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**IDEOLOGY AND CRITICAL POLITICS
IN THE DISCOURSE ON CANADIAN CINEMA**

by
MALEK KHOURI, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
(Master of Arts)

Department of Canadian Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
May 28, 1997
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"Ideology and Critical Politics in the
Discourse on Canadian Cinema"

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a specific interpretation of the notion of ideology in the critical writing on Canadian cinema. It assesses the implications of conceiving ideology as a 'negative' or passive expression of social and cultural domination.

After examining how ideology is conceptualized in film theory in general and in Canadian film criticism in particular, the thesis proposes a strategy for a 'socially interested' reading of Canadian cinema, one which articulates a 'neutral' articulation of the working of ideology in the cultural sphere. It emphasizes the need to address the role played by the social subject in the unfolding of ideology as an element within the hegemonic relationships in which it historically resides.

To My Parents

**Huneineh Nahas
And
Mounir Khoury**

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INTRODUCTION

Arts and culture play a crucial role in producing and reproducing the ideology which supports existing social production relations. As Walter Benjamin emphasized, through new forms of distribution and exhibition, art in the modern age has been able to break away from isolation and increase the level of human participation in the process of its creation and reception. Through marketing and reproduction, the arts have become functional elements in ideological and political struggles.

While useful in several areas of research, the concepts which dominate critical writing on Canadian cinema (as an expression of cultural identity, a separate notion of artistic achievement, or as a simple account for the output of films by Canadian artists) are facing new challenges. Developments in the fields of mass culture and communications are bringing new perspectives into the way people live and assess their cultural environment.

Recent drives to abate the role of the state in television, cinema, and Canadian cultural industries attest to the need for an analytical outlook which accounts for the shifting nature of Canadian cinematic production and reception. While introducing cutbacks in its monetary support to cultural projects and agencies, governments on all levels in Canada are modifying their traditional approach towards the issue of national culture. As they officially support the idea of Canadian cultural creativity and autonomy, government officials primarily call for producing material that is marketable and competitive internationally.

However, the contradictory dynamic which characterizes government cultural policies does not occur in isolation. Less conspicuous in this dynamic are the implicit ideological connotations broaching how 'art' and 'culture' are to be conceived under late capitalist conditions. This aspect of the challenge reemphasizes the need to address the political nature of today's critical preoccupations and analyses.

The changing cultural and political grounds which encourage the incorporation of social and cultural heterogeneity within the Canadian cultural landscape, also invite the reassessment of the role played by cinema in relation to 'national' and cultural realities. In turn, critical reading of Canadian

cinema is being challenged to address circumstances which are different from the ones it had to contend with in the early seventies when the interest in Canadian feature film was beginning to take shape.

On the one hand, and as with other forms of cultural discourses, film produces effects that contribute to shaping bodies of consciousness. These are elements in complex ideological constructions which influence the preservation and/or transformation of existing systems of social, economic, and political power.

On the other hand, critical writing on Canadian fiction film is affected by the historical constraints and dispersions of what I will critically label the 'Canadian experience'. This writing has its specific support network of terminology, scholarship, institutions, and bureaucracies which help define its shape and development. It also informs, and is informed by, the complex working of hegemonic structures within a historically specific social and economic landscape, one that gives preference to specific (i.e., Canadian) sociodiscursive formations.

Discourse analysis helps to point out some systemic and strategic limitations (and possibilities) in the critical writing on Canadian cinema.

Although it does not 'determine' everything that is said and discussed about this topic, critical discourse does maintain political, aesthetic, and theoretical presence in all discussions on Canadian cinema.

This study assesses the significance and the limitations of the usage of a specific articulation of the notion of ideology in Canadian film criticism, one which tends to conceive of ideology as a 'negative' social and cultural element. By studying this aspect of film criticism, this study hopes to elaborate a better understanding of the historical and social dynamics of the fluidly constituted beast we call the 'Canadian experience'.

After years of seeking to identify a 'national' character for its cinema, and after becoming more accommodating towards the heterogeneous nature of Canadian identity, much of English Canadian film criticism continues to centre on exploring a dichotomy between what is usually termed the Hollywood and/or popular film models, and the home grown alternative cinematic practice of a loosely labeled Canadian or 'art cinema'. In many respects, this approach postulates 'dominant' ideology as false consciousness to which only an alternative ideological cinematic model (based on nation, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) can remedy the consequences of its negative role and effectivity.

This critical approach tends to eclipse and mystify the social and historical dimensions surrounding the filmic text and narrative. While apprehensive about the dangers of reductionism, and as it incorporates a culturally more heterogeneous analysis, writing on Canadian cinema remains restrictive in its appreciation of the full dynamic of the social and historical context of the cinematic experience. It arbitrarily cages the study of film against the workings of hegemonic ideological formations and against the historical framework of those formations. Under this perspective, cultural identity assumes a static and ahistorical position and destiny; it becomes tied to a passive interpretation of the working of ideology: one which ignores or underestimates the complexity of hegemonic ideological functions. This approach consequently poses a passive social spectator/subject with limited capacity to interrogate or resist the impact of cinematic practice.

This form of determinism, similar in its critical limitations to forms of social and economic determinism, dehistoricizes Canadian cinema and contributes to limiting the ability to account for its counter hegemonic capacity as a mediator. It also mystifies the poignant material interests and the unequal relationships between a 'dominant' centre and 'dominated' margins, and blurs in the process the dynamics of social relations. Ultimately, this tendency contributes to concealing the antagonisms as well as the liberating possibilities inscribed in social and political relations.

By exploring aspects in the discussion of ideology in film theory, this study points out some of the implications of its usage in connection with the concepts of identity and social and political hegemony. It proposes a theoretical base for seeking a 'socially interested' critical strategy of reading Canadian cinema. Such a reading, one hopes, can contribute to extending the role of culture in Canadian transformatory politics, as well as expanding the role of such politics in the field of cultural practice.

While referring to a number of academics and critics whose works have significant impact on the development of the discourse on Canadian cinema, this study has no intention of giving an empirical who's who of those agencies of film criticism. Such a task is clearly beyond the formal and strategic limitations of this particular thesis; it is also beyond the goal of assessing the utilization of the notion of ideology in the discourse on this cinema. In other words, this study is not contingent on an inclusive inventory of all the texts that deal with this cinema or with this topic.

As it accounts for the issues of identity, representation, and marginalized social subjectivities, this thesis provides a theoretical insight into some alternative possibilities for situating these concerns critically. It conceives of culture as a domain of political struggle which, although dominated by the

interests and perceptions of specific power structures, remains subject to the consent and/or the contestation of 'dominated' classes and marginalized social groups. As it employs Marxism as a discursive theoretical practice, this thesis examines how appraising (and reappraising) the notion of ideology through the works of Althusser and Gramsci—particularly the latter's concept of hegemony—, continues to shape new directions in the area of theorizing cinema.

In the first chapter, ideology is appraised in terms of its 'negative' and 'positive' interpretations (i.e., ideology as a necessary distortion which conceals contradictions, and ideology as a neutral concept referring to the political consciousness of classes and social groupings including those of the proletarian class and other marginalized social elements). Chapter two focuses on the discourse on Canadian cinema. To identify some of the problems and to propose possibilities for developing critical writing on this cinema, the chapter surveys examples that are indicative of the main theoretical framework of 'nationalist' critical discourse. Emphasis will be placed on how this discourse incorporates ideology into its critical perspective.

Chapter three deals with 'non-nationalist' and other alternative approaches in Canadian film criticism and how they deal with the notion of ideology. The fourth chapter presents a theoretical application of ideological hegemony as a basis for a socially interested reading of Canadian cinema. The final chapter illustrates how ideological hegemony, through the working of 'common sense', can be incorporated into critical film analysis. This chapter provides a reading of Gordon Pinsent's 1987 film *John and the Missus* in relation to its sympathetic depiction of Newfoundlanders' resistance to a resettlement program which was initiated in the early 1960s, and how it is presented as an attempt to postpone the inevitability of change and progress. My analysis of the film reasserts that for an alternative discourse on Canadian cinema to play a role in addressing and contemplating strategies for counter hegemonic representation and resistance, it needs critically to situate film in the historical context of 'common sensical' intelligibilities.

CHAPTER ONE
GENERAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
IDEOLOGY IN FILM THEORY

Writing on Canadian cinema functions in a space of exchange among a multiplicity of other discourses, some of which are not restricted to the Canadian socio-historical formation. In his definition of a social discourse, Marc Angenot describes it as 'all that is said and written in a given society . . . or rather than this empirical totality . . . the generic system, the repertoires of topics, the rules of utterance formation which, in a given society, organize the sayable—the narratable and the verisimilar—and insure the division of discursive labour' (Angenot, 1994: 35).

Critical writing on Canadian cinema is not isolated from other political, cultural, and theoretical practices that inform comparable writings outside the specificity of the Canadian context. Other elements can also be implicated in the general development of the English Canadian 'tradition' of film criticism. This writing, for example, is informed by complex temporal frameworks, ones

that go back as far as the early film screenings of the late nineteenth century. Likewise, the development of this practice can also be traced to a wide geographic span of critical practices, which could encompass almost all the locales in which film screenings have taken place—and written about—since the ‘advent’ of cinema. Furthermore, the development of critical film writing is itself largely informed by a multiplicity of influences and debates both from inside and outside the discipline of film studies. One important thrust within the academic discourse on film relates to the discussions and elaborations on the notion of ideology.

As it struggles to establish its own autonomous disciplinary base, critical writing on film has been shaped by the intensity and vigour which characterized the interdisciplinary discussions and applications of this notion. To draw a theoretical background for assessing some of the nuances in the discourse on Canadian cinema, this chapter will probe the concept of ideology as it impacts on the discursive development of film theory in general.

I will map out areas of confluence between, on the one hand, Marxist based notions of ideology and hegemony (mainly through the contributions by Althusser and Gramsci), and on the other hand, the general domain of film theory. The chapter will survey how the appraisal and reappraisal of the works of Althusser and Gramsci shapes new and more complex directions in

the area of theorizing cinema. This involves an examination of how film theory has evolved in the direction of recognizing the presence of 'contesting' elements within hegemonic ideological formations.

Culture is therefore conceived as a domain of political struggle which, although dominated by the interests and perceptions of a 'hegemonic social bloc', is also exposed to vigorous contestations from the 'dominated' classes and other marginalized social groups. With this in mind, I will stress the need to re-articulate some theoretical considerations to foster a heterogenic reading of cinema, one that situates an active subject/spectator within the socio-historical dynamics of culture. I will also emphasize the importance of looking at the didactic notion of base and superstructure in the context of a 'historical bloc' within which social mediation plays the role of determining ideological effectivity.

'Negative' and 'Positive' Interpretations of Ideology

Many discussions on ideology begin with Marx's formulation in his book *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1987: 39). Marx stresses,

that "each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, merely to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society." Ideally, the dominant class gives its ideas "the form of universality, and represents them as the only rational, universally valid ones" (39).

This particular notion of ideology involves the reproduction of the existing relations of production, and the limiting of the subject's position within the processes of communication and exchange. Accordingly, the movement of productive forces (mainly working people themselves, but also the material tools of production), plays a central role in determining and transforming the shape of society. A vulgarized interpretation of this notion tends to devise a 'dialectic' through which the movement of cultural products, ideology included, advances mechanically through the process of transformation of existing production relations.

An important element in critical writing on film prior to the 1960s largely focused on a 'negative' appropriation of Marx's notion of ideology. With varying levels of analytical depth and emphasis, this writing accentuated how the 'dominant ideology' is reflected in cinematic practices. With this assumption in mind, critical writing focused on discussing the thematic and

content messages put forward by films, and designating in the process, the ideological identity and effectivity of those messages. The concept of 'social realist' cinema, for example, proposed alternative political and thematic film topics as a foundation for providing a cinematic 'opposition' to the 'dominant ideology'.

While this approach was crucial in devising primary analytical applications for an 'ideological' theorization of cinema, it proved less productive in relating economic and political determinations to the questions and concerns about subjectivity, consciousness, and ideological perception. Its conception of ideology as false consciousness, as an all encompassing superstructural formation which mechanically 'reflects' the interests and the views of the socially dominant class, led to a potentially 'negative' and reductionist theorization of cinema.

Discussions around ideology since the late 1960s occurred in the context of a protracted struggle between 'negative' and 'positive' interpretations of this notion. In essence, those debates posed ideology as a necessary distortion which conceals social interests and contradictions, against ideology as a neutral concept which refers also to the political consciousness of classes and groups, including those of the dominated classes and 'marginalized' social formations.

In turn, film criticism since the late 1960s gradually shifted towards seeking systematic theoretical frameworks. Among the sources it benefited from was French structuralism and semiotic analysis and, later, post-structuralist and post-semiotic approaches to text and knowledge. Film theory also incorporated elements of contemporary Marxism and psychoanalysis. This theorizing was discussed and elaborated in the British journal *Screen* throughout the 1970's. Offshoots of those discussions gradually became the new orthodoxy among film academics. While reading film sociopolitically (originally inspired by *Cahiers du Cinema* editors' discussion of the 1939 film *Young Mr. Lincoln*), the new critical orientation also incorporated elements from Lacanian psychology and Althusser's theory of ideology.

From False Consciousness To Interpellation and Overdetermination

Althusser stressed that ideology discloses a specific way of 'representing' reality: that while it makes allusion to the real in a certain way, ideology simultaneously bestows only an illusion of reality (Althusser, 1990: 26). He contended that ideology gives people a certain 'knowledge' of their world, or rather allows them to 'recognize' themselves in that world. At the same time, ideology only introduces people to its misrecognition: "allusion-illusion or recognition-misrecognition- such is ideology from the perspective of its relation to the real" (26).

According to Althusser, the first essential characteristic of ideology is that it is comprehensible only through its form, and that it comprises representations, images, signs, etc. Ideology, however, is not a simple tally of the elements of which it is constituted; "it is their mode of arrangement and combination" which provides them with their meaning (26). In other words, it is the form and structure of those elements which determines their meaning and function.

On the other hand, the structure and mechanisms of ideology are no more readily visible to the people subjected to them than the structure of the relations of production and the mechanisms of economic life produced by it are visible to the agents of production (Althusser, 1990: 26). Enticed by Jacques Lacan and psychoanalysis, Althusser located the function of ideology within the process of constituting the individual as a subject. He demonstrated that ideology is not simply an illusion or false consciousness of the 'real' nature of society, but is instead a material system of social practices (what he calls 'ideological state apparatuses') producing certain effects upon individuals and providing them with their social identities. Ideology 'naturalizes' or 'makes obvious' the ways in which people live lives in society; it is a 'representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (1977a: 152-3).

Althusser also described how 'interpellation' functions as the ongoing process by which subjects are constituted in ideology. In order to describe this process, he employed insights into the construction of the subject as provided by Lacan. The infant ego is constituted by the child's identification with, or misrecognition of, its own autonomy and self-presence. Althusser suggested that such recognition and misrecognition works as well in the social world at the level of ideology; the human subject regains, through ideology, an imaginary construction of its own autonomy. He argued that ideology, through the ideological recognition function, 'recruits' and transforms individuals into subjects.

The recognition function is the process of 'interpellation': ideology interpellates or 'hails' individuals, that is, addresses itself directly to them. Althusser gave as an example a police officer hailing an individual by calling, 'Hey, you there!' The hailed individual will turn around, recognize himself as the one who was hailed, and in the process become constituted as a subject. All hailed individuals, recognizing or misrecognizing themselves in the address, are transformed into subjects conceiving of themselves as free and autonomous members of a society that has in fact constructed them. 'Interpellation' is achieved mainly through ideological state apparatuses such as church, family, educational system, trade unions, media etc. These

apparatuses, rather than the repressive state apparatus of police and courts, secure the reproduction of social relations, and allow people to assume their sense of identity and the 'reality' of their position (Althusser, 1977a: 127–86).

The main ideology question for Althusser, therefore, relates to understanding *how* human subjects succumb to the dominant ideologies of their societies. Consequently, as Terry Eagleton suggests (1988: 171), the question involves assessing how such submission to ideology (critical to maintaining the power of a ruling class) occurs, and "by what mechanisms does this come about?" (171):

What Althusser does, in other words, is to rethink the concept of ideology in terms of Lacan's 'imaginary'. For the relation of an individual subject to society as a whole in Althusser's theory is rather like the relation of the small child to his or her mirror-image in Lacan's. In both cases, the human subject is supplied with an object which reflects this image back to it in a closed, narcissistic circle. In both cases, too, this image involves a misrecognition, since it idealizes the subject's real situation. The child is not actually as integrated as its image in the mirror suggests; I am not actually the coherent, autonomous, self-generating subject I know myself to be in the ideological sphere, but the 'decentred' function of several social determinants. Duly enthralled by the image of myself I receive, I subject myself to it; and it is through this 'subjection' that I become a subject. (172-3)

The subject here is not forced to submit to ideological determinants. Implicit in Althusser's theorization is an element of 'self-subjection' practiced by this subject: 'I subject myself to it'. It is within this context that Althusser's approach contributes to moving the concept of ideology away from its essentialist 'negative' interpretation connected with 'false consciousness'.

The 'structurality' of this subjection gives a space for a 'self-subjection' which is not unequivocally determined by elements of the base (or the infrastructure), but is rather 'overdetermined' by all structural elements including those of the infrastructure *and* the superstructure. For Althusser, the total structure of the social body determines and is determined by "the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates; it might be called overdetermined in its principle" (1977b: 101). He stressed that the capitalist-labour contradiction is always "specified by the forms of the superstructure" and "by the internal and external historical situation," and therefore is "always overdetermined" (106).

Althusser In Film Theory

Through their elaboration of the notion of ideology, mainly as a 'misrecognition', film theoreticians since the late 1960s began to look at film in a new perspective. The *Cahiers du Cinema* article (1976: 493) on John Ford's film *Young Mr. Lincoln*, for example, suggested that the signifying practice and the system of signs lead to the possibility of an 'oppositional' reading of ideology in the film. The article used Althusser's analysis to map out several structural absences and gaps which revealed an underlying tension between, on the one hand, the text, and, on the other hand, the

ideology of the film. Consequently, the writers of the article emphasized the need to read the filmic text through the 'historicity' of its inscription and its relationship to codes (social, cultural, etc.).

While attempting to 'decipher' film 'units' (i.e. its structures and codes), film criticism became increasingly concerned with assessing the totality of the filmic structure. This gave weight to addressing film as a 'whole' –rather than as a summation of its constituting parts. Bill Nichols linked this strategy to assessing a filmic 'surplus' which includes "gaps, omissions, constraints, or even 'structuring absences' (the pressure of what is unsaid, upon that which is said)" (Nichols, 1976: 7). Nichols illustrated how *Cahiers du Cinema* conceived and adopted this approach:

[It] indicate[d] how these gaps can result from the operation of the dominant ideology and the specific circumstances surrounding and enmeshed within a particular film. The whole is greater than its parts because the parts form patterns of interference, patterns whose characteristics the formally oriented critic can work to clarify rather than obscure through a desire for harmony. (1976:7)

Cahiers was clearly elaborating a more positive interpretation of the concept of ideology. Critical assessment of the filmic 'whole' was considered possible because the ideologically informed text allowed for the detection of 'interfering absences' which were present through the filmic 'parts'.

Robert and Michael Lapsley argue that the *Cahiers* article emphasizes the 'Althusserian' perspective that the ideological operation of mainstream cinema discloses the reproduction of the capitalist system, and that its success in this domain is a function more of form than of content (Lapsley 1989: 8). In effect, the editors of *Cahiers du Cinema* were calling for "a revolutionary cinema that would break with the dominant ideology in respect of both form and content, and would establish a quite different relationship with its audience" (8).

Film critics (particularly in Europe) were increasingly interested in examining the ways that certain films were able to place obstacles against ideological hegemony. Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, for example, stressed that while communicating the world to itself, cinema is burdened by the need to reproduce things not as they really are, "but as they appear when refracted through ideology" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 25). This 'refraction', which underlies the general ideological discourse, occurs throughout the production/reception process, including its subjects, styles, forms, meanings, and narrative tradition. It is through recognizing that the mere nature of its system turns cinema into an instrument of ideology that one begins to appreciate the priority task facing the alternative film maker in 'showing up' the cinema's so-called 'depiction of reality'. When film makers succeed in this chore, disrupting, or even severing the connection between cinema and its

ideological functions becomes possible (25). Other film theoreticians entered the discussion on the function of cinema as an ideological tool.

While depicting ideology as a 'reality', Claire Johnston stressed the impossibility of eliminating this 'reality' "as if by an effort of will" (Johnston, 1976: 139). She referred to the tools and techniques of cinema both as part of reality, and as non-neutral expressions of the prevailing ideology: "It is not enough, [for example] to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film," Johnston contended, "the language of the cinema/ the depiction of reality must also be interrogated so that a break between ideology and text is effected" (140).

Stephen Heath, on the other hand, viewed the semiotic analysis of film as a specific signifying practice, as an "analysis of a heterogeneity, the range of codes and systems at work in film over and across its five matters of expression (moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noise, recorded musical sound, and writing)" (Heath, 1985: 512). In this context, Heath refuted the mechanistic notion of reducing film to its 'ideology', and proposed that it is "the complex relationships among pleasure, meaning, commodity or industry, signifying practice, and text [which] pose[s] the central challenges [to film theory], not formalism or content analysis" (1985: 509).

In its general analysis, the Althusserian intervention into film theory struggled with ways to explain why the ideological underpinning of a narrative film is important. Film critics of this tradition generally viewed narrative representational strategies as elements that obscure social relations, institutions, and the representational strategies themselves. In a nut shell, the Althusserian tradition in film theory amounted to employing a psychoanalysis of perception (primarily Lacanian) to explain the 'disinformational' interaction of ideology-laden film structures with a "positioned" viewing subject.

While conscious of the nuances and the complexities of ideological affectivity, theoreticians related to the *Cahiers* magazine, Comolli and Narboni, and to a lesser extent Nichols and Heath, generally overemphasized how popular film shores up the capitalist patriarchal status quo. Analyzing ideology in terms of how it is internalized by individual subjects can thus subscribe to the view that cultural forms are monolithic reflections or rationalizations of 'dominant' interests. But if cultural forms literally have no content or basis other than the 'subjective' expression of ruling-class (or dominant) interests, then there is little reason for the study of cultural practice to amount to anything more than deciding what aspect of ruling class ideology a given cultural form reflects (a formal, descriptive procedure), or for the investigation of how an individual subject's perceptions are induced to correspond to the ideology embodied.

Repositioning' the Text and the Subject in History

While accounting for the interaction between the film and the viewer, discussions in the seventies also pointed out the need to assess ideology and politics (both in and out of film), as involving more than understanding language and Freud. However, film theory during that period often steered into modes of analysis which remained problematic in many respects. Psychoanalytic and linguistic frameworks of analysis confused the issues even further.

Paradoxically, the very attempt to understand filmic 'representation' and to remove it from the realm of economic and social determinism, led to another form of 'totalization' which worked against understanding the complexity, heterogeneity, and the dynamics of filmic affectivity. Just as behaviour cannot be reduced solely to its economic factors, so too it cannot be reduced to psychoanalytical or linguistic textual elements, itself a form of cultural common sense. The works of Roland Barthes (who influenced film theory in the 1970s), and Michel Foucault, both add new depths to the discussion on ideology.

Barthes's elaborations on the role of the text , the author, and the subject in the formation and comprehension of the work of art (written in the late

fifties and only translated into English in the early seventies), have particular theoretical significance for film criticism. While Barthes did not attempt to explain how, or suggest that, ideology is produced through interactions between various institutions and discourses (Barthes referred to 'discourse' in the context of myth), he nevertheless, indirectly contributed to the elaboration of a 'positive' perception of the notion of ideology.

Barthes argued that the way discourse (or 'mythology') is circulated through society makes a particular representation of the world seem natural and universal, so that an outsider to it cannot be imagined except as 'unnatural', perverse, exotic, abnormal, stupid, and so on. But myth (as an ideological element) "hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion" (Barthes, 1976: 129). Instead of attempting to destroy myth by cynically making its intentions obvious, or by demystifyingly unmasking it (122), Barthes focused his attention on exploring its temporal dimension. He contended that in the visual myth:

[t]he elements of the form therefore are related as to place and proximity: the mode of presence of the form is spatial. The concept [as a distortion of meaning] on the contrary, appears in global fashion, it is a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain knowledge. Its elements are linked by associative relations: it is supported not by an extension but by a depth (although this metaphor is perhaps still too spatial): its mode of presence is memorial. (122)

While acknowledging its spatial dimension, Barthes also situates myth within

the parameters of an 'overdetermining' historical dimension (i.e., memorial), rather than restricting it to its structural 'overdeterminants'. I will come back to this notion later when I acknowledge the dichotomy between Althusser and Gramsci's views on the subject. It suffices to mention here, however, that the dichotomy in contextualizing ideology—i.e. between history and structure—has important consequences for the way film theory—and consequently Canadian film criticism—has traditionally overemphasized the significance of the filmic text.

On the other hand, Barthes emphasized the centrality of the role of language over the intention of the author. In contrast to the dominance and authority associated with the rising 'prestige of the individual' in the late Middle Ages, Barthes considered the 'modern' author as a mere 'scriptor' (1977: 145). The 'absence' of the 'author' has changed the modern text: instead of having a book and an author "stand[ing] automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after," the "modern scriptor" does not precede or exceed the work, but is born concurrently with it. The only existing moment is that of the 'enunciation', "and every text is eternally written here and now" (145). Writing is, therefore, a 'performative' process: the role of the 'scriptor' is not that of expression but of 'inscription', which has only language as its origin (146).

As a consequence of the author's 'disappearance', any attempt to decipher the text becomes an unavailing task, because it closes that text by suggesting it as a "final signified" (Barthes, 1977: 147). Instead, Barthes called for 'disentangling' the text; instead of attempting to uncover what is beneath the text, he proposed to run it "like a thread of a stocking" (147). The emphasis is therefore on a different critical element, one that places the 'subject'/reader/author in the steering position: consequently, it is the reader, existing within specific 'memorial presences' (read: historical), which 'determines' the effectivity of the text.

Michel Foucault, on the other hand, dealt with authorship from the perspective of the relationship between the text and the author, and how the text "points to the figure who is outside and precedes it" (Foucault, 1977: 14). Like Barthes, Foucault pointed out that writing has been "transformed into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier," and that by referring to itself, writing has "freed itself from the necessity of expression" (15). Writing, he stressed, is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears (15). But more explicitly than Barthes, and while acknowledging the changing circumstances that surround the author's role, Foucault stressed the need to understand how authorship works: what are its dynamics, and

ultimately how and what historical moments enhance its functionality.

Foucault stressed the necessity of elaborating "the conditions of any text, both the conditions of its spatial dispersion and its temporal deployment" (16).

Foucault also linked what he termed the 'author-function' to other systems (i.e., legal and institutional), that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses. The 'author-function' does not simply refer to an "actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy" (23). Consequently, this 'author-function' (i.e., the modern author), does not operate in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; neither is it characterized as a reflexive attribution of a text to its creator, but is rather recognized through a precise and complex procedure (23).

For Foucault, the question of authorship allows for an "introduction of an historical analysis of discourse" (Foucault, 1977: 28). The 'author-function' "reveal[s] the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships" (28). Consequently, Foucault's emphasis centres on the conditions and forms of an entity like the subject appearing in, and effecting the order of discourse, its position, its function, and its rules. Therefore, the 'author' or its substitutes need to be "stripped of [their] creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (28).

The critical elements introduced by Barthes and Foucault have important implications for how film theory applies the notion of ideology. On the one hand, they help the recognition of the active position of the subject (spectator). On the other hand, they provide bases for moving film analysis further away from the determinism of the notion of 'false consciousness' and recontextualizing ideology within history. The works of Barthes and Foucault, for example, have been influential in undermining the notion of the text as a seamless unity and as a 'reflection of reality', or conversely, as a twist of the real (e.g. false consciousness). As a play of several voices, as the work of a collective 'author' rather than a unique and totally autonomous producer, and therefore as a locus of contradictions, Foucault and Barthes questioned the designs and interests that texts have on their audience, as well as the ways in which audiences might receive the text.

Both philosophers also opened new possibilities for 'repositioning' the cultural text within its sociohistorical materiality. Critics of mass culture have found new readings possible for texts that have previously been regarded as monolithic and regressive. In particular, Foucault's studies on the origins of power, his inquiry into classical notions of institutional hierarchies and of victimage, and his theoretical elaboration of the link between subalternity and social institutions, all offered (albeit indirectly, and without specifically

referring to it as such), important inroads to positioning the notion of ideology within history.

Opposition In Ideology

By the mid 1980's, more film theorists dealt with the implications of the negative interpretation of the notion of ideology. Ryan and Kellner argued that much of the work in film theory conceived of cinematic ideology in a way which tended to "flatten out necessary distinctions between different films at different moments of history and overlook the distinctive and multiple rhetorical and representational strategies and effects of varying social situations" (1988: 1). They emphasized that the relationship between film and social history, is a "process of discursive transcoding" (12). To them, "films transcode the discourses of social life into cinematic narratives . . . [and thereby] execute a transfer from one discursive field to another" (12). They argued against the persistent endorsement by film theoreticians of a strictly negative conception of contemporary Hollywood film as a one-dimensional 'Ideological State Apparatus' or of Hollywood narrative realism as inherently ideological (in the negative sense).

Christine Gledhill, on the other hand, stressed that by accepting the function of the mass media in making cultural definitions, one can take a more positive position toward "the spaces of negotiation in mainstream production" (1988:65). She emphasized that "into dominant typification and aesthetic structures are locked both atavistic and utopian desires; archetypal and futuristic motifs; sensibility and reason; melodrama and realism" (87). Gledhill contested the mechanistic interpretation of ideology as either 'conspiratorial imposition' or as 'unconscious interpellation', and reiterated, instead, the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony' as an underpinning of the model of negotiation:

Since ideological power in bourgeois society is as much a matter of persuasion as of force, it is never secured once and for all, but continually to be re-established in a constant to and fro between contesting groups. 'Hegemony' describes the ever shifting, ever negotiating play of ideological, social and political forces through which power is maintained and contested. The culture industries of bourgeois democracy can be conceptualized in a similar way: ideologies are not simply imposed—although this possibility always remains an institutional option through mechanisms such as censorship—but are subject to continuous (re-)negotiation. (68)

Marcia Landy echoes a similar theme when she stresses Gramsci's conception of power and ideology as less unified and totalistic, and that his dialectical perspective "complicates ideas of revolutionary struggle by adding subjective factors" (Landy, 1994: 25). Ideology with Gramsci, Landy emphasizes, "is not simply false consciousness that alters when social conditions alter" (25).

Nevertheless, much of the academic discourse on film continues to eclipse or mystify the political connections and implications of the text. This tendency engages in analyzing the text while arbitrarily distancing it from the historical elements of social and political culture. It also blurs the dynamics of ideology in connection with dominant hegemonic power structures. Even when it recognizes the importance of assessing such structures, the inclination is to assume fixed hierarchies and centres of power. In the process, and in spite of the major inroads that have been opened by Barthes and Foucault, the role of the spectator/subject in film theory remains problematic, and is often reduced to passivity.

Because it provides bases to analyze cultural products as contested spaces of ideology, Gramsci's notion of hegemony repositions ideological theorization in the realm of the politics of history, social agency, and social transformation. To clarify this connection, I will discuss the relationship between base and superstructure in connection with the role of social subject.

Althusser and Gramsci
The Social Subject in the Context of the Base and Superstructure

The incorporation of Lacanian psychoanalysis has affected the notion of ideology by shifting it further away from the concept of false consciousness. Althusser's focus on ideology questioned the endurance of dominant

ideological practices, and provided an entry into understanding the relationships of economics, politics, and culture. Like Gramsci, Althusser challenged the reductionist reading of Marx's notion of the relationship between base and superstructure. Even closer to Gramsci was the way in which Althusser perceived popular culture (particularly folklore) as an expression of opposition. Likewise, Althusser's examination of the role of the state and civil society in developing consent, bears some similarity to Gramsci's characterization of hegemony. Gramsci, however, offered a more flexible, and perhaps clearer, analysis of the nature of the state in a civil society, and of how hegemony involves consensus rather than coercion.

Hegemony for Gramsci goes beyond the restrictive parameters of 'false consciousness' or direct control and manipulation of the masses. The population's 'common sense' (or 'philosophies'), according to Gramsci, is made up of a variety of elements, some of which contest the dominant ideology. Hegemonic ideology provides a more coherent and systematic world view which not only influences, moulds, or 'hails' people, but serves as a principle of organization of social institutions. His rejection of the negative conception of ideology ultimately led him to recognize it as a 'terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.' (Gramsci, 1971: 377). It is within the 'parameters' of ideology that Gramsci

explains how a class secures adhesion and consent of the wider segment of the population (i.e., through hegemony).

For Gramsci ideology does not simply reflect or mirror economic class interests, and in this sense it is not a 'given' determined by the economic structure or organization of society, but rather an arena of struggle. Ideology, therefore, organizes action through the way it is embodied in social relations, institutions and practices, and informs all individual and collective activities (Mouffe, 1979).

In some important respects, Foucault's work addresses some of the deliberations put forward by Gramsci; his ideas about the dissemination of power within culture (in contrast to it operating decisively from above), are a good example. In a way, Gramsci's writings on power (particularly his notion of hegemony), represent a middle ground between, on the one hand theorists like Foucault with his views on power and power determinants, and on the other hand classical Marxism with its interest in agency and sociopolitical transformation. However, as Alan Hunt points out, Foucault does not explain how specific discursive formations become dominant: instead, Foucault's 'epistemological wariness' made him dodge dealing with the question of causality in his historical studies (1991: 52). Nevertheless, Gramsci's work in

light of the directions opened up by Foucault (as well as by Barthes), generates new possibilities for film theory, particularly in relation to its articulation of the notion of ideology.

Gramsci's interest in the nature, as well as the impact, of the emerging dynamics of popular forms of communication is particularly important; his emphasis on the role of those dynamics as elements of political and cultural transformation has specific relevance to the development of film theory. Gramsci's consistent alertness to the existing social and economic structures, on the other hand, points out the importance of deliberating the multiple factors that affect the correlation between the cultural and the political. As Stuart Hall suggests:

Gramsci, without neglecting other spheres of articulation, made himself, *par excellence*, the 'theorist of the political.' He gave us, as few comparable theorists have, an expanded notion of politics—the rhythm, forms, antagonisms, transformations specific and peculiar to it as a region. (Hall 1987: vii)

Gramsci's influence in cultural studies reintroduces the 'political' into the analysis. It impedes the determinist confines of 'economism' and/or 'false consciousness' as they are manifested in the reductionist interpretations of Marxism. But more importantly (at least for the purpose of this study), Gramsci precludes textual or psychoanalytical interpretations of ideology

which characterize Althusserian inspired film theories. This brings us to the question of causality and the relationship between base (or infrastructure) and superstructure. To stress the importance of Gramsci's position for film theory, I will compare it to Louis Althusser's notion of structural 'overdetermination' which became influential, as we have seen earlier, during a certain period in film criticism, and which continues to have an important impact on the theoretical framework of Canadian film criticism.

Comparing Gramsci and Althusser on the issue of base-superstructure demands that we emphasize the difference between the goals of each of them. For Gramsci, the main concern is with the relationship between the 'objective forces' (the economic infrastructure), and the ability of people to act freely and to launch their own intervention into the confines of specific social and historical conditions. Understanding how economic and social factors interact with the superstructure becomes imperative for historical analysis, and for assessing the effectivity of the process of cultural production. Equally crucial for Gramsci's position is that causality be comprehended in connection with human history as it materializes in specific modes of production in specific socioeconomic frameworks *and* as aggregated by specific superstructural effects. This, however, does not mean that causality is an issue of mere empirical research. Instead, the interaction in question becomes an issue of

empirical testing of history and of historical consequences.

For Althusser, the issue at hand is one of epistemology. As he endeavours to define a form of causality which is fundamentally different from the mechanical causality of vulgarized Marxism, Althusser also resists the expressive causality of Hegel within which an essence –or spiritual cause– gives organic wholeness to reality and exists hidden underneath the countless disclosures of history. Althusser defines the economic as a function of the structure and the social totality as made of interacting parts, none of which is in itself dominant or determinant. Each of those parts has its own lucid stamina and may, only occasionally, become a determining element. Accordingly, Althusser stipulates a 'relative autonomy' to the different superstructural levels, in a way which downplays the necessity of the economic factor on which the structure of the whole conclusively depends, but whose influence is 'overdetermined' by the superstructure.

Both Gramsci and Althusser see social reality as something more than the sum of its parts. But by this, Althusser means that the heterogeneity of social phenomena (or social reality) is a structure which is distinguished by the relationships among its elements. Hence, for him, since the social combination is ultimately a structural whole, there cannot be an independent

entity which can be referred to as the economic base (or infrastructure). In other words, the 'infrastructural economic' becomes just one more element of the social essence and therefore the "cause" of art, religion, law, politics, etc., (1970: 186-89).

Gramsci, on the other hand, centres not so much on the relationship itself between the structure and the superstructure, as on the place of human agency within it. Although he postulates that people acting consciously are the agents of history, history, nevertheless, cannot simply be explained in terms of collective opinions and actions. As Joseph Femia puts it:

Social interaction may have patterned consequences that none of the participants intended or foresaw. The independent conscious designs of the various individuals in the system may produce a configuration of forces which confront each man compulsively. So productive forces which have intentionality built into them can be determining, in so far as they entail consequences and requirements that elude our control. (1981: 117)

To understand the potential of Gramsci's approach it is also important to account for the material underpinnings of his assessment of the relationship between ideology and its socioeconomic dimensions. To underestimate this aspect of Gramsci's analysis deprives it of the multifaceted power which enhances its analytical dynamics. Gramsci recognized that there was no automatic reaction between changes in the economy and changes in ideology

(1971: 184). On the other hand, Gramsci was also able to see the connection between the two, and, at the same time, the ultimately determining role of the economy. Indeed his whole conception of 'organic crises' rests on exploring the relationship between crises in the economic terrain, where classes acquire their basic identity and interests, and the conjunctural field where political and ideological forces fight out the underlying conflicts in the relations of production:

A common error in historic-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural. This leads to presenting causes as immediately effective which operate indirectly, or to assert that the immediate causes are the only effective ones. In the first case there is an excess of 'economism', of doctrinaire pedantry; in the second, an excess of 'ideologism'. In the first case there is an overestimation of mechanical causes, in the second an exaggeration of the voluntarist and individual element (1971: 177-78).

In comparison with Althusser's emphasis on structural causality and overdetermination, what underlies the base-superstructure relationship for Gramsci is what he alludes to as the 'historical bloc'. This 'bloc' is the tangible materialization of the interconnection between the economic base and the ethico-political superstructure. By extension, the intellectuals who are organically tied to the hegemonic classes and social groups are in essence the functionaries of the superstructure. This makes the superstructure only as effective as its parts are organized, propagated, and, in other words made hegemonic by the conscious (and material) intervention of the intellectuals.

By stating that "structures and superstructures form a historical bloc" and that "the complex, contradictory and discordant *ensemble* of the superstructures is the reflection of the social relations of production" (1971: 366), Gramsci enables us to assess how material forces set limits to the operations of ideology. What differentiates between Gramsci and Althusser in relation to the base-superstructure interaction involves much less the theoretical assumptions regarding the dialectics of interdependence of levels (which are essentially shared by both thinkers), than Gramsci's underscoring of the *historically adapted actions of collective social agents at all levels of the social totality*.

Through proposing basic unity between the base and superstructure, Gramsci strips the notion of causality as determinism (whether 'mechanical', 'expressive', or 'structural') of its theoretical validity or centrality. Since social subjectivities are not determined or dominated in what they do or think, therefore they are not 'forced', or destined to live according to the dictates of particular structures or structural elements; yet, at the same time, social subjectivities are not free to operate beyond the limitations (and the opportunities) or conditions set by the concrete historical existence of these structures.

Since social subjectivities operate, in their material practice, within the structural limitations which they inhabit, they become potentially capable of 'negotiating' their conditioning, and of becoming active, creative agents in grappling to break the bounds of a necessity that in the last analysis is only relative. This is what Gramsci calls the moment of catharsis, which "indicates the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment." This also means the passage from "objective to subjective" and from "necessity to freedom" (1971: 367). In other words:

Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive, and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. (367)

This does not mean that the ethico-political moment holds priority over the economic. The subject acting in history moves within a historical bloc in which base and superstructure organically interact. Therefore, the economic becomes the means by which superstructural modifications are realized.

Contributions to the notion of ideology in critical film discourse continue to map out areas and spaces within which cultural studies can assume a role in the political struggle for social change. As such, the field of cultural analysis in Canada is being challenged to address the interrelationships among economic, and social and ideological spheres. How does the English Canadian critical writing on its own cinema deal with those challenges? And

consequently, how can this writing explore the political dynamics at work within the domain of cinematic production and reception? The next chapter deals with some of the theoretical questions which have traditionally marred the discourse on Canadian cinema, particularly in relation to its articulation of the notion of ideology. It presents samples of writings which made, and continue to make, a major impact on how Canadians perceive of their 'national' cinema. Consequently, the chapter identifies some of the theoretical problematics which hinder the development of a counter hegemonic critical reading of this cinema.

CHAPTER TWO

NATIONAL IDENTITY AS IDEOLOGY

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, discussions on ideology and ideological representation constituted an important element of film theory. In general, early attempts to theorize Canadian cinema envisaged national consciousness as a distorted reflection of an 'Other's' cultural domination: that of the American mass culture. Critical assumptions in regard to this domination favoured a negative interpretation of the workings of ideology within the Canadian cultural landscape. By and large, much of the academic discourse on Canadian cinema became based on inferring a 'falsity' which dominates the national Canadian consciousness, one which 'mirrors' the economic, historic, social, and cultural 'dominance' of the United States over Canada.

In many ways, the theoretical premise upon which some of this discourse bases itself seems more in concord with the earlier interpretations of ideology

(i.e., pre Althusser). While it eclectically incorporates some methodologies (particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis) and terminologies used by structuralist and post-structuralist analyses, this discourse tends to assign a fixed and limited role for ideology, one which is determined exclusively by the socio-political domination it reflects. On the other hand, this approach tends to derive the Althusserian argument of its main interest in seeking an answer to the question of *how* human subjects succumb to ideology.

Harcourt, Myth, and the Ideological 'Other'

In 1973, Robert Fothergill wrote an article which proposed that 'a Canadian condition' operates within, and is reflected systematically in Canadian feature films. He emphasized that these films characteristically depicted the "radical inadequacy of the male protagonist—his moral failure, especially, and most visibly, in his relationships with women" (235). The "impediment to satisfactory self-realization" by this protagonist was seen by Fothergill in terms of a psychological analogy of the relationship between a younger brother (i.e., Canadian) and an older brother (i.e., American).

Fothergill's critical emphasis on the positional inferiority of Canada's relationship with the U.S. gradually became institutionalized in Canadian film

criticism. In many ways, it became a framework within which this criticism—more forcefully during the 1970's—applied the notion of ideology to its reading of Canadian cinema.

Peter Harcourt's 1977 book *Towards a National Cinema: Movies and Mythologies* was the first effort in English Canada to contextualize the discussion on Canadian cinema as it relates to the notions of national identity and ideology. The book reintroduced a series of broadcasts prepared by Harcourt for the CBC radio in 1975. Basing his argument on Roland Barthes's writing on mythology, Harcourt focused on the specificity of Canada's "dependence on Europe" and its "proximity to the United States" which encouraged Canadians to look at themselves as reflected in "other people's mirrors, in terms of alien mythologies" (5).

Harcourt acknowledged the usefulness of Barthes's literary analysis of the classical French novel and "how he has made us aware that certain forms of speech and conventions in art which we tend to take for granted actually reflect specific social values that might have been different than they are" (1977: 3). On the other hand, Harcourt stressed the need to articulate a Canadian cultural identity capable of re-evaluating the 'standards' by which it is swayed, while developing its own 'standards' for evaluation (3). His analysis

of Canadian films concentrated on dealing with the inability of the Canadian consciousness to articulate its own genuine mythology. In an article on

Paperback Hero (1973), he writes:

The film really is a tragedy –a tragedy of someone who models his behaviour on myths derived from foreign cultures which finally prove inadequate for the world he lives in. If seen in this way, for many of us as Canadians, the film might seem a little bit like the tragedy of us all. (160-61)

In his analysis of Allan King's *A Married Couple* (1969) Harcourt relates the Canadian authenticity of the film to the inability of its characters to comprehensively conceive of their own social and familial positions:

The film does have an authenticity about it and is very Canadian—possibly even in the immaturity of many of the arguments, as if the characters are not really sure who they are but are striving to define themselves through arguing. As it exists in the film, the dialogue is simultaneously very funny, somewhat brutal, and distressingly real. (155)

Harcourt's attribution of how Canadian cinema expresses the 'real' identity of Canadians was linked with the level at which it articulated concern for and interest in depicting a 'Canadian myth'. He emphasized how this cinema deals with problems of identity, and how those problems are usually defined for Canadians by others (159). Recurring elements in Canadian cinema, he argued, contemplate the failure of our society in providing a meaningful role to its members (Harcourt 1977: 166). This is why our films repeatedly present themes about adolescence, dropouts, criminals, "or simply about wild and

energetic characters like Pearson's *Paperback Hero* or Carter's *Rowdyman*—characters who end up acting destructively because there is nothing else to do" (161).

In *This is Where We Came In*, Martin Knelman echoes a similar perspective. For him, the uniqueness of Canadian cinema correlates with its depiction of a Canadian 'false' sense of identity:

What sets off *Goin' Down the Road*, *Between Friends*, *The Rowdyman*, *Paperback Hero*, *The Hard Part Begins*, and *Why Shoot the Teacher* from most of the commercial movies produced in the same period is that no one could mistake them for American pictures. These are not merely films that happen to have been made here; they catch (or at least try to) something about the spiritual landscape. The wilderness seems to yield not opportunity but isolation. The characters in these films are frequently stuck in a rigid society without the means to get out, and they feel psychologically stranded from their goals. (1977: 99)

The 'uniqueness' of those films is therefore contingent on them depicting a Canadian state of mind which is capable of 'reflecting' an ideology that is not Canadian. The state of paralysis which consumes the main characters in those films is what specifically distinguishes their national identity. As such, the identity of Canadian cinema is associated with its ability to reflect upon the 'national' state of 'false' consciousness.

Envisioning Canadian cinema as a 're-aligning' element between Canadians and their own 'real' image—or their own 'myth' as Harcourt

emphasized—remains among the most persistent themes in English Canadian film criticism. In a 1995 article on Atom Egoyan, Harcourt writes:

It is a specifically Canadian dilemma to sort out the differences between images imagined for us by ourselves and images imagined for us by other people—let alone making a distinction between all these imaginary images and what we might still want to call, on occasion, the "real world". (1995: 6)

The emphasis on the dichotomy between a 'Canadian consciousness' saturated by American images, and an 'alternative' consciousness which is aware of its own 'real' images and myths remains a consistent thread in Harcourt's argument. The authority of Harcourt's approach, however, goes much deeper into the entire general framework of Canadian film criticism.

Much of this criticism echoes concerns and preoccupations which are parallel to those proposed by Harcourt. Mike Gasher, for example, reminds us of some of the historical elements which have traditionally contributed to the 'loss' of the Canadian national consciousness. He points out that the ability of local cinema to express a Canadian voice has been historically and consistently derailed:

The colonization of the material means of Canadian film distribution and exhibition denies Canadian feature film a mass audience in its own country and contributes to a larger media environment starved of works addressing Canadian themes and Canadian stories, and global issues treated from a Canadian perspective. (1993: 96)

Gasher calls for the 'decolonization' of Canadian cultural expressions. He

links this 'decolonization' of Canadian 'cultural imagination' to introducing a 'self generated'—rather than externally imposed—'Canadian imagination' (104). Canadian film practice and production, he writes, could present a challenge to the hegemony of Hollywood cinema in Canada only when it acknowledges that "there is another way of film-making and there is another world view" (104).

In an article on genre and Canadian cinema, Jim Leach summarizes the main concerns of the Canadian genre film and relates them to emphasizing the gulf between 'Canadian reality' and the dreams that underpin American genres (19). "The measuring of Canadian culture and society against the American standards," Leach writes, "becomes (implicitly or explicitly) a major concern of Canadian genre films." He refers back to Peter Pearson's film *Paperback Hero* as a classical story about a Canadian who invests his life in emulating the "glamour drawn from American westerns that is hopelessly at variance with the drab reality of his small-town existence in Saskatchewan" (19).

In a comparative reading of an American film (George Lucas's 1973 *American Graffiti*) and Canadian Sandy Wilson's film *My American Cousin* (1985), Joanne Yamaguchi refers to the endings of both films to illustrate the

dissimilarity between the sensibilities of the two cultures which they reflect:

The epilogue of *My American Cousin* is warm and positive (Mom was right, boys are like buses). Even its negative aspects are without a bitter edge (never saw my American cousin again), since no news is good news in the sphere of epilogues. By contrast, the *American Graffiti* epilogue is tainted with an underlying resentment, a cynicism implying that people and situation of great promise inevitably fall from grace (a promising student becomes a car salesman). (Yamaguchi, 1989:72)

Comparing it with the nihilistic nature of the American experience, Yamaguchi concludes that the Canadian experience seems more hopeful (72). Ironically, in her reference to the difference between the two national images, she reverses the traditional conception of the Canadian protagonist (as lost and pessimistic), and attributes it, instead, to the protagonists of the American film. But while Yamaguchi suggests a different definition of what constitutes a Canadian experience, her framework of analysis, and in a similar manner to Harcourt and other nationalist critics, remains based on assigning a critical priority to the dichotomy between two different cultural and 'ideological' frameworks.

Harcourt's approach is twofold. On one level, he proposes specific thematic criteria for identifying and analyzing Canadian cinema. Those themes deal with the effort to disentangle and understand our own concealed myth. In order to untangle this myth, and, in the process, to achieve a better understanding of our 'national' identity, Harcourt suggests that film criticism

needs to 'unconceal' the workings of the filmic text. In a later essay, Harcourt brings back Barthes to the discussion:

Has not Roland Barthes shown us how, through a series of intricate readings, we can find the concealed text within the ordered text? Isn't it an axiom of literary studies that the greater the novel, the greater the play might be between order and concealment, between the 'manifest' and 'latent' meanings of the text? (Harcourt 1985: 298)

However, Harcourt's incorporation of the notion of myth parallels that of Northrop Frye rather than Barthes: it is Frye who saw myth as the structural foundation of literature—or the narrative structure itself. As I have mentioned in the first chapter, Barthes regarded language and myth not as simple tools of communication, but as a means of reproducing discourse. Equally as important, Barthes advanced a 'paradoxical' mode of reading in which the reader must search out 'mythic' or new meaning at odds with the surface logic of the language of the text. To untangle this paradox, Barthes suggested that the critic looks at the text not as an already 'authored' frame of reference, but rather as a process, a continuously enhanced and authored social process. For Barthes, myth has a context which transcends its 'authored' text, and which can only be understood through discerning the workings of a specific extra textual formation which it inhabits. In film, this means that addressing the text is not a process of 'unconcealing' meanings, as Harcourt suggests, but is rather a process of manifesting how ideas which

'make sense' within a specific social and historical context are manifested through the filmic text.

Similar to Frye, Harcourt is more interested in articulating a national myth through extricating its transparent textual presence (e.g., its reference to pre-assigned 'Canadian themes'). His interest in myth is therefore closer in its methodology to Frye's interest in the realm of a self-contained verbal universe. For Frye, the resultant universe of words is describable by a specific form of criticism. It is contingent upon avoiding non-literary questions whether they are historical, biographical, psychological, political, ideological, religious or otherwise (Frye, 1957: 6). Criticism for Frye cannot be determined by extra-literary elements such as politics, ideology, psychology, etc.

Harcourt locates myth within textual tangles, rather than in relation to the position of those intricacies within a sociohistorical context. Otherwise, Harcourt would have seen in Canada's cultural myth (as Althusser might have argued) an unstable ideological formation 'overdetermined' by complex elements which cannot be assigned as exclusively 'ours' (i.e. as Canadian), or 'theirs' (i.e., as American). Harcourt's notion of myth, therefore, involves alluding to a difference between a concealed 'Canadian culture' and a

dominant American culture, one which can exclusively inhabit an ideologically predetermined filmic text, rather than as part of the structure inhabited by that text.

Myth, however—and by extension ideology—does not involve marking dichotomies between truth and error, fact and fable, report and fantasy. While it might happen to be partly true, myth never contains "the power to separate its truths from errors" (Lippmann, 1993: 214). Myth represents a specific set of allusions to history as filtered through the consciousness of social cultures:

Mythology is not used here as a synonym for lies, propaganda or pieties; rather the term refers to a body of symbols and associations that coheres around a set of historical events and comes to take on a life of its own. In time, it is possible for those symbols and associations to interact among themselves in such a way that the public consciousness will refashion the historical events to suit the dynamics of the symbolic structures. (Duffy, 1977: 17)

As elements within specific ideological formations which are not simply determined by our approval or disapproval of them, myths, like ideology, are enhanced and reproduced through our own consent and articulation.

Whether or not we agree on defending the right of Canadians to produce, exhibit, and watch their own films, the fact remains that our mythology is historically in a constant state of 'becoming'. Furthermore, this myth incorporates all the cultural discourses that touch our lives within a specific

sociohistorical juncture, including those that are 'created' in Canada, south of the borders, or anywhere else. One can argue that even 'Hollywood myths' are themselves elements that are constituents of 'our' own myth; as such, those myths are not enforced on us (hence the need for critically unconcealing them as Harcourt suggests), but are there as articulations (and as articulated elements) that inhabit and affect our own ideological fears, hopes, anxieties, struggles, and appetites. As Carl Boggs suggests, under capitalism, domination is a process which is "refracted through ideological and cultural mediations" (1984: 158). This is why greater attention should be given to "the 'consensual' basis of power" (158).

The problematic associated with Harcourt's influential conception of myth in the discourse on Canadian cinema opens up the discussion around several crucial questions. For example, in reference to Canadian film, Harcourt assumes a neutral conception of myth (as an ideological element) and refers to the possibility of finding the myth concealed 'within its ordered text'. Several questions linger as a result of this: first, why can't we apply the rule of finding concealed meanings to the assessment of the 'Other's' cultural products (in this case, of American Hollywood cinema)? Second, does the cultural 'allegiance' of the filmic text or narrative determine or alter its capacity to incorporate contradictory cultural nuances? And finally, is the

Hollywood model, by virtue of its own thematic preoccupations, incapable of incorporating 'concealed' contradictory texts other than those of its 'ordered' text? Let's examine how other film scholars deal with those dilemmas.

Bruce Elder: 'The Cinema We Need' and The Formalist Alternative

An important variation on the theme of national cinema relates to the polemic proposed by another prolific Canadian film scholar. In an essay entitled "The Cinema that We Need", Bruce Elder expounded on the need to overcome the critical preoccupation with the "distinctiveness" of Canadian culture. He suggested that since this 'culture' has lost its relationship with its 'real' culture (read: own myth), the discussion on Canadian cinema has remained sealed in a "victim's position," or in the permanent "adolescent mystification" which victims tend to celebrate because it proposes that the victim's past contains something preferable to the present (1989: 11).

Instead of looking at the 'distinctive' features of Canadian culture, Elder proposed defining this culture beyond the span of the 'Other' and "beyond the opposition of imaginary identity, to discover what we are in our history, in the traditions we possess" (14). Identity, he suggested, cannot be located in the description of binary differences, but rather through "a genetic approach and

endeavour to discern, in the process of our becoming, what we are today" (1989: 14-15).

For Elder, no consciousness can escape the situation in which it exists. To pretend that consciousness can escape conditioning by situation is a "delusion that masks the most terrifying aspect of our modern technical system" (1988: 262). Consequently, the kind of cinema Canada needs, has to reveal "how events come to be in experience, that is, the dynamic by which events are brought into presentness in experience" (264). To achieve such an 'alternative', Elder suggested that the classical narrative structure, or the Hollywood model, has to be abandoned:

Narrative is the artistic structure of technocracy. The cinema we need, the cinema that combats technocracy, will, therefore, be non-narrative. It will not be animated by a rage for order— and order's concomitant concealment. It will accept that every discovery involves dissimulation (265).

Such a cinema, Elder contended, will also be able to reveal the process of its own emergence into being.

An important debate ensued from Bruce Elder's article. Summarizing this debate, Bart Testa links Elder's approach to George Grant's interest in explaining how narrative expresses a technological view. Testa contrasts Elder's views with those of other film critics who entered the debate. Robin

Wood, for example, expressed his belief in a cinema accessible and popular enough to allow the viewer to access "the community of those who resist the dominant capitalist-patriarchal ideologies." For his part, Peter Harcourt re-emphasize[ed] his long standing position that Canadian cinema should be able to tell, reflect, and "express/create an identity that he associates with Canadian culture" (Testa, 1985: 274-280). Piers Handling, on the other hand, saw in Elder's proposals yet another prescriptive emulation (in genre rather than in content) of John Grierson's interest in the documentary genre (274-280).

Elder provoked an important discussion on the role of Canadian cinema in producing an 'imagined' Canadian 'national' identity. But as Christine Ramsay suggests, "The Cinema We Need" debate in the mid 1980's boiled down to a debate mainly between Elder and Harcourt, a debate which remained centred on attempting to find ways to claim a Canadian 'cultural uniqueness':

It is variously argued that cinema could and should play an important part in producing an imagined community in Canada –whether through the idealism of avant-garde experimental film that, Bruce Elder claims, could pull us out the shadow of Hollywood as technocratic-imperialist narrative machine; or through the mythic capacity of our own narrative films that, Peter Harcourt claims, could tell us our own stories and reflect the uniquely Canadian identities that derive from our culture; or in tandem with a plurality of popular forms that, Piers Handling claims, could "address the general public" and call into question dominant ideology and the very ways we look at and imagine ourselves and our world. (1993: 31)

Ramsay's account of this debate illustrates that the concerns of several critics continued to neglect the cinema that we *have*. As Geoff Pevere suggests, the debate simply maintained a form of colonization of the Canadian collective consciousness (1988: 332). The debate also indicated a similarity between the contending critics in their perception of mythic and ideological notions.

For Elder, as for Harcourt and other critics involved in the debate, ideological formations were either 'dominant' or 'non-dominant'. In his critique of Elder's 'formalism', and despite his emphasis on the need to understand how 'dominant' ideology works, Piers Handling's reference to ideology re-introduces it in the form of false consciousness:

Is it enough to make films that are formally correct or should they not address themselves to the central ideological questions and events of the day: the representation of women, the absence of certain people and classes from our screens, the nature of the "hidden reality" that ideology obscures in modern society, etc.? (1985: 291)

Handling suggests that critical analysis needs to involve an understanding of how the 'image industry' functions: how it represents, reveals, and conceals. Only through this process can Canadian cinema start to address and situate Canadian issues and concerns "within a recognizably Canadian cultural, social, political, economic and physical landscape" (293).

Unlike Harcourt, Elder makes his proposals contingent on explicitly rejecting the classical narrative model. He conceives 'technocracy' not only as a reflection of the cultural 'dominant' (what Elder labels the 'Hollywood factory of illusion'), but also as a totally self-sufficient textual model. In this context, Elder takes an approach which essentially dismisses the role of the subject/spectator as an author and as a cultural agent. As an already formed ideological tool of 'dominance', Elder conceives of narrative film as a fixture of 'dominant' ideology which can only assume a specific politico-ideological function.

While Harcourt and Elder disagree on what constitutes a priority in the critical characterization of Canadian cinema (i.e., Harcourt's emphasis on narrative thematic content, and Elder's accent on textual form), both, nevertheless, emphasize the filmic text as the main point of their critical departure. As with Frye, the already 'authored' text becomes the centre of cultural effectivity and consequently the determining focus of critical analysis.

Both Harcourt and Elder force a detachment between the sociohistorical context and the functionality of the film as a text. Two conclusions can be deduced from this critical logic: either the text is a fixed ideological construction, and accordingly there would be no point in alluding to its

relationship with specific social and historical moments, or history and social structures themselves are fixed phenomena of which a text can only mirror eternal realities (in this case the entire concept of history is called into question). In both cases, the designation of the filmic text as the only subject of film criticism can only be based on the assumption of a 'dominant' form of fixed (and ultimately negative) ideological working.

Emerging Trends in the Nationalist Based Critical Discourse

Christine Ramsay bases her critical writing on Homi Bhabha's call to study the complex strategies of cultural identifications as immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and "literary narratives". She places her emphasis on how national formations affect different subjectivities (1993: 29). Her approach in relation to the significance of national identity is therefore tied to acknowledging the multi-layered social elements which contribute to a 'national formation'. She stresses that nations and borders are sketched in the geographic, social, and personal identities, and assigns a "dynamic of centre and margins—the safe and the threatened—where the centre is always an ideal, ordered universe to be gained, and the margins are variously coerced, disavowed, disallowed, or ignored" (28).

Two frameworks identify Ramsay's approach. On the one hand, she articulates the concerns of the cinematic text in a way which incorporates extra-textual trajectories, including those of national identity. On the other hand, this incorporation is achieved through articulating a metonymic reading of that text. In both cases Ramsay re-situates the filmic text mainly within the binary difference between an American centre and a Canadian margin. Let's examine her approach more closely.

As with the classical Canadian nationalist tradition, Ramsay's cognizance of the extra-textual is based mainly on exploring the binary relationship with the American 'Other'. This 'Other', however, assumes the position of centre in relation to the Canadian margin:

English Canadian films, as forms of fantasy, social practice and intelligibility, demonstrate how we (as a marginal people to the American global centre who ironically build our 'imagined community' and sense of social and personal identity on diversity—on the foregrounded paradox of the de-centred centre) construct nation, see culture, and experience our sense of social self. (1993: 32)

To illustrate the difference between her approach and earlier critical nationalists, Ramsay explains how social dynamics can be traced through a metonymic assessment of the national characteristics of English Canadian film discourse.

As a practice, metaphor selects and concentrates signs and produces them as 'national truths' (Ramsay 1993: 35). A metonymic reading of the text, on the other hand, fragments the text and produces "separation and difference through signs" (35). This 'separation and difference', Ramsay contends, "foreground[s] paradox, [and] social conflict" (35). Ramsay introduces an alternate reading to the 1970 film *Goin' Down the Road*:

A metonymic reading of the film could perhaps take up the cultural specificities the film elaborates as a social text about difference, symptomatizing it as a complex network of conflicting relationships that clearly point to the existence of the social, cultural and political forces that traverse it and determine its heroes. (38)

Ramsay conceives of narrative cinema as a matrix of social intelligibility which negotiates the filmic text and the extra-text. This matrix also includes oppositional social environments, imagined community, and the critical discourse of the text itself (1993: 32). But since social determinations are intrinsic to the forms in which they reside, the filmic text—as a site of social practice and social intelligibility—should become the main focus in any consideration of national cinema (32). Ramsay sees in such reading a way of achieving what she claims as the goal of the critical reading of film: 'unpacking its meanings' (1995: 7).

As she departs from the traditional traits of nationalist English Canadian critical writing, Ramsay shifts her emphasis towards assessing "how the social

and personal concerns of foregrounded marginality in the English Canadian nation as imagined community inhabit the text" (34). Studying the mode of arrangements involved in a specific utterance (in this case studying the filmic text as a social and political trajectory), allows for the capture of its contradictory, fragmented, and interrupted moments. This also allows for the depiction of the hidden or 'inferior(ized)' voices of the socially and culturally marginalized.

Ramsay acknowledges the historical bases of both the nationalist discourse as well as the filmic text. She reminds us that those discourses are "products of imagination, a fantasy, a historical construction based in an economic, political and cultural power nexus that is open to historical change and therefore always potentially unstable, fragile and insecure" (1993: 46). On the ideological level, this implies an appreciation of the interactive dynamics which connect the base to the superstructure.

Ramsay's approach shifts the critical emphasis to accommodate the 'extra-filmic text'. In this context, film becomes 'overdetermined' by the 'extra-text' of a heterogeneous national culture, and by the text itself through the criteria provided by the film itself. But by alluding to the extra-text as intrinsic to the text, and as *sufficiently* (my emphasis and wording) discernable from within

that text in which it resides (1993: 32), Ramsay risks assigning the filmic discourse the function of an ideological determinant, rather than as a mediator or as an 'overdeterminant'.

In a later article, Ramsay looks at David Wellington's 1993 film *I love a Man in Uniform*, not through capturing 'how the social and personal concerns of foregrounded marginality inhabit the text' as she proposed earlier, but rather through introducing a pre-conceived national metanarrative (1995: 7). She identifies Canadian national traits as those associated with "[the] colonial inferiority, obedience, role-playing, self-righteousness, and emotional repression [all of which] often colour national life" (7). In the end, Ramsay's interest in pursuing an unpacking of social meaning from within the text reintroduces an already 'ideologically' fixed meaning which is more at home with a metaphoric, rather than metonymic, reading of the text. In the end, it is within an eclectic characterization of the 'Canadian national consciousness' that Ramsay applies her critical analysis.

Looking at national markers solely from within the filmic text and/or narrative, always carries the risk of reducing them to a position of stability in relation to the social and historical infrastructure to which they relate, and of which they are part. As I have mentioned earlier, structure (or base) and

superstructure are not separate entities. Those didactic descriptions are similar in essence to the differentiation that we usually assign when comparing qualitative and quantitative, or content and form. Therefore, if the infrastructure only allows a relative stability to its components (i.e., its empirical contents), then why should we assume an absolutely stable ideological superstructure (i.e., a stable textual 'form') with pre-assigned markers such as the ones assumed by Ramsay, for example, in her analysis of *I Love a Man in Uniform*.

Conclusion

Two patterns can be inferred through examining Harcourt's, Elder's, and Ramsay's paradigms of the critical discourse on Canadian cinema. The first relates to the conception of the Hollywood model as an ideological (or mythic) embodiment of the American economic, political, and cultural 'Other'. The assumption which enhances this assessment relates to envisaging the status of Canada as a 'colonized' or marginalized cultural entity. In other words, ideology, as experienced by Canadians is essentially a form of 'imposed' or deceptive consciousness. In this context, ideological 'false consciousness', which obstructs the ability of Canadians to pursue their own economic, political, and cultural self-interests, is tied to the absence of a 'real' or 'authentic' national consciousness.

While Ramsay uniquely points out the intrinsic social and cultural differences within the Canadian consciousness, and explores how they are metonymically elaborated within the filmic text, her emphasis, nevertheless, remains fundamentally similar to those proposed by Harcourt and Elder: as a consciousness, Canadian national identity (or identities) is an expression of the 'Other's' domination. In this context, even a metonymic based analysis is forced to deal with the pre-established assumption of a negative articulation of the notion of ideological domination. The critical question which seeks to understand and explore *how* a Canadian subject succumbs to ideological domination is essentially downplayed.

Hollywood's dominance over the Canadian cultural space prompts such an ideological perspective to seek a cinematic practice which involves regaining a sense of a lost 'myth' or 'true consciousness'. As Geoff Pevere suggests, pursuing a national cinematic identity always searches for an 'ideal' ideological alternative. Such an 'alternative', however, implies a conception of popular culture as monolithic (1985: 330):

The most significant and essential assumption shared by prescriptive Canadian film critics is also the least apparent and discussed, which is not surprising, given that it is also the most relative, contentious and abstract of this set of assumptions: that there is, in fact, a perfect state, condition and context for the object of Canadian film: a set of idealized environmental, political and ideological circumstances under which the object will flourish and nourish according to the relative standards of what this ideal Canadian Cinema is or must be.' (1985: 324)

The second pattern relates to elevating the textual discourse of the film into a superstructural critical determinant. Whether this is achieved through exploring themes and perspectives that are capable of 'mirroring' Canadian's own 'mythology' (or the lack of it, as Peter Harcourt might suggest), or through articulating new and innovative formalist frameworks capable of contesting dominant cinematic narrative structures (as Bruce Elder contends), or whether through examining the metonymic characteristics and 'differences' within the Canadian filmic text (as Ramsay suggests), the non-variable critical emphasis remains centred on the attributes of an ideologically authored filmic narrative and/or text.

CHAPTER THREE

IDEOLOGY IN ALTERNATIVE CRITICAL MODELS

Writing on Canadian cinema as a national cultural reference has been the subject of critical contestation. Conflicting views address the implications and the consequences of the 'nationalist' based discourse. For example, film historian and critic Peter Morris describes how Canadian cinema has traditionally been preoccupied with the lives of Canadians as victims and losers (1994: 37). He points out that while this might have given some insight at a certain point to understanding aspects of our cultural composition, this tendency in film criticism has rapidly deteriorated into a 'rote formula':

In a recent essay on four Canadian features of the late eighties, all four are forced into the "loser" model and their themes examined only in terms of variations from the model as applied to earlier films. This seems not only somewhat contemptuous of each film's uniqueness, as criticism it verges on the tautological. (37)

The field of cultural analysis is being challenged to move beyond the general framework of the nation-state; on the other hand, it is being

confronted with the need to address issues of grassroots economic and cultural heterogeneity within the nation-state itself. Two general categories of critical writings on Canadian cinema tend to deviate from the tendency to prioritize national identity as a critical underpinning. The first category disputes the political and economic assumptions put forward by the nationalist critics, while the second emphasizes its rejection of the inclination by those critics to disregard or minimize textual or/and social differences.

'Nation' As Illusion

As we have discussed earlier, deliberations on 'Canadian cultural sovereignty'—both as a reality or as a goal—and the threat to this sovereignty as posed by the dominance of the American cultural industry, represent an important frame of reference for film writers and critics of the nationalist tradition. This preoccupation with the dominance of the Hollywood model is considered by some critics to be an analytical misreading of Canada's socioeconomic structure. Michael Dorland, for example, contends that the notion of a 'Canadian sovereignty' has mostly been a "fictitious suggestion" based on the false assumption that a state like Canada "which [in reality] has never experienced sovereignty would nonetheless be able to safeguard it" (1991: 35).

Dorland argues that the Canadian state has consistently invited "an historically articulate soliloquy . . . principally to convince itself of [this fictitious suggestion]." This, he contends, has contributed to a cultural outlook which offered 'Canadian cultural sovereignty' as "an instance of a discursive form that can be productively explored from a communication history perspective" (1991: 35-36).

In assessing why an alienated Canadian national subject always lives in the shadow of a dominant 'Other', Anthony Wilden links the problem to a nationally based dilemma. He suggests that, as a class, the Canadian bourgeoisie has been historically content with its role as a second rate entrepreneur:

Our pseudo-bourgeoisie long ago decided, it appears now –for whatever reasons– that they would be and could be quite comfortably well off by engaging in profitable and relatively secure second-level, and service industries, while leaving the more risky primary industries, including most manufacturing , to others. Thus it is that the Canadian bourgeoisie is dominant in banking, in transportation, in some forms of 'local communication', in retailing, and the like. (Wilden, 1979: 11)

It is in the context of the Canadian bourgeoisie's failure to play its national leadership role that Wilden cites the problematic of the Canadian identity itself. This class as an 'imaginary capitalist class' has contributed to the socializing of Canadians as Imaginary people. "This" Wilden suggests, "is the anomaly that Canadians are surly one of the largest groups of such people

whose 'national identity' is almost exclusively defined by what [they] are not" (p.14).

Robin Wood questions the validity of characterizing Canada as a victim of 'American cultural imperialism' (Wood, 1989: 59). He conceives differences—cultural or otherwise—between Canada and the United States as ones that are based merely in locality variation:

Canada shares with the United States both an economic base and, by and large, a social/political superstructure ('capitalism' and 'patriarchy' remain necessary terms in defining these): differences, such as these, are purely a matter of local variation. Given the overwhelming power and close proximity of the US, there is no hope whatever of constructing a Canadian identity of any efficacy unless it be one of radical opposition (i.e., Marxist and feminist). This would of course not be in any real sense peculiarly Canadian: it would exist alongside the struggles of Marxist and feminist groups throughout the world, and could probably only develop in conjunction with such movements within the US itself. (59-60)

While problematic in their reductionist overtones, challenges to the nationalist critical model (whose analysis tends to minimize or avoid reference to other infrastructural and superstructural elements), do have some validity. Canada's increasing integration into North American based—and globally oriented—economic and cultural systems (free trade agreements with the U.S. are good examples of such a process) testifies in support of some of the observations alluded to by some critics.

However, in an ironic resemblance to Harcourt and other 'nationalist' film scholars, those 'class based' critics also seem to conceive ideology as a reflection of dominant power structures. Unlike their nationalist counterparts, nevertheless, they postulate 'nationalism' in Canada as 'the ruling ideology'. While Harcourt assumes that it is an 'Other's' myth (or ideology) which 'dominates' the Canadian cultural landscape (i.e., the ideology of American domination), these 'non-nationalist' critics, on the other hand, suggest that Canada's ideological 'Other' is none other than our own ruling class which conveniently manipulates the concept of national identity to maintain its class control. The 'colonized' or 'marginalized' national consciousness which Harcourt and other 'nationalist' critics associate with the domination by an American mass culture, is here replaced by a home grown ideological class 'domination'. In both cases, ideology is conceived as a 'reflection' of certain forms of domination.

On the other hand, nationalism within the Canadian social and political formation (i.e., as an advanced civil society) is interrelated with a specific sociohistorical hegemony. This hegemony allows for a contradictory denotation of what nationalism implies for Canadians. In this context, the search for a unique and stable identity, the assertion of national specificity, does have some meaning and some usefulness. To dismiss the 'national identity'

discourse (as some opponents of the nationalist critical model propose), as a 'misreading' of the reality of the Canadian infrastructure, or as a simple 'reflection' of ruling class interests, does not change its ideological relevance to the critical discussions on Canadian cinema. Histories of national cinema can be only understood as histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation. Notions of 'nation' and 'identity' in Canada are elements within a specific hegemonic historical bloc whose effectivity cannot be reduced to either its infrastructural or superstructural characteristics. More importantly, those notions are historical ingredients whose function is ultimately determined by how social agency assumes a specific role in dealing with them as empirical constituents of the 'bloc' that they inhabit.

National Discourse as Totalization

Another diversion from the framework of the nationalist critical model proposes a more heterogenic concept of identity. This approach's discord with the mainstream Hollywood model, however, is similar in form to what the 'nationalists' argue: it conceives of this model as a guise which conceals the diversity of marginalized identities. However, instead of adopting national identity as its mythic (or ideological) alternative, this approach rejects what it conceives as the tendency of the nationalist discourse to 'totalize' or silence other marginalized social formations and voices.

Angela Stukator suggests that as with the Hollywood model, nationalist critics risk erasing differences because they create an illusory sense of omnipotence and omnipresence (1993: 123). Attempts to present identity in the context of coherence, unity and wholeness, she contends, "are examples of our insatiable desire to fix identity despite the impossibility of this desire" (1993: 118). She proposes that critical writing on film needs to shift away from the attempt to categorize identities and its manifestations. Instead, she stresses the need to explore how the heterogenic complexity of identities is either "disavowed or erased" or "sustained and generated through narrative and textual strategies" (118).

Within the same context, Kass Banning describes the shifting grounds underneath the nationalist metanarrative in relation to the 'myth of centre'. She points out that this discourse has essentially "been over-run by 'other' signifiers of difference; racial and ethnic nationalism, feminist, regional and class allegiances contribute to our shifting ground of reality that can only offer momentary communities and the local" (1992: 2). Furthermore, Banning's critical writing stresses the need to seek cinematic markers that not only go beyond the national identity discourse, but also beyond the notions that reduce representation of differences to victimology. In an article on Mina Shum's 1994 film *Double Happiness* she writes:

[The film] approximates an emerging auteurist Canadian cinema, signalled by feature films from directors such as Atom Egoyan and Srinvas Krishna. Here's to this Canadian cinema: a post-multi-culti cinema, one that has moved past the rhetoric of victimology, to a place where humour and artistry help elevate 'telling our stories' beyond the sober restrictions of identity politics. (1995: 26)

Similarly, Cameron Bailey describes how the process of 'telling' in Krishna's 1992 film *Masala* expresses heterogeneity, and supplants the 'cinema of duty' formula which favours explicit depiction of social and political issues:

[The film] moves beyond the cinema of duty by decentering the whole notion of centre-margin as a driving force in the film, and by making representation itself a concern. The heterogeneity of narrative styles in the film uproots its subjects from the fixed, inevitable narrative of crisis, and opens a space for the representation of character. (1992: 38)

No role here is assigned for the social subject as an 'author' or an 'author function' of the text (as Barthes or Foucault might have respectively argued). Ultimately, it is the 'idea', as it converges within the 'representative' text, which determines for the subject its capacity to resist homogeneity. No less reductionist in his approach than the 'cinema of duty's' preoccupation with "tell[ing] buried or forgotten stories, writ[ing] unwritten histories, [and correcting] the misrepresentations of the mainstream" (1992: 38), Bailey himself makes resistance solely contingent on the process of "representation." The assumed false consciousness of the 'totalizing' cinematic myth which Banning associates with nationalist and 'Other's'

cinemas, and Bailey connects with the 'cinema of duty', is 'corrected' within the framework of an 'alternative' ideological tool (i.e., performative narrative representation).

But multiplicity of performative or identity based discourses cannot be conceived in isolation or as processes which transcend social and historical moments. As Alan Hunt contends, there is a need to account for the shifts that occur in conjunction with epochal historical shifts (1991: 51). These shifts involve "a displacement or marginalization of some discourses and the enhancement or creation of new discourses" (51).

The 'significance' of the filmic text is neither restricted to the text itself, nor is simply articulated by a 'sovereign' viewer. The text is a process which operates within the sociohistorical dynamics of cultural intelligibility. Even the conceived 'slippages' and 'differences' that Stukator, Banning, or Bailey might attribute to filmic narrative and textual strategies, do not self-sufficiently 'reflect' social and historical characteristics, because their ideological impact is contingent on their interaction with the social and historical dynamics within which the subject, as an agency, resides and operates.

Both models (i.e., nationalist and non-nationalist discourses on Canadian cinema) are characterized by a specific depiction of ideology:

- (1) while they account for the specificity of the text as the basis for their critical approach, and as they acknowledge the social and political conditions within which a filmic text exists and operates, their reading underestimates the significance of the text as one structural element within the social body (or structure) of the cinematic construction and reception. Rather than acknowledging the diverse superstructural (e.g., legal, political, philosophical, religious, educational) and infrastructural determinants (e.g., social, historical, economical) as structural overdeterminants, these models reduce the effectivity of ideology in film to the textual and/or narrative determinants.
- (2) This reading also conceives ideology as a reflection of 'sameness': rather than accounting for ideological reflection as the functional and operational similarity between two autonomous spheres (e.g., ideology as an element of the superstructure, and the social and economic base), the main critical concern is centred on unconcealing what is 'hidden' in the mirror/text (as an ideological reflection) hence 'restoring' the authenticity of the 'real' national (or social) subject.
- (3) Authorship is confined to its 'original' and/or 'originating' textual source. The subject/spectator and/or reader as a social 'author function' is essentially reduced to receptive passivity.

Other Critical Approaches

By conceiving 'dominant' cultural practice as an element within ideological hegemony, the Hollywood model (as well as other cinematic models that are traditionally conceived as 'non Canadian', 'oppressive', or representative of a cultural 'Other') becomes a mediator between, on the one hand, the hegemonic power structure and, on the other hand, the social subject. The way in which a 'hegemonic' cinematic model plays an ideological role in sustaining specific sociohistorical relationships has to do with its ability to achieve a consensual relationship with the social subject: the subject has to feel that the cultural product 'makes sense'. Shifting the subject of critical analysis from its prescriptive focus (i.e., what kind of cinema we need), to what cinema we have, demands a change in our understanding of the notion of ideological 'dominance'. As Geoff Pevere suggests, this shift in focus makes the process of critical analysis less restrictive in its object of interest:

If the emphasis of Canadian film criticism shifted from the prescriptive and the evaluative to the descriptive and the analytical; if all film texts, from the *Heavenly Bodies*'s to the *Grey Fox*'s, were treated objectively as texts worthy of analysis (because all cultural texts, from the crass to the vanguard, convey vital messages of cultural and ideological self-definition), and were given equal due, Canadian Cinema might finally yield that elusive motherlode of self-identity sought by the prospectors of Canadian culture since Confederation. (1988: 334)

For his part, Jose Arroyo rejects altogether focusing attention on whether or not Canadians watch their own films. To him, enjoying American cinema

cannot be equated with being a 'passive dupe of imperial ideology.' The question for Arroyo is one of assessing "how we see, how we comprehend, [and] how we might interpret" cinema and cinematic products (1992: 87).

Echoing a similar view, Scott Forsyth stresses the critical importance of looking at culture and cultural products in the context of their contradictory ideological implications, rather than through categorizing them as expressions of passive or oppositional consciousness. Citing how film critics conceive a 'passivity' in the social subject's relationship to ideology he writes:

Much Left response has been to see [film] spectators as duped masses, getting false consciousness massaged. . . [but] isn't there contradiction and pleasure-use-value- in how we enjoy such art? Can we compartmentalize art from industry or 'passive' from 'oppositional' consciousness? Isn't there something of oppositional culture that is wrested from within dominant culture? (1991: 54)

Forsyth's approach suggests a different take on how ideology works. Instead of conceiving of popular cinematic models merely as cultural bases for ideological domination by the 'Other', he incorporates a positive affectivity into their role by citing the contradictory nature of their ideological significance.

Other critical writings propose that fixing identity is impossible because the 'subject' at hand is always in process, and because subjectivity is itself heterogeneous and decentered. They also emphasize that the impulse to seek

a 'stable' and 'secure' identity is inescapable even in the face of differences and specificities. More accent in such writings is placed on the paradox which makes Canada (as an imaginary nation-state entity), a site of incessant struggle where, as Chris Faulkner suggests, the "forces of the centre work to hold off, disavow or repress those competing interests at the margins that clamour for recognition" (1994: 7).

Faulkner asserts that attempting to construct the history of a nation or a national cinema as coherent, unified, and homogeneous, results in its erasure of difference and "the maintenance of a centrist and neo-conservative cultural politics" (1994: 7). He points out that the failure to comprehend conflict and contradiction contributes to essentializing and impoverishing a culture:

What one always wants to be writing about is the conditions of possibility for the nation, the telling of its name, its boundary and its history, the repetitive accounts of its "impossible unity," the putting of itself at risk as that takes place in cultural practices like film. Cultural criticism should be about the struggle for meaning, about the evidence of sights and sounds that challenge the disavowal of difference, that test the limits of personal and social identity. (8)

Citing Michael Dorland's altercation against the 'over-determined nationalist strain' of the discourse on Canadian cinema, Faulkner illustrates how this practice has curtailed our understanding of "the full range and complexity of the production and experience of cinema in this country" (1994: 8).

Faulkner then explains how an alternate approach rooted in "always-already existing conditions of possibility" is much more worrisome to conservative interests, because "the shifts and changes in patterns of identity that it predicts obscure the boundaries between who and what is in or out and is thus inimical to fictions of wholeness and stability" (1994: 8). Faulkner echoes Stuart Hall in stressing the importance of utilizing "moments of settlement and transition" in order to 'excavate' the formation of the national subject and class alliances, and "the movement of a particular class to a position of presumed national representation" (8). I would argue that it is within those 'moments' (read: temporal and historical moments), that the reading of a text provides a dimension over and above the 'immediacy' of the text, and allows for an appreciation of the role of the subject/spectator in causing the text to be ideologically effective.

Conclusion

A pressing question lingers: does providing the social and cultural subject with a filmic space in itself determine the political significance of that subject's representation? I contend that it doesn't. It is correct to stress that without the textually based 'reference' in the first place (and reference here

could include absences), no social formation can be critically scrutinized. But since the politics of filmic representation are communicated within a social cultural sphere (i.e., one which includes the relationship among text, social and ideological formations, and subject/spectator), what determines the political effectivity of any representation has to do with how social agency (in this case the subject/spectator) brings together and accommodates all those overdeterminants, and eventually channels them within and towards a specific ideological direction. Therefore the issue is not about what kind of ideology or myth 'dominates' Canadian cinema and the Canadian cinematic culture; and it isn't about which, and whether or not, specific cultural or social 'references' or 'voices' are rendered within the filmic text and what 'kind' of representation they imply. What is critical for a socially interested reading is how the hegemonized subject/spectator articulates the filmic text, and supplies it with its ideological function.

CHAPTER FOUR

IDEOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE FILM CRITIC

Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.

Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*

As I have demonstrated, much of the critical writing on Canadian cinema has been largely immersed in a 'negative' perception of ideology. Under such a theoretical assumption, ideology appropriates a pre-assigned role and effectivity which is, 'necessarily' and homogeneously, reflective of the social, political, and cultural structures which it inhabits. This has led to a preoccupation with the rhetoric of *which*, or *whose*, myth or ideology 'dominates' Canadian cinema. Based on this critical pretext, the main concern becomes centred around: (1) 'unmasking' meanings within an ideologically 'complete' filmic text, and (2) citing 'markers' of difference and marginality within that text. What begs critical answers, however, is *how* historically

specific hegemonic relationships, such as the ones we live in Canada, work ideologically through the Canadian filmic text. Through dealing with this critical challenge, a 'socially interested' Canadian film criticism can transcend the rhetoric of ideological classifications, and assume a pro-active (read: organic) role as a transformatory political agency. The goal of this chapter is to provide theoretical and practical guidelines for such an alternative critical strategy.

Ideology, Film Criticism and Critical Agency

The interaction between social classes creates different strata of intellectuals who become organically involved in the dispersion of particular views and perspectives. Reading Canadian cinema is not beyond this social dispersion. Therefore, addressing how film critics effect political-social consent and/or dissent is a valid point of exploration. One, however, needs to be cautious that differentiations between social groups and orientations in a advanced capitalist civil society like Canada should not be done crudely. The issue might be more productively dealt with based on how a socially 'interested' film critic can assess the cultural intelligibility of Canadian cinema.

First, it is important to acknowledge that through the relative cohesiveness of an all-absorbing consumer culture such as ours, society

acquires what Gramsci described as a 'totalitarian' system of ideologies, based on the paradoxes of homogeneous diversity (read: diversity within unity). On the other hand, and as an element of hegemony, cinema does not simply reflect (as some critical writing in English Canada implicitly contends) the willed ideology of a politically dominant culture, class, or positional (e.g., in relation to the notion of centre and margin) 'Other'. Only rarely, and in its most politically aberrant forms, does film express, in an orderly manner, views that are despotic or foreordained. No more than an 'Other's' cinema can 'reflect' the interests of the 'dominant' ideology or culture, can Canadian cinema be assumed to 'reflect' the ideology (or ideologies) of a 'dominated' Canadian culture, classes, or marginalized social groups.

Film critics, academics, and intellectuals, including those who are 'organically' linked to the dominant groups (i.e., through direct or indirect various 'lines' of benefits) themselves disseminate multifaceted elements of ideology through the social strata, according to the needs of the subaltern classes and social formations. Ideology then never reaches the people in its original form as a 'clean' or an already 'authored' text; rather, it passes through numerous stages of modification and articulation in connection to the collective thoughts and desires of the groups it aims to unite. The ideological cohesiveness of the entire social bloc depends largely on the intellectual strategies employed in the process of diffusion.

Bringing together textual and extra textual elements as subjects of critical intelligibility is largely achieved through the 'interfering act' of the critic (or of the critical subject/spectator). Through this conscious interference, the 'socially interested' film critic transcends the traditional claims of artistic and/or 'scientific objectivity' which remains a pretext for much of the academic endeavours in the fields of social sciences and humanities.

*Ideological Reflection
Between 'sameness' and 'autonomy'*

In some ways, ideology does 'reflect' dominant power structures. But as I have briefly pointed out in chapter two, ideological 'reflection' does not imply identity or sameness. Instead, it didactically alludes to the unity of two distinct and autonomous domains. It is a relationship which is similar (in an instructive sense) to how superstructure and base interact within a historical bloc: a relationship between form and content (or quality and quantity). As Gramsci stresses, in a historical bloc, "material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces" (1971: 377).

This denotes that what is crucial for critical analysis is to explore the dynamics of ideological operation (read: the qualitatively superstructural) in conjunction with accounting for the quantitative empirical criteria of the socio-economic infrastructure. In other words, material life produces consciousness, while social structures and institutionalized cultural apparatuses (such as cinema) provide empirical elements which contribute to (rather than determine) the way individuals live and see themselves in society. This is achieved through the endowment of a specific, ideologically enhanced form (or quality) to consciousness. However, it is through the way in which the social subject (and by extension, the social agency) deals with, articulates, reacts to, submits, or (under specific conditions) is coerced to accept those conditions and 'productions', that the effectivity of ideology finally materializes and takes shape. Therefore, ideology does not simply reflect or mirror economic or political interests, and is not 'a given' determined by the economic structure or organization of society, but rather an area of struggle. It organizes action through the way it is embodied in social relations, institutions and practices, and informs all individual and collective activities (Mouffe, 1979).

The tendency to 'unequivocally' locate *either* cultural domination *or* cultural resistance (and never both) within a single filmic text, makes it

devoid (i.e., the text) in its position as an ideological mediator to a socially based subject. Reading the cinematic text as a 'depository' for social and political ideas, essentially assumes ideology as a superstructural determinant, one which reflects 'samely' (rather than functionally) the pre-determined concerns and interests of 'dominant' social and economic power. Consequently, the text becomes an enunciator of 'difference', which replaces, rather than mediates, social agency and social resistance.

However, the non-neutral intervention of the social subject within the filmic text (whether as an organic intellectual, or as a subject/spectator) transcends the film's ideological 'neutrality' (in terms of its inability to determine, on its own, its effectivity), and helps it assume an active functionality within the hegemonic social and cultural relations which it inhabits. Therefore, to assess the ways through which social domination (or marginalization) is maintained, fortified, reproduced, challenged, and/or overthrown in a civil social formation like Canada, it is crucial to understand how cultural processes, such as film, play an ideological role within the totality of structural social and cultural relationships. Providing a critical assessment of ideological reflection as a social indicator allows for a 'translation' of the filmic text which accounts for the way two of its structural elements (i.e., social and ideological) function in an historically analogous manner.

Consciousness and Social Agency

Ideology involves different forms or levels of social consciousness (rather than 'false consciousness') all of which contribute to sustaining present hegemonic relationships *and* to challenging and moving beyond present social and economic relationships. Resistance by the so called 'margin' or 'dominated' is a process which occurs within specific hegemonic relationships whose ability to sustain power is contingent on specific historical conditions. While, as Terry Eagleton asserts, ideology particularly involves "those modes of feeling, valuing, maintenance and reproduction of social power" (1983: 15-16), such conditions also allow for different levels of consciousness among the subaltern to emerge, and eventually for social agency to play a decisive role in shaping history. As such, ideology transcends 'expressing' (or samely reflecting) entrenched and/or unconscious sets of values and influences.

The relevance of works of art in general, and cinema as one of its most popular forms, is psychological: "[arts] organize human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc" (Gramsci, 1971: 377). For cinema, this means that its ideological effects are part of a particular common sense and, thus, of a process or activity that it endeavours to express. It is an element within a hegemonic process in which ideological effects are combined to produce a

particular vision of life and reality. This amounts to the active presence within the cinematic text of a number of different and paradoxical elements, all of which are bearers of complex (and mostly contradictory) ideological messages that, viewed from a relative distance, appear to merge into a hegemonic dialectic.

The ideological question appears when the cinematic work is seen as a practice directed at reforming consciousness. Concretely, this occurs at specific points in the cinematic narrative when 'values'—moral, political, social, and otherwise—are challenged and eventually resolved (or left without a resolution). These are the points in the filmic narrative when the spectator is presented with a dilemma that has to be settled. How does the formal-textual logic, from which the cinematic ideological effectivity is derived, sets limits to the ideological perception of history and reality? how do thoughts, emotions, and sensory awareness acquire specific historical significance? As such, both the text and the extra-textual of a cinematic work remain relative in their function (i.e., devoid of meaning) until they become supplied by a 'subject'-ive critical interpretation.

As a form of cultural communication which largely relies on expressing 'commonsensical' stories and ideas and on popular appeal, feature film is a

medium where the representation of ideological working assumes major social and historical significance. A socially interested reading of cinema needs to explore how different levels of consciousness (i.e., both from within and from without the filmic text) function to overdetermine the ideological effectivity of the filmic product. For example, by seeking to understand how films presents different forms of social and cultural interaction and how they articulate 'free' will and 'independence' into the ideology of hegemonic formations, film criticism points out the dynamics of social agency and resistance, and ultimately the crucial element for overcoming submission: social consciousness.

Film as a Cultural Composite

To study Canadian cinema in its historical context involves studying a cultural 'composite', against which the novelty or originality of a specific filmic work can be surveyed. In reality, such a composite is a sociocultural system, which cannot be reduced to struggles involving contradiction or negation. It is not a dialectical whole, but rather a universe of dissonance that has acquired an apparent order, reflected in cultural artifacts and philosophies to all of which we tend to assign the description of a 'Canadian cultural experience'. The oppositions, paradoxes, solidarities, conflicts, continuities, and changes within this system constitute one of the main objects of critical exploration,

which could involve the questioning and examining of everything from every possible angle.

Critical assessment of cinema, then, is not one of epistemology, as much of the Althusserian inspired film criticism seemed to assert, but a dialectical perspective of strategy of what is to be known. Criticism, in other words, should not be confused with aspiring to insert culture into some preestablished, teleological scheme and the reduction of a particular filmic work to a series of dialectical contradictions or negations. Neither should we confuse it with an endless metonymic fragmentation of the text, one which has the tendency to assign the text as the only focus of social, cultural, and political critical interaction. In order for us to understand the concept of textual 'reality' as a process (or processes), we must explore causal relationships as empirical constituents within the ideological functionality.

A socially interested reading of Canadian cinema has to deal with the question of how ideologies and discourses assume positions of social and cultural predomination. It addresses why a film becomes popular, and why, under other conditions, it makes no sense for the audience and is hence rendered unpopular. In other words, a socially interested reading needs to provide a socially based ideological assessment of the filmic text to

understand what's in it that makes sense and corresponds to the popular taste.

Such a reading cannot avoid acknowledging the concept of hegemony. As Alan Hunt asserts, "hegemony is important in providing an understanding of the complex processes that secure and reproduce the predominance of particular strategies, projects and discourses. (1991: 55) Thus, a film criticism which is interested in addressing and contemplating the notions of marginality, social struggles and conflicts, and subaltern resistance and culture, has to be based on a strategy which involves pointing out or locating elements of the hegemonic (and/or counter hegemonic) process. As Raymond Williams suggests, criticism needs to bring to the surface the "relatively mixed, confused, incomplete, or inarticulate consciousness of actual people who, in their fictional existence as characters in a play or novel, demonstrate a complex interlocking of the social, political, and cultural forces" (1977: 109).

By making criticism conscious of the effectivity of the commonsensical 'philosophy' of the subaltern both inside and outside the filmic text, meanings of film as a cinematic process become part of understanding the contradictory workings of hegemonic ideology. Through acknowledging the effectivity of

subaltern commonsense philosophy as it is manifested and as it works within the filmic narrative, criticism assumes an organic role which is specifically oriented towards addressing and contributing to the social and political struggles of the marginalized. Such a politically engaged critical practice in relation to Canadian cinema develops a sense of its own political identity, an awareness of how criticism is itself part of specific hegemonic or counter hegemonic processes. It is an awareness which enhances a perspective of how Canadian films empower, and are empowered by hegemonic ideology.

Mediation on the Superstructural Level

Critical analysis which restricts itself to examining the criteria allotted by the filmic text will always be vulnerable to reductionism. The same way vulgarized versions of Marxist analysis tended to reduce ideology and ideological formations into a 'reflection' of sameness of economic and social structures, reducing critical analysis of the ideological workings of film into an examination of the text makes such analysis vulnerable to conceiving the text as a mirror which has the capacity to reflect 'samely' the ideological reality which it inhabits. Incorporating an explicit assessment of the 'extra-text' into critical analysis—including what does not directly or necessarily implicate the text, but nevertheless refers to its social historicity—introduces an appropriation of the cinematic process as a social signifier.

Mediation asserts the possibility of passing from one level of the superstructure to another (and as I have discussed earlier, between levels of base and the superstructure) in a way which illustrates how different languages expressed at the various levels represent diversely modified manifestations of the same essence. Through mediation, one can explain a text in terms of its extra-textual relations, not in order to establish a 'sameness' of identity between filmic structure and material practices, but rather to show that superstructural phenomena are mere projections of other infrastructural realities (e.g., political, philosophical, institutional), which means that they have in common an inner logic and that they possess similar functions and characteristics.

As Gramsci asserts, the concept of mediation is reaffirmed in the notion of "convertibility" or "translation". These are seen by Gramsci as general principles that establish the fundamental unity of superstructural and infrastructural spheres. Convertibility makes possible the reciprocal translation of the specific languages of any given system. It makes film, while it possesses a distinct language of its own, translatable into a common vernacular manifesting the peculiar characteristics of a world view or the universal structure of a given sociocultural system.

As social, economic, and political discourses cannot on their own determine an understanding and ultimately a change in cultural discourse, filmic discourse in isolation of those and other discourses does not determine an understanding of the social significance of the 'extra-filmic text'. A socially interested critical reading of the filmic text needs to attest to the specificities of its historical moments; this implies a reading which accounts for the empirically extra-textual (e.g., the quantitatively political, philosophical, historical), and the formally cinematic (i.e., the filmic as a qualitative sphere).

For any cultural criticism to incorporate mediation, it has to acknowledge that this process involves more than a mere unmasking of meanings from within the text as a substitute for assessing extra-textual attributes. Mediation brings together two seemingly separate elements from two different spheres to address their relationship and interactivity. Neither the metaphoric nor metonymic attributes of the text are capable of bringing together the textual and extra-textual elements in a critically 'translatable' manner. Therefore, in order to provide a social and historical understanding of the filmic text, analysis has to bring together both spheres of intelligibility which it is interested in addressing.

Conclusion

Cultural resistance, therefore, is neither a mere semiotic resistance, nor an isolated ideological struggle against what Lyotard calls a "cultural policy" (1984: 76). Rather, critical analysis is part of a political struggle within historically specific hegemonic relationships, one which in the case of film needs to assess what the film most evidently manifests in relation to ideological hegemony and intelligibilities. To bring together those elements, the task becomes, as Fredric Jameson points out (1985), neither to unveil a sub-text of hidden ideological operations that exists within a cinematic text, nor to decipher a system of an Other's ideology which 'produces' false consciousness and hides its cultural operations by the very fact of its concealment of its identity. Instead, cultural analysis needs to deal with what is already evident within the filmic text, in mediation with the ideological formations of which it is part.

To understand any intellectual climate presupposes an analysis of the underlying ideas or philosophies characterizing a specific milieu, how they are rooted in material practices and how they circulate within the various parts of the superstructure, how phenomena that might appear different contain a common ideological nucleus, the substance and functions of which

may be reciprocally converted or translated from one to the other. The role of critical writing on film becomes a crucial element within a complex ideological discursive process. A filmic text comes into being in relation to the limits placed on it by time and place, and by concrete, historically situated language and consciousness. The study of Canadian cinematic culture becomes, then, a study of the relations between cinema and the society of which it is a part.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMON SENSE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL WORKING OF CINEMA: *JOHN AND THE MISSUS*

According to Gramsci, common sense incorporates contradictory conceptions of the world maintained by subaltern classes and groups. Popular conceptions held by such groups are not simple reflections of predominant social and political conditions; they are not simply false consciousness, or expressions of an Other's myth or ideology. As a 'philosophy', common sense is characterized by contending loyalties and alliances. It is a means of negotiating existing conditions which are specific to one's social and cultural backgrounds.

Gramsci argues, that as a concept, common sense is "ambiguous, contradictory, and multiform," and, although it may be called "the philosophy of the non-philosophers," it is not a "single unique conception, which is identical in time and space":

It is the 'folklore' of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a

conception which even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. (1971:419)

One of the goals of an historical assessment of cinema (Canadian or otherwise), is to bring to the fore the contradictions between a hegemonic reading and the reading by the 'Other', and thus to produce (as part of an ideological struggle) the tension that will show the 'dominant' reading as an "interested" reading which is open to contestation and change. While acknowledging the primacy of the processes of production, distribution, and reception in defining and shaping the future of Canadian film, socially "interested" critical assessment needs to inquire into how ideology works in today's popular culture as reflected in cinema.

Gordon Pinsent's film *John and the Missus* (1986) is set in a small town in Newfoundland (Cup Cove) in 1962. The town is subjected to virtual shutdown as a result of the provincial government's plans to resettle the entire population in an economically more feasible location. The shutdown, however, is presented in conjunction with the closing of the town's main economic lifeline: its copper mine. This reading of the film tests it against the ideological context it operates within. It provides a basis for attesting to the work of ideology through the film's commonsensical depiction of the town population's resistance to the forced resettlement program.

Analyzing the ideological workings of the film's narrative and its sympathetic depiction of Newfoundlanders' resistance to change, this reading also alludes to the narrative's delineation of this resistance as 'nonsensical', and as a traditionalist attempt to postpone the benefits of 'inevitable progress'. Through pointing out some 'extra-narrative' ideological nuances which correspond to the meanings presented within the narrative, I will also refer to another extra-textual reference which is relevant to the film's production date in the late 1980s.

As it accounts for the notion of 'change' as heralded by the inevitability of economic and technological progress, the film establishes a commonsensical trajectory into the repercussions, as well as the benefits, of accepting the 'inevitability' of change both in the period in which the film is set (i.e., 1962), as well as the more current period under which the film was produced in 1987. Through these dynamics, the film provides an ideologically 'cohesive' statement on Canadian social and economic 'realities' in the historical specificity of economic downsizing, free trade agreements, and the explosion of information technology.

General Historical and Political Background

Between 1953 and 1965 the provincial government in Newfoundland initiated an extensive program of community centralization. In 1949, the year during which it joined the Canadian federation, Newfoundland had close to 1,500 rural communities, most of which had fewer than 300 residents (Matthews, 1976: 2). Citing the cost and difficulty of providing roads and other services to remote outport towns, the program initiated an attempt to resettle the residents of those areas in urban and semi-urban locations of the island. Financial assistance was provided to residents only when 100 percent of the community ratified their willingness to resettle. By 1965 the plan only succeeded in evacuating 115 communities containing less than 7,500 people. Only after making some revisions to its strategy was the government successful in closing 119 further communities and relocating an additional 16,114 residents. (Matthews: 2-3)

Describing the process of resettlement, David Macfarlane presents an image of virtual uprooting of the lives of entire communities in Newfoundland:

[The program] reached its dizzy heights in the 1950's and 60's when poor outport communities that were too thinly populated to justify the construction of a road or a causeway were simply uprooted and moved to more convenient locations. Entire houses—their china shaking, their drapes billowing, their pots rattling, their dogs barking at the upstairs windows—were put up on floats and pulled across bays to be transplanted to more central communities. (1991: 125)

As it resulted in some tragic consequences for most of the resettlers, for others (particularly those with better access to capital), the program presented an opportunity for economic benefit. Describing his own family's position in this process, Macfarlane writes:

At times it seemed as if the entire island was up for tender. The Goodyears were in the right place at the right time with the right occupation. The family's move to the interior had been prophetic. They built roads, and when people travelled on those roads they ended up at one of the Goodyear's stores. It looked like the beginning of a dynasty. (125)

Many Newfoundlanders, however, conceived of the entire resettlement program as merely a scheme to help the big corporations exploit the cheap labour of the impoverished and newly displaced settlers (Brox, 1969: 67). As a result of this process, local culture in Newfoundland acquired a significant repertoire of anti-resettlement songs that articulated this experience as a tragic separation from a traditional way of life and resources (Sullivan, 1994: 204).

Much of the discourse on Newfoundland's economic development presents itself as an inquiry into the island's problematic embrace of progress and modernization. While acknowledging the significant obstacles to regional growth—noting, for example, the foreign exploitation of provincial resources, the alteration of aqua-environments and the challenges of geographical isolation—this discourse "tend[s] to reserve the most vigorous finger-pointing

for Newfoundlanders themselves" (Sullivan, 1994: 189-190). Newfoundland workers, Sullivan points out, have been berated for harbouring the underdevelopment of their region through "their devotion to 'backward' or traditional' work methods and through their lack of support of government-sponsored growth initiatives" (190).

In analyzing the nature of the crisis in Newfoundland's economy during the late fifties to the early seventies, Frederick Johnstone links it to economic dependence as it relates to conditions which are similar to Third World underdevelopment. He rejects the conventional emphasis on 'traditional backwardness', and draws attention to the need to reconsider instead the capitalist structure of economic power. He writes: "people were poor because wealth flowed out of their regions, due to resources being controlled by profit-seeking business in other regions" (176). Johnstone connects the process of economic deprivation in the area to the legacy of capitalist penetration of the Third World as neocolonialist imperialist hegemony. He reminds us that after World War Two:

This system had led to the uneven development of regions and unequal exchange between them. The rich areas got richer at the expense of the poor areas, because they controlled resources, credit, and the terms of trade. The capitalist core actively "underdeveloped" the Third World periphery over a long period of time. The Third World did not arise naturally; it was created. (176-177)

Major difficulties have characterized labour and independent political action in Newfoundland during the fifties and sixties. Collective forms of resistance on the island, however, were not totally absent. Describing the nature, the size, and the impact of labour activities around that period in Badger (a town less than fifty kilometres away from the fictional setting of Gordon Pinsent's Cape Cove), David Macfarlane writes:

In January 1959, twelve thousand loggers struck against the paper mills in Newfoundland. It was a vicious, bitter dispute, and when premier Smallwood called in the RCMP and a young officer in the royal Newfoundland constabulary had his skull cracked open at a violent demonstration on the main street of Badger, my grandfather concluded that, if Newfoundland was any indication, the world had finally gone mad. (156)

In an island with less than half a million people, labour action of such magnitude cannot but have an impact on the political, social, and cultural memory of the community. The film's conception of resistance and collective memory, however, is different.

On a more contemporary level, and over the last two decades, one way of articulating policies that had negative social effects on the less economically fortunate segments of Canadians, has been through aligning such policies with ideas about change, progress, and civilization. A good example of this relates to how the Premier of Ontario has recently associated his economic anti-deficit program with the slogan of 'common sense'. When *John and the*

Missus was produced ten years ago, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was similarly trying to sell the first Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. as the only 'sensible' way of competing and functioning in a new global economy. The concept of 'change' under late capitalism, therefore, places priority on equating it with commonsensical and non-threatening change or 'evolution'. In other words, in order to be part of the late capitalist concept of change, one needs to articulate his/her own submission of serving the goals of the hegemonic class by constantly moving things without transforming them in order for the existing relations of production to be permanently reproduced in a subtle manner.

Gordon Pinsent's adaptation of his own play and novel depicts a personal statement on a fictional situation which occurred during the implementation of the resettlement program. The film takes place during a holdout in a Newfoundland outport when a copper mine closes and the government moves simultaneously to resettle the local inhabitants. It is a powerful personal testimony to Pinsent's nostalgic pride and attachment to his roots in Newfoundland. It articulates an examination of the fate of specific individuals (mainly John, his wife Nan, his newly wed son Matthew and his bride Faith) as they adapt to the harsh reality of displacement.

Progress and Traditionalizing Resistance

John and the Missus re-inscribes existing social and economic order by demonstrating the contradictory, yet complementary allegiances of Cup Cove's residents as they react to the government's plan to resettle them away from the outport. Commonsensical understanding by the residents (including their most vocal opponent of the plan) of the 'reality' of progress and the impossibility (or worthlessness) of resistance, leads by the end to their willing submission to the 'new' order.

The film, on the other hand, poses a discourse on history which divulges sympathy for "traditional" perspectives of the world. It poses family, hard work, love of the place of birth, and fidelity to social and cultural values and heritage as a moral high ground for resisting the recklessness of progress. It presents progress as an inevitable fate: a loathed, yet desirable fantasy.

The explosion in the town's copper mine results in the death and serious injury of several miners. It becomes the pretext which prompts one of the owners (Tom) and the government representative (Danny) to implement their original plan to resettle the now shattered community in another part of the island. Although he first refuses to go along with the program, John, a well-

respected resident and a member of a founding settler family in Cup Cove, finally succumbs to personal and community pressure to leave the town. John, along with the mine co-workers and other town residents, finally accepts the inevitable relocation proposal. His final act of submission, however, becomes an act of 'defiance'. John decides to physically remove and relocate himself and his house by mounting it on a barge and sailing it through Notre Dame Bay.

The Evolutionary Chain of the Past, Present, and Future

The filmic narrative sets the stage for an ideologically 'commonsensical' resolution for the dilemma of resettlement. As Cup Cove enters a period of instability due to the decision of the mine owners to start laying off workers, the community is challenged to come up with its own answer to the dilemma. However, a major explosion occurs in the mine causing many casualties. Under such circumstance, to keep the mine open and ultimately to sustain life in Cup Cove becomes an unrealistic and even dangerous alternative.

In the film, the preoccupations of the present are represented not merely as the interests of the moment but as eternal needs. They become significant for the past, the present, and the future. As such, the film's notion of tradition becomes a common sensical component in the process of 'dehistoricizing'

history, and allowing the concept of change and modernization to become synonymous with continuity rather than with fundamental transformation. Thus, change is rendered open to move toward the past as much as away from it. This ambiguous view of the relationship between present-future and past is clearly captured in *John and the Missus*. The needs of the present (e.g., making a decision regarding resettling away from Cup Cove) reinvent the past (e.g., tradition of early settlement, family, hard work, community etc.) thereby preparing for a non-threatening and commonsensical form of change. Let's demonstrate how this is achieved in the film.

The film's opening segment incorporates John and his wife Nan and the 'historical' face of Mr. Fudge. The past (history) is introduced as a memory, and is merged into the present through the Missus' touching hand which introduces us to John. Lost in his memory, John relates the continuity of the present (his wife) to the comfort of the reassuring hand of an early settler (Mr. Fudge). In this scene, the film sets out the couple's facility to be part of the inevitable process of change. It inextricably intertwines the 'transformation' of Mr. Fudge's hand into the hand of the Missus.

More than merely constructing her point of view (position) as the audiences' look and position as Andre Loisele suggests (1994:77), the film's

identification with Nan's look consistently re-identifies us with her role as the link between the past and the present. The Missus is a mediator who heralds the ensuing evolution which eventually leads John (albeit based on 'his own terms' as we will see later) to submit to the proposal of resettlement. Nan's silent sympathy with moving out of Cup Cove is matched by Mr. Fudge's passive observance of the unfolding events which he has no power to interfere in. Toward the end film, as John throws Mr. Fudge's black hat into the water in a gesture of his final break with the past, Nan utters a painful sigh. John puts his arm around her in a reassuring display of continuity between the present-change and the future. The presence of the Missus (present-change) becomes the substitute for the absence of Mr. Fudge's hat (the past-tradition).

Technology, Tradition, and Evolutionary Progress

Another important element in the film's depiction of the notion of commonsensical change relates to the role of technology. The affiliation between the 'Canada of today' and its past (including that of the Atlantic region) is charged with contradictory dynamics which refer to social change. However, as with other advanced civil societies, political culture in Canada regards change as a sign of vitality and negation of stagnation—which is

associated with the past and tradition. Within this dynamic, technology (as a signifier of the future and of change) is particularly privileged in the Canadian cultural discourse. Through three different outlooks (i.e., technological humanism, technological dependency, and technological realism), the works of Grant, McLuhan and Innis are of particular interest. As the three pillars of the Canadian discourse on technology, those writers express diverse, yet similar assumptions in relation to the role of technology as a formative vehicle on the road towards change. In the words of Arthur Kroker:

What makes the discourse on technology such a central aspect of the Canadian imagination is that this discourse is situated midway between the future of the New World and the past of European culture, between the rapid unfolding of the "technological imperative" in the American empire and the classical origins of the technological dynamo in European history. (1984: 7)

Change is perceived as a way of accepting the inevitability of the future as technological progress irrespective of the social forces and dynamics that control the process. This form of change is 'imagined' as infinite prospects. Yet, society under late capitalism remains generally cautious about 'change' as a whole, because it also propagates possible disruption, discontinuity and lack of direction. While it is occasionally rendered as a thinly disguised chaos which undermines the principles of an orderly society (different concerns around the 'negative' effects of information technology are an example of such caution), change as part of technological progress remains a condition of the

individual innovation and breakthroughs upon which the Canadian entrepreneurial imagination is constructed.

John and the Missus depicts the past as it 'moulds' into the future through technical innovation. The film's delineation of this linkage, however, places it as part of an evolutionary and non-threatening transformation. After John cuts a tree branch into a whistle pipe and hands it to his young neighbour (Robert), the boy hears a loud sound. As he looks up to discern the source of the sound, a supersonic plane buzzes through the sky above. The image of young Robert looking upward is immediately followed by the image of John gazing in front of him as he examines one of the town's recently abandoned houses. "Wouldn't be bad for young Matt," John tells another friend standing by.

The sequence is constructed in a way which refers to 'technology' (i.e., the plane) not as a threatening omen, but as continuity and as part of the evolutionary change to which tradition (i.e., continuity of familial ties) can be 'assimilated'. Change as technology becomes a signifier of 'natural' progression between young and old, primitiveness and innovation, past and present. The boy's interest in the newer form of technology (plane) is juxtaposed with John's mastery of more traditional technology (the pipe). The

'contrast' between the two seemingly different interests is depicted in a rather complementary manner, which incorporates possibilities of 'natural' displacement by progression between one generation and the other.

In the same context, the film introduces us to John's son Matthew as the young man with the blue car, and his wife Faith as the young woman with the camera. The young couple are captivated by the idea of seizing the beauty of Cup Cove (the past). They do that, however, as they drive their car through its roads or through capturing it on film (i.e., via utilizing the technical instruments of the present-future). On the other hand, instruments of technology (the future) are again associated with youth (change-present). Our contradictory fascination with technological adaptation is associated with its evolutionary inevitability (a 'normality' similar to generational displacement).

In the words of Arthur Kroker:

It is the gamble of the Canadian discourse on technology that, in disclosing the full horizon of the technological simulacrum within which we are trapped, and in revealing possibilities for transforming technique in the direction of human emancipation, Canadian thought partakes of the 20th century by posing the question of the human fate. (18-19)

History as 'Common Sense'

A commonsensical interpretation of history tends to transform it into a homogenized past. It becomes an abstruse moment with a muddled relation to the economic, political, legal, and philosophical practices of a specific society. It is transformed into an interpretation of the past necessitated by the commonsensical demands of the present. In the context of conceiving change as inevitable, nostalgia becomes a commodified version of what Althusser labels as 'historicism', which on one hand promises continuity and stability, and on the other hand forges the 'ideal' subjectivities that are essential for the maintenance and the development of the economic and social order of the day. Michael Dorland suggests, that "the operative dimension of Canadian time is, at best, that of nostalgia; the longing for a past that never was from the perspective of a present one cannot accept. (7) However, subaltern nostalgia is also a trajectory for change and progress. This makes the present-one which Dorland conceives as 'unacceptable'—in reality bearable *and* acceptable to the marginalized classes and social groups, and in other words: commonsensical.

When John and the rest of the mine workers are finally told about the closing of the mine and of the resettlement project, John's own conception of his future as historical nostalgia (i.e., staying in Cup Cove in the company of

his son's family to continue the tradition of earlier settlers), is contrasted with the more dynamic notion of change as present (i.e., resettlement). His angry protest against this interruption and discrepancy in the chain of evolutionary continuity between past, present, and future becomes the high point in the dramatic development of the film; without resolving this dilemma in a commonsensical way, the film remains ideologically problematic. The ensuing stretch of the film's dramatic tension eventually leads to re-establishing the stability in the chain which connects the past, present, and future. John and his wife physically move their house and belongings (as an accommodation of both the nostalgia for their past, as well as their move towards the future), and begin a journey across Notre Dame Bay—a journey which compliments the present-change as envisaged through resettlement.

Resistance as Individual Free Will

Although the ostensible dimension of the journey represents their own version of the present-change (the film does not make certain the destination of John and Nan's resettlement), the couple's goal remains part of the collective submission to the commonsensical reality of 'progress' to which everyone else in Cup Cove has succumbed. As John and Nan sail offshore

and arrive at their first intended 'destination' (Shoe Cove), Nan goads John to move on. "It looks like home, doesn't it!" John tells his wife. "Yes," she replies, and urges to him to continue on. As their destination becomes an open-ended question, the journey is rendered as a culmination of the "infinite possibilities" that they hold, a voyage built to exemplify their ultimate triumph in finding their own destiny.

On the one hand, the journey reinstates John and Nan's relationship. It marks the intense emotions we expect them to bring to the renewed substitute of the happiness they left behind in Cup Cove. On the other hand, the journey rationalizes the couple's submission to a new lifestyle which was forced upon them by the all powerful wheel of 'progress' and 'modernization'.

Earlier, as John carries his dead co-worker's coffin for burial, his voice in the background speaks to his departed friend while simultaneously addressing his own fate: "Your feet could only go wherever you wanted to go, just like mine . . . till now. Now, you have to go where [they] say you go and you have no say about it. What would you think of that . . . Imagine that . . . No say in the matter . . . " 'Future' is sealed as inevitability, as fate, and as natural evolution, and John—just like his dead friend—has "no say in the matter." Later in the film, John responds angrily to the government's offer for

resettlement. Although his position gives him a moral high ground, his 'resistance' is nevertheless destined to failure. John's 'motif' is intertwined with clinging to the graves of the elders: his vision of the future (clinging to the past), becomes synonymous with death: "will anybody recognize my grave? . . . you sir are telling me where to die," John challenges Danny the government official, pointing his finger at the town's graveyard while holding Mr. Fudge's clock in the same hand.

John's attempt to resist the government's decision is clearly doomed to failure. Lying down on his death bed, fatally injured, Alf appeals to John to keep the mine closed. The inevitability of submission is also marked forcefully by the role played by John's son Matthew. In an intimation of his father's isolation, Matthew, along with other town workers, picks up his resettlement application form and walks out leaving the 'old man' standing behind alone in the town hall. Youth (the present-future) has opted for the ideologically viable form of 'change'. Mathew's problematic relationship with 'tradition' is proposed earlier in the film when he hesitates to make love to his wife Faith because they happen to be sleeping in Matthew's grandfather's bed. Independence, love, the possibility of procreation, and ultimately change, are posed against the rigidity and the sterility of hanging on to the past (in this case considering the option of staying in Cup Cove).

When forced to recognize the uselessness of his 'resistance', John articulates his own version of submission. John's rejection of 'change', however, is linked to his need to qualify, for himself and for his family, his submission to the present-change. He does that through articulating his own 'free will', while in the process incorporating his own past and 'tradition'. Therefore, John's new history is rewritten by setting out on a journey of renewal which leads him back to another collective imaginary symbolic of the island's 'traditional' form of resistance: the 'dream' of abandoning the island for the big city or the mainland. John and Nan's reinstatement of the past (the house and each other), restores stability and continuity to the previously disrupted historical chain; however, it is a stability associated with their own 'authentic' (read: consensual) mode of articulating the past, the present, and the future in the context of hegemonic power relations.

On the other hand, the presence of the 'old folks' and Mr. Fudge indicates John's longing for the past as future. It symbolizes John's loathing of the 'logic' of the authorities, as well as his desire for 'non-mediated' cognizance. John rejects the present-change as he is disinclined to enter the 'future' as proposed by the authorities. Yet dropping out of the collective commonsense of his town peers, he remains bound by the larger ideological framework of consent. John's 'independent' logic does not transcend the non-discursivity of

a 'free' person obtaining his/her authority of freedom from within his/her own immanent self.

The climactic stand which puts John beyond the 'logic' of the rest of the community is made possible by having his own house (his more direct little space) physically 'dragged' across the bay. The consideration here is not to recognize the discrepancy between claim and reality, but the very possibility of the political opposition of the individual (as opposed to the collective) and, in the absence of such possibility, the feasibility of personal forms of resistance to the 'excesses' of reckless capitalism. Through their journey, John and Nan privatize the contestation of values, and by supposedly 'dropping out', also succeed in making their own peace with the world: their option reincorporates the prosaic lifestyle of a likely "bohemian" margin.

In their search for new living grounds, John's son Matthew and his wife Faith want to get as far away from the temporal (the past) and geographical (the island) intersections of their current life as possible. However, the limits to their desired journey are already determined by the fate of the entire town. The film in fact becomes a measure of the possibilities available for the entire community; a collectivity of the subaltern faced with the determined will of the guardians of progress: the hegemonic power structures. The film sets in

motion a chain of motifs leading towards the town's consent, and towards the symbolically significant consent by John himself. While posing possible sites for resistance and action, the narrative simultaneously depicts those sites as parochial and anti-progress.

The mainland and the world outside the island add yet another symbolic dimension to the ideological options provided by the narrative. In retrospect, those sites provide a cognitive frame for the people of Cup Cove. References to those symbolic spaces (the photographs in the travel brochures, the travel fables told by Fred, and the stories of success uttered by the baker who left the island to open a successful business in Hamilton) are used as the standard against which most characters and their experiences are probed and either found morally lacking, and thus 'rejected' as anti-tradition (as in the case of John), or considered agreeable and hence undertaken as the only option by the rest of the community.

Fred's last stand, however, culminates in his death. After throwing away his travel brochures and 'souvenirs', he embarks on the only 'voyage' he could realistically take: his final departure from life. As the ultimate imaginary traveller and the never settled (or resettled) islander, Fred is the one character who does not belong to the past (as nostalgia), the present (as

consent), or the future (as false hope). His dreams become ideological signifiers of the impossibility of articulating imagination into reality.

As an ideological construction, history under late capitalism re-inscribes the past that is recovered in the name of change, making it as harmless and non-threatening as possible. However, for the past to be depleted for the sake of the present, it has to be first transformed into 'tradition'. As such, tradition becomes an element in an uninterrupted chain which joins it with the concept of evolutionary modernization. It provides the basis for familiarity and stability.

The construction of tradition as an ideological entity is nevertheless subdued so that the view of reality seems inevitable, natural and, more importantly, commonsensical. This moulding of history into tradition erases the dynamics of the past, while projecting it as a moment of clarity and sameness in which the interests of the present (i.e., current production relations) are rendered natural. Through exploring change as fate and as a vehicle within an uninterrupted process which links the past, the present, and the future in the chain of evolutionary history, *John and the Missus* inscribes a commonsensical story of dissent in a marginalized region of Canada. By traditionalising a community's struggle for survival, the narrative reaches a transcendental moment that is anti-historical and apolitical.

Conclusion

In its first editorial in 1977, the Canadian film and cultural journal *Cine-Tracts* contemplated the possibility of a critical cultural practice that is capable of unmasking the ideological character of criticism itself. To achieve this goal it proposed a theoretical critical connection:

In linking together the issues of self-reflexivity, subjective positioning, and hegemonic social structure, we are proposing the outline of a possible theory of culture which embraces both the 'critique of ideology' and the problematic of praxis. This work is largely incomplete and thus far, poses far more questions than answers. (1977: 3)

Addressing such questions today is in fact as urgent as it was two decades earlier. Negative interpretation of ideology in critical film analysis limits the understanding of the liberating possibilities of cinema. Furthermore, the inability to appreciate the complex role of hegemonic ideology bolsters powers that have an interest in enforcing a homogeneity of 'unified'—or powerless and 'fragmented'—global cultural subjectivities.

For an 'interested' study of Canadian cinema to develop, and for it to play a role in challenging dominant power structures, it has to demonstrate a closer and more subtle integration with empirical studies in history and sociology. A crucial element in this process relates to articulating an understanding of how the notions of hegemony and commonsense provide a

basis for appreciating the social and political dynamics of the general cinematic culture in Canada and within our loosely identified Canadian cinemas. Critical expounding on the working of ideological hegemony provides a crucial tool for enhancing the politics of cultural and social resistance in the specific conditions of late capitalism in Canada.

In contrast to formalist or 'thematic' critical analyses which essentially deal with enclosed ideological spaces, a socially 'interested' reading of *Canadian film* needs to operate on the social crossway of several infrastructural and superstructural levels. Instead of remaining conditioned by the innate features and practices of the filmic text or by the dichotomy with, or the will of, the 'ideological' Other, Canadian cinema would be reincorporated into the Canadian experience as a historically and socially produced frame of cognizance.

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