English Canadian cinema has presented a long-standing problem in Canadian cultural and communication studies, largely because it has not manifested the levels of popularity deemed appropriate for a truly national cinema. It is something of a challenge, then, to think about English Canadian cinema as something other than either a failed experiment in popular culture or a list of overlooked films. My goal in this chapter is to outline an alternative approach. I consider the idea of national cinema and examine the ways in which recent cultural policies in Canada have created multiple industries with different, and sometimes conflicting, goals and outcomes. As examples of the vexing question of English Canadian cinema, I consider the significance of the non-theatrical in Canadian exhibition history and I
analyze the rise of what I call “hoser mockumentaries” as actually existing popular Canadian film texts.

I argue that what connects these phenomena is a conception of cinema as a site of the formation of Canadian publics, both in relation to existing or virtual public spheres, and in relation to identity formation. The “public sphere” is a metaphor that, according to Alan McKee, “we use to think about the way that information and ideas circulate in large societies.”¹ But more than this, public spheres can be understood as sites where publics come into being. Publics can be national in scale (the Canadian public) or more local; they can be formed according to official projects, such as nation building, or emerge as oppositional alternative or counter-publics. Michael Warner notes that texts are an intrinsic aspect of publics (the reading public) and that creative work can constitute a public sphere.² So, while traditionally the public has been associated with rational, deliberative political thinking, according to Richard Butsch in his book Media and Public Spheres, “if we relax the criteria of reasoned deliberation among equals for a common good, and we accept the presence of multiple public spheres, then we find public spheres of all sorts in many places, included, abetted or unrestrained by today’s pervading media.”³ Arguably, the formation of national identity occurs in part through the public sphere and certainly important aspects of citizenship occur in and through such textual interactions.

Non-theatrical screenings with the pedagogical intention of nation-formation go all the way back to the National Film Board’s mobile cinema strategies of the 1940s and continued in the postwar period with an emphasis on the importance of libraries and schools as sites of Canadian film distribution. Following the policy turn toward cultural industries in the 1980s, by the 1990s non-theatrical screenings were transformed into sites of privatized consumption, on the one hand, and film festivals on the other. Significantly, hoser mockumentaries emerge at this same moment and can operate as a site of textual encounter with official policies traditionally connecting film and citizenship, marking in a prescient way both the shift underway in the English Canadian film landscape toward the film commodity and the struggles in the Canadian polity over multiculturalism.

In what follows, I argue that funding for film festivals, as well as their remarkable success in Canadian cities, and the push for new media solutions to the distribution problem, as well as the emergence of popular mockumentaries all point to the long-standing question of film’s role in the Canadian context as a site of
citizenship formation. Citizenship is invoked whether it is rooted in the urban experience of the film festival’s temporary public, in the attempt to bypass conventional commercial distribution circuits, or in the parody of the Canadian documentary tradition. This complex relationship between culture, citizenship, and marketplace—between texts, national and political identity, and the context of commodity exchange that tends to dominate—provides a framework for what, following Mette Hjort, we could call the themes of nation.4

**Nation and “Spheres of Publics”**

In his article, “Technological Nationalism,” published over twenty years ago, Maurice Charland proposed that technology was at the centre of the Canadian imagination: “Canada’s national dream is a dream of technology,” he wrote.5 “Technological nationalism promises a liberal state in which technology would be a neutral medium for the development of a polis,” but is ultimately bankrupt. There is “no substance or commonality for the polis,” he concludes, “except communication itself.”6 According to Charland, in Canada a technophilic bureaucracy inhabits the place where a true community should be. Charland’s argument is elegant and thought provoking. Yet it normatively presumes that to be authentic a state should be propped up by a nation and not the other way around. Elsewhere I have proposed that we examine our highly regulated and technologically mediated public sphere in Canada not as inauthentic, but rather as productive of the distinctive sorts of public discourses and national activities that prevail in this country.7 I’d like to extend that discussion here.

Theorists of the democratic process in liberal nation-states tend to agree that citizens constitute a public only when they become engaged in spaces, both literal and figurative, around issues of public concern. According to Michael Warner, a public must be self-organizing, “organized by something other than the state.”8 This corresponds to Charland’s discussion about the absent Canadian nation. Their views dovetail with the growing field of cultural citizenship, where there is a move to shift citizenship discourse away from an orientation toward state sanctioned formal rights, and toward participation (though of course rights can form a safeguard for participation of certain kinds). Partially, this shift has to do with a move away from assuming the nation as the default scale of political community. National forms of citizenship are being reconstituted by an emphasis on the global and the local9 and
citizens by definition belong to a polity in which they may participate, a concept that is not coterminous with any particular scale of community or nation.10

Yet as Craig Calhoun and others note, nations still matter.11 In his extensive work on the area of media and national communication, Philip Schlesinger has observed that strong national links remain despite globalization and that, above all else, the nation is a “communicative space.”12 Nations have distinctive national discourses, he argues; they still “speak to themselves, mark themselves off as different from others.”13 In this respect, Schlesinger’s notion of a “sphere of publics… in which national identities are seen as subject to much more explicit negotiation”14 is suggestive. Charland, for example, does not account for the existence of multiple publics in Canada, presuming a singular public sphere. Nor does Charland allow for the possibility that spaces opened up by the state may still operate in dialogic fashion with more authentically popular democratic public activity. Warner postulates, for example, that a public can only act thorough “imaginary coupling with the state,”15 and this may prove a useful perspective on the Canadian case.

Michael Warner’s emphasis on the textual basis of publics is also pertinent. According to him, the “concatenation of texts through time” creates a public, an “ongoing space of encounter for discourse.”16 Publics in this sense are “inter textual” and “intergeneric.”17 In Canada, where virtually all feature film production and 70 percent of television production is funded by Telefilm, a national agency with a nation-building mandate, the conception of the film public is more than an abstraction. Thinking about the link between policy and public is useful when we consider the role of film policy in constituting texts and spaces for their reception as nation-building activity. Authenticity is certainly at issue, as is credulity. Nation-building’s earnest engineering is easily mocked. Yet, as I explore below, even this intertextual mocking can provide a significant commentary on Canadian political culture and is therefore worthy of analysis.

**National Cinema: Some Issues**

The concept of “national cinema” is often closely linked to nation building. Nevertheless, the term is polyvalent and context-dependent, referring by turns to a domestic industry, a privileged set of domestically produced “quality films,” or the actual films watched by various fractions of the national audience.18 With
the globalization of cultural industries, there has been increasing acknowledge-
ment that the nationalist project of producing an indigenous cinema, in English
Canada and Quebec as elsewhere, cannot be thought of without reference to the
very real aspect of Hollywood films in Canadian’s lives. For instance, one impli-
cation of Hollywood’s dominance is that no small national cinema meets
Hollywood or other regional powerhouses on its own terms. National cinemas
are always in lopsided dialogue with Hollywood or other regionally dominant
cinemas, such as the Indian film industry (Don McKellar’s Child Star [2004]
and Deepa Mehta’s Bollywood/Hollywood [2002] are both self-conscious exam-
pies of this).

One of the modalities of this dialogue is genre. Genre, exemplified by main-
stream film conventions such as the western, the gangster film, the musical, the
horror film, melodrama, and comedy, has tended to be dominated by Hollywood
definitions. Thus, every engagement with genre is an engagement with or a rejec-
tion (in the case of the auteur film) of Hollywood. Auteur films play well at film
festivals and art houses, but otherwise have a limited following, and haven’t pro-
duced a national audience for Canadian-made films. Genre films are what most
people choose to see, whether or not this is due to lack of exposure to alternatives.
Added to the complex relationship with Hollywood is the fact that Hollywood
production has become an important policy aspect of the Canadian film indus-
try. It may be effective to consider it as one of a number of Canadian film indus-
tries, along with indigenous popular film, indigenous art film, Quebec film, and
Aboriginal film. In short, Canada is home to multiple film industries and corre-
spanding film publics.

In an oft-anthologized essay, Stephen Crofts has described the different ways
in which national cinemas negotiate the relationship with Hollywood:

- Cinemas that differ from Hollywood but do not compete directly by tar-
  geting a distinct, specialist market sector;
- Cinemas that differ from Hollywood and do not compete (as above), but
do directly critique Hollywood;
- Non-Anglophone entertainment cinemas that struggle against Hollywood
  with little or no success;
- Cinemas that ignore Hollywood;
- Anglophone cinemas that try to beat Hollywood at its own game;
Cinemas that work from within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state-subsidized industry;
Regional or national cinemas whose culture and/or language take their distance from the nation-states that enclose them.

Canadian cinema, defined as both our domestic industry and patterns of consumption, combines several of these profiles. Since John Grierson penned the National Film Act in 1939 Canadian film policy has tended toward the first approach, to develop a specialty in distinct markets that wouldn’t directly compete with Hollywood. This explains our traditional strength in both documentary and non-theatrical cinema. Since the 1970s, many Canadian films conform to profile number two, an auteur driven art cinema that criticizes Hollywood. Currently there is a shift to category five, trying to beat Hollywood at its own game by creating crowd-pleasing popular fare that can compete at the box office at home and abroad. And finally, Quebec cinema represents a particularly successful version of number seven, a regional cinema that takes its distance (through distinct language and culture) from the larger Canadian nation-state.

Film Policy

Policies mark the ways in which official culture permeates everyday life. Since the culture of a nation is still broadly identified with the state’s key agency of official culture, the national education system, film policy has tended to focus on the production of projects deemed relevant or worthy by state agencies. Yet multiple, conflicting ideas make their way into policy, sometimes leading to confusion. In recent years, the instruments of the Canadian state invested with the task of producing a successful film culture have registered with alarm that the audience has been overlooked as an outcome of policy. In order to rectify this situation, the 2000 film policy, From Script to Screen, resolved: “Having built an industry, it is now time to build audiences.” The turn to the audience represented a concern about an oversupply of films without the production of viewers who were invested in the significance of indigenous work. Yet the concern about the audience oversubscribing to Hollywood products is contradicted in part by the Canadian state’s own commitment through tax breaks and other industry initiatives in the 1990s to support an industrial model of film and television production. This period of
neo-liberal deregulation bolstered the foreign locations market and co-productions on a newly expanded cable dial, creating a comparatively large and embarrassingly undistinctive audiovisual culture.

The turn to audiences in film policy represented a new approach. Rather than provide what was good for citizens, or good for industry, the question of what people want to watch, the popular, implicated the policy in the formation of film publics. The complexity is compounded by the fact that the turn toward audiences came after a boost in funding to Canadian film producers in the first years of this century which itself came hard on the heels of a booming foreign locations market in the 1990s, part of Hollywood’s globalization.24 This shift in international production to Canada was linked to the rethinking of public funding for the arts, including film, in the 1980s, during a period of liberalization and a turn from a language of arts funding to a discourse of the “cultural industries.”

The multiplicity of film industries reflects the complex and some would say contradictory work of policies that are brought into relief when we consider that film policy, like so many arts policies, is not only about industrial success. Canadian state film policy has a number of imperatives, of which economic success is only one. It also aims to develop creative talent, to create and strengthen identity, to foster diversity, and to entertain audiences. The question of whether or how all of these objectives might be met at once is one of the many paradoxes of Canadian cultural policy.

Non-theatrical Cinema

There have been some direct consequences of the Script to Screen policy to find audiences. Starting in 2001–02, $5 million was dedicated annually to putting Canadian filmmakers together with film festivals, both domestic and international. A number of subsequent policy papers have turned to the non-theatrical as a viable site for considering films to come into contact with Canadians, and a new way to quantify effective policy.25 But does this policy emphasis on the national help us understand the public? Shawn Shimpach has hypothesized that the cinema audience is an early example of a self-conscious public, comprised of individuals imagining themselves within a group experience. A statistical entity, the cinema audience constitutes a mass public, whether going to the cinema together, or watching films alone but together as part of what Charles Acland notes is a collective media event of a film’s
opening weekend. Like the first weekend box office and attendance figures, the film festival constitutes one such zone, where individual choice dovetails with aesthetic production and national cultural policy.

Film festivals are experiencing a surge of interest around the world, providing a public space for engaging with cinema that offers partial relief from the limited palette of mainstream cinemas year round, as well as the promise of the auratic contact with directors, actors, and other cultural figures that provide a “value-added” aspect to the viewing experience that cannot be replicated at home. It is also a zone where official culture meets popular practice in a genuinely successful way. Canadian film festivals have burgeoned in the past couple of decades, representing a clear continuity with what Charles Acland has called Canadian film culture’s “expo mentality,” an orientation toward the special screening venue. Their emergence is certainly linked to the formation of specific identities and communities around texts, from the early Women’s Film Festival in Toronto, to queer, Asian, Hispanic, environmental, and children’s festivals today. A parallel focus on genre reflected in festivals grouped around form, such as documentary, experimental, animated, short, and mobile, has become a way for industry, often dominated by television, to interarticulate with cultural production, sidestepping more political modes of organizing film publics. But these festivals, too, might be thought of as constituting film communities.

Like film policy and the public sphere itself, film festivals are mixed zones that, as Janet Harbord points out, include discourses of independent filmmakers and producers; media representation and spectacle; business discourse of purchase, copyright, and logos; tourism and service industry, all of which are bound together through discourses of the nation. She writes, “the festival remains a crucial showcase for the symbolic capital of the nation; the local specificity is contextualized by this broader infrastructure of subsidy and policy framing, remaining connected to the nation.” Reflecting the contradictions of the public sphere, from the outset, the nationalist and industry mandates for Canadian cinema have been connected. The first Canadian film festivals only belatedly introduced Canadian film series, more or less in tandem with the development of the industry. For example, in 1977, a year after the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors’ Association introduced the Golden Reel award to mark the highest grossing film in Canada, Toronto’s Festival of Festivals (now the Toronto International Film Festival, or TIFF) included just three Canadian films in its program; in 1984, the

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same year as the shift to cultural industries led to the renaming of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) to Telefilm, the festival launched its Perspective Canada program. Today the festival screens dozens of Canadian films annually and often chooses a Canadian film as its prestigious opening screening. In the twenty-first century, most Canadian cities host a film festival and all of them include an emphasis on national and regional, as well as international cinema.

Yet for all this festival hype, Canadian films are not theatrical hits. Liz Czach, a former TIFF programmer and academic, has observed this contradiction: “Unlike the rest of the year when little critical or popular support seems to be mustered for Canadian films, festivals generate crucial critical, public, and industry interest in Canadian films.” This state of affairs can perhaps be explained by the fact that film festivals are sites or spaces only marginally related to other aspects of the Canadian film industry. As Julian Stringer notes, a successful festival is not inextricably linked to the growth of a national film industry. In addition, most Canadian films still fit the bill as independent, auteur-based productions, which, although they may play well to a film festival public, are of only limited interest to the majority of moviegoers. Genre films are still rare.

One way to explain the seeming discrepancy between film festival success and year-round struggles for Canadian films is that the film festival has become a distinct, temporary cultural sphere where the traditional expo mentality reigns and film events constitute Canadians into quasi-spontaneous film publics. Film festivals represent successful spaces of global-urban cultural interface and, in this sense, they epitomize what Shawn Shimpach identifies as the cinema-going audience representing itself to itself as a public. As he puts it, making the decision to go to movies in a particular context is partly about “imagining oneself as a certain type of person.” It is precisely the successes of Canadian films at film festivals that leads me to think about film festivals as public spheres. The emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism in film festival programming brings a range of cultural expressions to a single public sphere in which the film-festival-goer, presumed to be an urban, sophisticated cultural consumer, consorts with self-selected peers in a highly charged atmosphere. This cosmopolitan public achieves representation of itself to itself through the massive media coverage that occurs during the festival.
Moving Beyond the Theatre

So far, I have considered the ways in which film policy has turned its attention to audiences, at the same time that Canadian film festivals have achieved unprecedented popularity. Since the Script to Screen policy, there has been a move to recognize and encourage non-theatrical film exhibition of all kinds. This move was a way to recalibrate the actual film consumption activities of Canadians, at schools, in the home, and in the workplace, rather than simply look to the theatres in which Canadian films have never done too well. It specifically sets out to recognize the more diverse “sphere of publics” in which Canadians actually operate. In 2005, the government released its follow up report to From Script to Screen, tellingly entitled Scripts, Screens and Audiences. According to this report, performance of a film should be expanded past box office results to include non-theatrical markets, what the interim report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage called a film’s “ecology.”

However, the issue about whether to emphasize genre pictures, art films, or the Canadian tradition of documentary film—the result of multiple film publics and film industries—could not be completely resolved. In a series of briefs submitted to the federal government in 2005, the National Film Board (nfb) suggested the establishment of a network of electronic or e-cinemas in which Canadians could receive dedicated screenings of nfb films. In particular, then Film Commissioner Jacques Bensimon suggested that this kind of network would “serve communities outside the major urban centers … turning them into cultural spaces connected to Canadian creativity.”32 This proposal was an extension of a recent initiative, CineRoute, launched in December 1999 at fifty-five university libraries, which allowed users to connect over broadband network to 800 nfb films.33 But going back even further, it was an extension of the earliest distribution strategies of the nfb. Since the early 1940s, the nfb utilized mobile screening strategies derived from British colonial practices.34 During the Second World War, film circuits were set up in factories and later around rural areas. In the postwar period, this practice morphed into the establishment of film clubs and a network of film lending libraries. But information films were still made and circulated to dedicated screening locations, including schools. This philosophy found a permanent home in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, where nfb supporters established the first Canadian film festival in 1947, specifically for the short films produced by the Film Board.
So although in certain ways the policy focus on the non-theatrical is new, in another light it is a continuation, albeit in privatized form, of the tradition of dedicated non-theatrical screenings. Arguably, this kind of complementary viewing practice has come to constitute one of the national thematics in our public film culture. These state-sponsored public spheres, no doubt plagued by contradictions, as Charland suggests, are productive of the particular flavour of media publics in this country. I propose that we call this practice the establishment of temporary publics and consider the impact of this kind of circulation on the sort of film culture we have inherited and continue to develop. Both dedicated, mobile film screenings and documentary have a long history in Canadian film culture and in this way serve as interfaces with the constitution of Canadian publics.

Over the past thirty years, then, there has been a shift from publicly funded, primarily documentary fare, to privately financed feature films, and from the constitution of audiences as temporary publics to the statistical constitution of atomized home consumers. Yet aspects of public service remain embedded in the policies. By no means are terms like “identity” and “community” the equivalent of “publics” made up of citizens. But the issues of who speaks to whom about what are relevant to both. National communicative space is essential for the sphere of publics, however temporary or flawed.

Mocking the Documentary Tradition

Thus far, I have sketched the ways that the Canadian state has renewed an effort in recent years to constitute Canadian publics around films, a strategy that I suggested has been used before. These strategies have been state led and therefore perhaps lack the authenticity and democratic authority of non-state organized publics. In the remainder of the paper, I want to consider the rise of Canadian mockumentaries in the past decade as another form of engagement with film’s role in Canadian official culture. Through parody, mockumentaries from *Hard Core Logo* (1996) and *FUBAR* (2002) to *Trailer Park Boys* (2007) reject multiculturalism and the sophistication of the self-selecting film festival audience. Achieving levels of theatrical popularity rare for English-Canadian features, these films utilize the documentary form as an intertextual engagement with the constitution of the nation. The working class, backwoods, white masculinity both mocked and celebrated by
these films harkens back to the phenomenon of Bob and Doug McKenzie, awakening the nation to its true hoser spirit, not to mention *Wayne's World*, *The Red Green Show*, and some of the CODCO and *Royal Canadian Air Farce* sketches. Remarkable is the degree to which all of these texts engage not only with hoser masculinity but also with the documentary form, or in the case of *Wayne's World*, *Red Green Show*, and *Trailer Park Boys*, low budget or cable television, traditionally associated with civic engagement, as well as amateur culture. At the same time, they explore the rural as a space of Canadian culture excribed from the emphasis on sophisticated urban culture—the site where the NFB would place e-cinemas. In choosing to watch these films in relatively large numbers, audiences have self-constituted themselves as a certain sort of public, one that adopts the values and virtues of Canadian identity ironically, precisely through an engagement with and mocking inversion of the site of film reception as either a state-sanctioned civic form or generic entertainment imported from Hollywood.

**Hyperbolic Hoser Masculinity: *Hard Core Logo* and FUBAR**

*Hard Core Logo* (1996) is the well-known adaptation of Michael Turner’s book of poetry, widely considered director Bruce McDonald’s most successful film. The screenwriter, Noel Baker, along with the cast and director, significantly altered the original book’s emphasis on the dead-ends of punk rock to create a love story between the band’s singer and lead guitarist, played by Hugh Dillon and Callum Keith Rennie respectively. The film traces the band’s desperate Western Canadian reunion tour as they, like punk rock itself, fall apart. In an apparent quest for realism, the screenwriter opted for a mockumentary format that allowed him to write in the real director as a self-mythologizing character also named Bruce. The two buddies at the centre of the film routinely criticize “Bruce,” as does their idol, punk icon Bucky Haight.

In his analysis of the adaptation, Peter Dickinson astutely notes that the final film produces the effect of a highly characteristic Canadian text combining Canadian cultural institutional traditions and Hollywood. “*Hard Core Logo*, the film, is Julien Temple’s *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* by way of the NFB, Rob Reiner’s *This is Spinal Tap* as funded by Telefilm, Penelope Spheeris’s *Decline of Western Civilization, Part II* as it might have looked on the CBC.” The distinctively
Canadian aspect is precisely the intertextual combination of American popular culture with Canadian authorized discourse.

In his “making of” diary, Baker describes the painful experiences in the Telefilm office, the fears and anxieties about spontaneous changes to the script while shooting that might lead to the film being hung up by the gate-keeping agency later on. At the first meeting with Telefilm, executive Michelle McLean reportedly explains that the funding agency thinks that McDonald should try something other than a road movie. Baker keeps the following thought to himself, but includes it in his diary: “I want to ask why Telefilm has no trouble funding filmmakers who specialize, film in and film out, in, say, lesbian love stories or frigid parables about contemporary alienation, yet they have such a problem funding Bruce within his area of interest.”38 Indeed Dickinson points out that for Baker, “the completed movie is a document as much to the institutional, economic, and political constraints that bedevil the Canadian film industry as it is to those constraints which bedevil the Canadian music industry.”39 At the same time, the emphasis on a film not about lesbians or alienation is code for a popular, accessible film, one that happens to be about tough Canadian boys. The lesbian alienation films are clearly for the festival audiences.

Dickinson analyzes the performance of masculinity in the film, a balance between the “hypermasculine erotics of display and exhibitionism on stage” and prototypical “masculine detachment.”40 As punk rock icons, the boys of Hard Core Logo have achieved a certain limited national notoriety and, in the case of Billy Tallent, are being sought out by powerful members of the American music industry. Yet, in another way, they emblematize the backwoods anti-fashion punk sensibility particular to Vancouver, one that distinctively negotiated its identity away from the cross-dressing, urbane, and ironic New York and Los Angeles scenes. So, while Joe Dick and Billy Tallent represent Canadian artists and countercultural figures, they also convey a certain sort of straight ahead, working class, small town, white, rock ‘n’ roll attitude; a kind of “hyperbolic hoser masculinity,” to borrow a phrase from Tom Waugh.41 This kind of cultural homology includes buddies, beer, and loud music, living for the moment without the pretences of educated, cosmopolitan urban life. Unlike some alternative music scenes, Vancouver punk rock articulated, for the most part, a machismo that makes Hard Core Logo’s homoeroticism all the more surprising.
Yet sexuality is not as far from hoser culture as one might suspect, given that a hose is a euphemism for a male sexual organ. Upon reflection, hoser sexuality is not that different from the sexuality of mainstream heteronormative national culture. In his book *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, Tom Waugh compellingly shows the rich history of straight men in love in Canadian cinema, including and especially, when they are in sports-related rural contexts, such as on hunting trips or during hockey tournaments. In this context, alcohol comes into play and drunkenness not only “gives license to enact without accountability the erotic undercurrents of homosocial relations and sport… it also becomes an end in itself,” the fount of a sort of masochistic dissolution.

In *HCL*, the particular hoser eroticism between straight men who love each other comes at the expense of the filmmaker who is trying to document them. Their love for each other eclipses their wish to be engaged by the public. Similarly, in *FUBAR*, the film’s main subjects, Dean and Terry, bond against the filmmaker, Farrel, who has set out to make a documentary about head banger subculture. From the outset, as Farrel screens his previous film for his new film subjects, the audience is encouraged to identify with Dean and Terry as they request that Farrel “turn down the suck” on his pretentious film full of incomprehensible imagery. By contrast, Dean and Terry’s drinking, partying, and head banging seems authentic, if somewhat excessive. The friends are living their lives; Farrel is only “following us around.” Moreover, as we soon learn that Dean has testicular cancer, the issue of phallic power is clearly established and Farrel, not Dean or Terry, is the one with something to mock. Finally, on a camping trip to Sasquatch Creek, Farrel shows just how incompetent a Canadian male he is as he refuses to jump into a river, only to finally jump to his death. The film itself continues without the filmmaker, showing just how insignificant he is compared to his film’s hard drinking, dead end ‘bangers, who nevertheless know how to live life with gusto. Despite capturing actual documentary footage of recreational parking lot fights and other facets of small town partying, the film doesn’t achieve any kind of hard-hitting expose of head bangers.

Through the parody of authority and heroism, the mockumentary form is well suited to the satire of masculinity. Where a film like *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) relentlessly, if lovingly, satirizes the hypermasculinity of heavy metal through a parody of the rockumentary, both *HCL* and *FUBAR* parody the filmmaker’s anthropological attempt to observe the film’s subjects who either retain their integrity as characters, or, through an aversion to pretence, are not in a position to
be parodied. It is the outsider filmmaker who comes in for the ridicule precisely in his attempt to make a comment on something through the documentary form. Unlike the profound, if endearing, stupidity of the members of Spinal Tap, the essentially Canadian hosers are redeemed through their lack of pretence.45

*Trailer Park Boys* is a slightly different case, as the filmmakers never appear as characters. The shaky hand-held style becomes a low budget aesthetic to match the low rent lifestyles of the main characters, Ricky, Julian, and Bubbles, and the other side of the story of a reality show like *COPS* that follows the police into trailer-park-like settings. However more than in *HCL* and *FUBAR*, *TPB*’s emphasizes the humour of white trash, where poverty and slum living are the source of laughs precisely because the characters are white but not upwardly mobile.46

In all of these cases, the hoser masculinity of the main characters is the butt of the jokes, but simultaneously, it is precisely what enables them to assert their subjectivities and their bond at the expense of the meddling filmmakers. The popularity of these stories well beyond the demographic of white small town men is redolent of the surprising success of the Bob and Doug McKenzie characters created by Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas in the early 1980s as a way to fill the two extra minutes of screen time allotted to *SCTV* during its Canadian broadcast. After spending less than an hour improvising these skits, the two actors were surprised to have created a sensation in which people dressed like them, talked like them, and mobbed them whenever they appeared in public, yelling “Take off, eh!” and other McKenzisms.47 In less than one month, they sold more than 300,000 albums and in 1983, they released their self-directed movie *Strange Brew* with *mgm/ua*, which went on to be the top grossing Canadian film of the year.48

At least since the plaid-wearing Charlie Farquharson appeared on *This Hour Has Seven Days* (*cbc*, 1963–66) with his homespun advice, the self-deprecating backwoods motif has figured prominently in representations of English Canadian masculinity. (The resounding success of both *Les boys* and *Men With Brooms* would also seem to attest to this.) It is challenging to explain the tenacity of this stereotype. On the one hand, it seems to be a way of laughing about masculinity, one of the mainstays of comedy, while also making fun of the working class. On the other hand, however, there is a kind of dignity and respect granted these characters precisely because of their modesty and lack of pretension. It would be too simple to call this mindless entertainment; it is also popular and Canadian. Rather, I propose that there is something about the constellation of unpretentious
white masculinity that resonates with certain factions of the Canadian audience and it may be related to a backlash against an official culture promoting a centristic model of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

In her study of Canadian whiteness, *The House of Difference*, Eva Mackey argues that despite Canada’s belief in itself as a land of civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism exists here, too, insofar as “certain categories of people consider that they, as real and authentic Canadians, represent the ‘democratic will of the people.’” These are people who say of themselves that they are *Canadian*-Canadians.49 Liberal discourses of “tolerance” are reliant on a racist logic of dominant and subordinate groups with varying claims on national belonging. “The recognition of difference,” Mackey writes, “is not necessarily the solution, just as the erasure of difference *per se* has not always been the main problem.”50 These Canadian films about hoser masculinity render performative the usually invisible apparatus of heteronormative, white masculinity in Canada. In so doing, they arguably register the existence of a certain sort of self-defining public around these media texts. At the same time, they are so heavily self-ironizing, especially around the critique of the filmmakers within the films, that it is hard to say what the films mean in any definitive way.

**Conclusion**

Charland is right to point out that popular culture and public culture seem to be anathema in Canada. In the realm of cinema, this has had to do with the multiple, often conflicting, objectives. But, unlike the empty technological nationalism Charland associates with broadcasting systems, film policy has long been associated with a close control of content. From script vetting to film festival programming, English Canadian film culture has been closely tied to a policy of forming a film culture that is at once distinctively national and oriented toward the cosmopolitan. Yet truly popular Canadian fare has emerged around the hoser, an unpossessing figure who engages with Canadian airs and pretensions to global consciousness with deep irony. These figures also provide a possibly reactionary and certainly laughable everyman who loves the foibles and failures of his buddies.

These films can be seen to comment ironically upon the drive of the earnest Canadian policy to create spaces for civic engagement and the promotion of educational national culture. Whether or not they also present a populist, if
inarticulate, challenge to official culture is hard to say. Yet these contributions to, and affirmations of, white male hoser culture may at the same time actually serve to engage a public in a simple version of the nation, rather than the increasingly complex and diverse situation we actually find ourselves in where national identities, as Schlesinger notes, must be engaged with “explicit negotiation.” The persistence of the hoser imaginary is possibly a way to mimic and undermine this kind of discussion while nevertheless making claims about national belonging and identity.

Film policy, like the public itself, is riven by multiple objectives, some might say contradictions, attempting to negotiate between marketplace and art form, affective and deliberative citizenship, entertainment and enlightenment. Rather than see the film festivals as successes and the national film industry as a failure, I have attempted here to argue that each is productive in different ways given their contradictory mandates. The problem with the phrase “English Canadian cinema” is that it means radically different things to different people. Many automatically presume that it represents an inherently oppositional discourse, providing alternative imagery and ideas to mainstream, American culture; others imagine it as the articulator of popular sentiment; still others envision a successful industry. As the most powerful rhetoric of state policy and funding decision-making, the nation remains an important part of the discussion. The themes of nation cannot be reduced to the analysis of texts alone. As I’ve tried to explore here, Canadian cinema, like the diverse Canadian audiences for which it is produced, is constituted both intratextually between cinematic texts and intertextually between mutually resonant texts and their economic and political contexts in a sphere of publics. In that sense, it is part of an on-going envisioning of citizenship.

Filmography

Bollywood/Hollywood (dir. Deepa Mehta) 2002
Les boys (dir. Louis Saïa) 1997
Child Star (dir. Don McKellar) 2004
CODCO (Salter Street Films/cbc) 1988-93
Decline of Western Civilization, Part II (dir. Penelope Spheeris) 1988
Family Viewing (dir. Atom Egoyan) 1987
FUBAR (dir. Michael Dowse) 2002
The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle (dir. Julian Temple) 1980
Hard Core Logo (dir. Bruce McDonald) 1996
Men With Brooms (dir. Paul Gross) 2002
The Red Green Show (S & S Productions/cbc) 1991-2006
Royal Canadian Air Farce (Air Farce Productions/cbc) 1993-2008
SCTV (cbc/Global/nbc) 1978-89
Strange Brew (dir. Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis) 1983
This Hour Has Seven Days (cbc) 1963-66
This is Spinal Tap (dir. Rob Reiner) 1984
Trailer Park Boys (dir. Mike Clattenburg) 2007
Videodrome (dir. David Cronenberg) 1983
Wayne's World (dir. Penelope Spheeris) 1992

Notes


Zoë Druick
32. Jacques Bensimon, The NFB in the Digital, High Definition Age: Prospects and


36. Aaron Taylor (2007) points out that McDonald’s screen persona “Bruce” appears in a number of his films (204).

37. Peter Dickinson, Screening Gender, Framing Genre: Canadian Literature into Film (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 190.


42. Ibid, 183.

43. Ibid, 190.


48. Surprisingly, Strange Brew actually bears many resemblances to other Canadian works of the period. Both shot and set in Toronto, it involves a video game, Galactic Border Patrol, that mysteriously connects to both a surveillance camera system and the afterlife, which is more than a little redolent of Cronenberg’s Videodrome. The tender relationship between the brothers is explored and expanded to the extent that the film includes a shot of them playing their own parents engaged in a primal scene, redolent of Family Viewing-era Egoyan. Max Von Sydow plays a brewmaster/psychia-
trist worthy of any number of onanistic Canadian independent films. And the psychiatric patients, dressed in Star Wars-style black and white storm trooper outfits and trained to respond violently to the strains of a hockey arena organ on a rink lined with cases of beer is a scene of queer sports nationalism that John Greyson would have been proud to direct.


50. Ibid, 163.

51. Schlesinger 2000a, 27.