costly first-run films within it, only they can saturate American screens through block and blind bookings and only they can deny access by competitors to American exhibitors by threatening to switch their lucrative first-run films to other chains.

Canadian distributors, therefore, are prohibited from distributing *any* significant films within Canada, *whether American, Canadian or otherwise.* Even if bidding were open (which, of course, it isn't), they could not afford to compete with the American majors for the North American rights to significant first-run films, and they cannot bid for the Canadian rights alone, for Canadian rights must be packaged with those for the United States or access to the American market will be denied.[6] And no distributor, unable to distribute first-run films, can long afford to stay in business, much less in big business.

Control of distribution by the American majors ensures their control of Canadian production as well. When the ratio of the Canadian to the American dollar is low, the majors find it strikingly advantageous to use Canadian locations, technical personnel and facilities to make American films. Our major urban centres can easily be made to look American but, unlike New York or Los Angeles as locations, are clean, crime-free and full of excellent yet inexpensive restaurants; the working language of central and western Canadians, and therewith the appearance of the signs that surround them in Toronto and Vancouver in particular, is American (hardly English.); our crews and laboratories are world-class; and both provincial and federal governments are recurringly prone to subsidize American productions having only token Canadian input.

Since the 1920s, by design since the 1930s and *articulately* so since the 1950s, the American majors have routinely raised the "production value" of their films by using expensive technologies inaccessible to competitors (quadrupling the average cost of a

---

and yet another American firm was firmly in control of an even larger share of Canadian exhibition. (See Pendakur, op. cit, pages 111-113 for the figures cited in the paragraph; and Chapter 7 for more on Drabinsky's manoeuvres prior to the collapse.)

[6] "Free Trade" to the Americans does not mean open bidding by Canadians and Americans for each other's products. Rather, it means unimpeded access for American products to the Canadian market through American subsidiaries in Canada, while effectively denying access to the American market for Canadians and their products through the obvious advantages of massive capitalization – textbook neocolonialism in 1990s dress!

first-run film since the mid-1970s alone). By coming to Canada to do more and more of their filmmaking, Americans have driven up the costs of filmmaking to match the demand. Our rates for talent and lab work, once low enough to permit unsubsidized production of indigenous films, are now comparable to those of Los Angeles or New York and hence increasingly prohibitive for *Canadian* filmmakers without access to comparable sources of funding.

Canada, therefore, has become a branch plant for generating American productions. When the dollar is low, Toronto crews and laboratory technicians, for example, have more work on *American* films than they can handle, and at American rates. No one can blame them for preferring quick and hard cash to goodwill, especially since the volatility of investments and exchange rates ensures that a higher dollar will recurringly cycle through every few years, puncturing the investment balloon, throwing everyone out of work and yet again destroying the colonized industry of American filmmaking in Canada.

The only choice open to Canadian *producers*, on the other hand, is to try to make a denaturalized product for the American market within an undercapitalized industry assisted by co-production funding, or government grants or both (perhaps aiming at a niche as yet insufficiently cultivated by the Americans, say "children's films", for example, or MEATBALLS!). Such a film, if marketable, will be distributed by the American majors with the primary share of the profits being theirs, for retrieval of the costs of production will otherwise be denied; and viewers in Canada and elsewhere will see a film indistinguishable from the pap produced everywhere else for the Americans (and which, if it is *really* successful, may generate a sequel *made in Hollywood*).

Whatever happens in Canada (low dollar or high; successful films or failures), the American majors win. They control the *marketplace* and hence can buy or not buy whatever services or products they choose. Any film actor, cinematographer or technician in Canada can sell their talents intermittently to the Americans but with no hope whatsoever of a secure and satisfying future. Any clever producer, director or writer, with sufficient devotion and governmental assistance, can get a movie made in Canada to which they have devoted ten years of their lives and, should it prove marketable (that is, look enough like an American movie), see the benefits accrue to the Americans. And if one dislikes deception, one can move to Los Angeles and work for the Americans in America (and in sunshine as well!), following in the footsteps of Max Sennett, Mary Pickford, Jack Warner, or more lately Norman Jewison, Donald Sutherland, Mark Irwin or Michael J. Fox, becoming (as the joke goes) a resident of the 3rd largest *Canadian* city in North America.

No matter what Canadians do with respect to films (watch, study, make, distribute or exhibit them), they contribute one and all to the Americanization of Canada. Most do so

unwittingly but a favoured few for the enticing rewards of colonial betrayal through service on the boards of American enterprises or investment in their products.

No wonder a viable, independent, indigenous *Canadian* film industry has never developed regardless of the efforts of government or the multiple commissions that recurringly comment upon it. No wonder we have *growth* without *development*, *consensus* without *identity* and *dedication* without *purpose* within the filmmaking industry of Canada – for that is what colonization is all about.

Within the Canadian colony, students, audiences, exhibitors, distributors and producers are being used (bought, sold and disposed of) to serve the interests of the American majors. The result, though predictable, is startlingly conclusive:

A report commissioned by the government of Canada in 1987 estimated that nearly 90% of Canadian revenues from film and video were controlled by the American majors, while the proportion of feature films screened yearly in our cinemas that are Canadian (by *any* measure of "Canadian", no matter how tenuous) has never exceeded 3% and commonly is half that or less.[7]

Studying Filmmaking in Canada

Given the forces aligned externally and internally to prevent the filming of Canadians by Canadians for Canadians, it is hardly surprising that Canada has no *national* film school nor any national programmes to strengthen and coordinate the training of its filmmakers.

Canada is a collection of provinces, the allegiance of its citizens are largely provincial rather than federal, and education is a provincial responsibility. The question of *where* a national film school could be placed is therefore politically unanswerable, as is the question of *what* it would do. Were it to encourage local production on topics of local interest (that is, the interests of the province in which it is placed), the rest of Canada would object; were it alternatively to stimulate filmmaking detached from local concerns, it would inevitably, given the colonial context, become yet another tool for the further Americanization of filmmaking in Canada.

---

[7] See *Vital Links: Canadian Cultural Industries* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1987), page 43; and Pendakur, op. cit., page 29. During the same period the percentage of indigenous features to all features shown in other comparable countries ranged from 20% in Australia to 48% in France, with Britain (26%) and Italy (44%) in between.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the only significant training of filmmakers in Canada occurs within a very few of its *universities*, each of them located within one of Canada's three centres of banking, exchange and media production (Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver) and all fed by a bevy of college programmes offering a range of basic technical instruction (colleges in Canada being two-year trade and pre-university institutions).[8]

Toronto dominates the training in "English" Canada through the universities of Ryerson and York, the former having trained many of the working radio, television and film technicians in the area, while the latter, through a curriculum designed to encompass a blend of production, writing and film studies, has dominated the training of independent documentary producers, writers and cinematographers. Each school can accept only one of ten applicants to its undergraduate programmes and sees nearly 85% of its small number of graduates enter the industry; the upper-level productions of both schools have dominated the student filmmaking awards of "English" Canada, while those of York recurringly win top honours at international competitions; and York offers the oldest, best known and, to date, most fruitful *graduate* production programme in Canada.

Two other graduate production programmes exist in Canada. One, a new but viable programme at Concordia University in Montreal, was designed to complement an excellent undergraduate programme comparable to York's but encompassing an animation concentration as well. The graduate programme, like the undergraduate, can serve not only anglophone students but also (and uniquely) francophone students in their own language emerging from the undergraduate French production programmes at the University of Montreal and the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM).[9]

The only other graduate production programme in Canada, unfortunately, has never lived up to the promise of either its university or its location. The master's programme in production at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver has graduated no important filmmakers, circulated no films and seems, as I write, to exist largely on

---

[8] The prairie universities in Regina and Winnipeg, and several of the art schools in the maritime provinces, have succeeded as well as or better than anyone could have hoped in introducing their students to filmmaking. Winnipeg, indeed (and to some extent the others) can now boast of being the centre of a coterie of dedicated local filmmakers producing recurringly some of the most interesting and innovative films in all of Canada (enacted films amongst them). Being far from the media centres of Canada, however, their impact upon the sensibilities of other filmmakers has been far less than deserved.

[9] The fortunes of Concordia, as yet predominantly an English-language institution, are intertwined with the interesting future of a devoutly francophone Quebec. One hopes that the recent and costly advertising campaign mounted in the buses and subways of *Toronto* to entice anglophone students into its programmes is a sign of confidence and not ill-health.

paper. Much interesting *experimental* filmmaking is being done nearby at Simon Fraser University, but only at the undergraduate level.

Two facets of production training in Canada, graduate and undergraduate, are salient:

1. Not one of the older universities of Canada, established originally to educate the children of its wealthy elite, has managed to generate within it a viable programme of film production. Production training remains the exclusive provenance of 2-year colleges, art schools or the newer urban universities created since 1960 to serve especially the offspring of first-generation immigrants (Concordia, Ryerson, York).

2. The core instruction within the viable production programmes has been provided almost exclusively by first-generation residents of Canada uniquely aware of yet unimpressed by its colonial legacy (expatriate Americans, Czechs, English, Lithuanians, etc.), or Francophones in Quebec accustomed to resisting all legacies in languages other than French.[10]

Given the division between the traditional centres of education favoured by the neocolonial elite and the newer schools committed to training in film production, it is hardly surprising that the latter have been compelled to survive, ofttimes precariously, with neither dedicated governmental nor corporate support for either their programmes or the filmmaking efforts of their students. Students of filmmaking in Canada do not qualify for any of the provincial or federal funding grants for filmmakers; instructional grants to the institutions are no higher per student than for those studying painting or sculpture; and no provincial or federal programme whatsoever is dedicated to assisting students in producing a first feature film upon graduation, no matter how extraordinary their achievement.

Having taught writing and production to students in three countries on two continents over twenty-five years, many of whom have made internationally-adjudicated prize-winning films, I speak with authority when I affirm that the work being done by upper-level production students in Canada is uniformly first-rate, and the best of it is unexcelled anywhere in the world. Were our graduates to be enabled by their governments to take the next step in developing the filmmaking skills they have already acquired within the universities, an indigenous and viable *Canadian* film industry would be assured.

---

[10] Even the film *studies* programmes devoted most directly to the sustained investigation of the history of Canadian film and its makers reside in untraditional universities (York predominant amongst them, but Concordia, Simon Fraser and Windsor as well).

To do so, of course, would be to fly in the face of the Americanized interests already entrenched. Instead, in Ontario, both the provincial government and its federal counterpart, *supported by the American majors*, have sunk several millions of dollars since the late 1980s into Norman Jewison's Centre for Advanced Film Study. The Centre, housed on a magnificent estate in north Toronto, admits 12 students yearly as "residents", all of them mature, distinguished in non-directorial aspects of the art and well-connected to the industry (Brigitte Berman, John Greyson, Margot Kidder, Peter Raymont, for example). All expenses are paid. At the end of the year, a half-dozen are selected to continue for a second year to complete a short enacted film and perhaps generate a feature-length project.

What has been the result? A number of short films unworthy of international competition with nary a viable feature film conceived – exactly as one would expect from an *elite* institution designed by Canadians to further the interests of the American majors in Canada by mimicking the programme of the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, rather than assisting the best of our young directors, committed to making Canadian films in Canada, upon graduation with international honours from the *non-elite* production programmes of Ontario.

One must applaud the cleverness of the game being played here with the hopes and aspirations of the young filmmakers of Canada. Should a feature project ever be developed at the Jewison Centre, it would, of course, be pitched to the American market through the American majors – and in the meantime *two governments of Canada have paid millions to cover the losses.* One would be hard pressed to conceive of a more brilliant example of the colonization of the Canadian mind.

The Future

Would it be possible in Canada to make films of and by Canadians that Canadians would want to see and yet would cost us no more than we are now spending to support *American* filmmaking? Assuredly! We could do so, and quickly, and spend no more than our governments are now spending on futile enterprises like Telefilm (the federal funding agency established to support feature filmmaking by Canadians) or the Jewison Centre.

Nuances aside, were a portion (say $60-million) of the monies now allocated yearly through Telefilm to be divided equally each year among 60 proposals for low-budget features from filmmakers across Canada, selected in quarterly competition by a panel of Canada's most successful *teachers* of film production accustomed to assessing such proposals day in and day out, subject to the following conditions:

Each film must be producible in Canada for $1 million and focus upon events recognizably Canadian; each person involved in the production must be a citizen of Canada; and the writers, director and crew must have graduated from a recognized school of film production with appropriate credits on a credibly-enacted and sustained short film, or otherwise have secured such credits or better,

we should have produced 300 low-budget *Canadian* feature films within five years, the majority of them as credible, accessible and intriguing as the international standard now being set within the viable film programmes of our universities and a remarkable number of them worthy of sustained international attention – a record surpassing anything Telefilm has achieved or will ever achieve.

Were the remainder of the Telefilm budget (say $15-million) to be devoted yearly to securing within the major cities of Canada accessible and attractive screening facilities in which the 25 best films of each year could have a two-week run, advertised in the schools, colleges and universities and coordinated with visits by the filmmakers, etc., with the cost of admission half that charged by the American majors, and were the films to be made inexpensively available thereafter via videotape and laser disc for unrestricted private and educational uses within the country, we should have driven a wedge into the colonial legacy from which it would never recover.

And were the governmental monies now expended on the Jewison Centre alone to be divided yearly amongst the film schools that have trained the filmmakers who recurringly make the films in competition of most interest to Canadian audiences (with perhaps a bit diverted yearly to sustain an institute or two devoted to film development, modeled upon Redford's "Sundance Institute" *and not the AFI*), we should have ensured the long-term viability of indigenous filmmaking in Canada.

Will it ever happen? Will we ever put good money after good rather than bad, building upon what has been achieved rather than what others would use us to achieve? Will the Americanization of our filmmaking ever be challenged?

Of course not! To do so would be to esteem more highly what we have than what others would have us buy from them, and hence to act contrary to the American Way – contrary, that is, to how Canadian colonials have been taught to act. Canadians will continue to reward the few who control the many, blaming twinges of residual discomfort upon personal or collective inadequacy and ensuring that the hopes of the young never go to their heads.

Epilogue

Had the film reviewer of the *Globe & Mail* reflected accurately and sensitively the task facing would-be makers of Canadian films for Canadians in 1992, he would have said something like the following:

> Filmmaking in Canada, as an expression of the lives and hopes of its colonized peoples, is nonexistent and will remain so. As with our apples, lumber, oil, gas, water and electricity, we who reside here shall send an increasing number of our young people southward for processing into American filmmakers while training the rest to make films in Canada for the American market, exactly as those who lived here before us shipped cod, beaver and lumber to be processed in England, and their sons to die in English battles, while serving themselves crumpets and tea on bone china embossed with the image of the Queen.

But that, in context, would have been inappropriate. UnCanadian, even.