FILM AND THE CITY

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THE URBAN IMAGINARY IN CANADIAN CINEMA

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Canadian Heritage — Patrimoine canadien

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A city is not only a place but a state of mind.
— Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*

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INTRODUCTION

The Urban Imaginary in Canadian Cinema

This book is a study of the focus on Canada's urban environments that has emerged in Canadian narrative cinema over the past decades. It draws its inspiration in part from another recent trend, that toward interdisciplinary approaches. In what follows, I seek to integrate insights from three well-established fields—Canadian studies, with its ongoing exploration of national-identity formation for both individuals and collectives; film studies, which contributes concepts of genre, authorship, and audience; and urban studies perspectives on the built environment and the urban experience. Mark Shiel, co-editor of *Cinema and the City,* argues that interdisciplinary approaches "can be profoundly useful and fruitful in addressing key issues."[1] Ideally, interdisciplinarity creates intellectual linkages that generate fresh approaches to subject matter. Shiel's work, for example, uses interdisciplinary methods to generate what he calls "a sociology of cinema."[2] My goal is different: I want to link the construction of urban identity in a film text with the urban influences on the filmmaker and the film's audience. Through the integration of theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches from three different fields, I seek to move the discussion of film and the city beyond the conventional boundaries of any particular field of scholarship. By linking films and cities and analyzing how the two are related, I also hope to offer a distinctive statement about contemporary Canadian identity—to clarify how Canadian urban cinema contributes both to our understanding of urban realities and to our efforts to articulate what it means to be Canadian.

The importance of the urban to recent Canadian cinema begins with the established public discourse on cities such as Toronto or Montréal, which has

long recognized the social and economic vibrancy of those cities and their importance as cultural centres. Historically, these cities have also served as symbols of division—signifiers of opposing political and cultural identities. Nationalist discourse, with its goal of promoting a unified sense of Canadian identity, has accordingly encouraged an emphasis on the rural. A basic premise of this position is that our overall identification with the land unites us into a single nation. This view of national identity, which equates the "country" with countryside, is common to many cultures. For example, the French word *pays,* which appears in the terms *paysage,* "landscape," and *paysan,* "peasant," has come to mean "country" in the sense of a nation. In the popular imagination, cities are associated with change, migration, and innovation rather than stability, homogeneity, and tradition. As sources of disruption, cities become symbols of subversion in cultures that seek to promote an essentialized vision of national identity. The view that Paris is not the "true" France, for example, or that London is not the "real" England is thus normative for public mythology in these countries. In his essay "The True North Strong and Free," Rob Shields points out that, in Canada, the "great national foundational myth" of the North as "an unconquerable wilderness devoid of 'places'" encouraged the view that the essence of Canadian identity lies in the country's natural landscape, rather than in the built environment.[3]

Perhaps because national discourses about identity promote a division between the rural and the urban that privileges the former, Canadian urban identity has come to include within itself an attraction to the rural. This attraction, rooted in the obvious absence of the much-lauded rural in Canadian urban environments, is visible in public discourse, which is often laced with disquiet about urban life and identity. I have lived my whole life in Canadian cities, yet, because of the power of the rural myth, I find that urban spaces do not measure up to my inherent sense of Canadianness. When I think of being "Canadian," I think more of my experience of hiking in the Rocky Mountains or canoeing down a fast-flowing Precambrian Shield river. As an urban dweller, I am divided in my loyalties: the valorization of the nonurban environment has instilled doubts about the ultimate value and authenticity of city life. A question I attempt to answer in this book is how this ambivalence is articulated and interpreted in cinematic images of Canadian cities.

While the rural myth of Canadian national identity ignores the contribution of the urban to that identity, that same urban reality now comprises a diversity of cultures and peoples, a multiplicity of social voices and languages, and a growing sense of transnational and diasporic identities. After the conquest of New France in the eighteenth century, the attempt to promote a monolithic—that is, Anglocentric—reading of Canadian national identity founded on the existence of French Canada. By advancing a geographic, rather than cultural, reading of Canadian identity, the rural myth tried to sidestep the English-French divide. The rural myth emphasizes not only the magnificence of pristine wilderness but also memories of a foundational agrarianism as defining elements of nationality. All of this is wrapped in the Eurocentric (but not necessarily Anglocentric) whiteness of a valorized settler society, whose standard heroes are European or Euro-Canadian explorers—heroes who, while themselves immigrants, were nonetheless *white* immigrants. Fundamental to this project was a distinction between white and nonwhite, a racism that was first aimed at First Nations but today also finds expression in anti-immigrant opinion. Given that the majority of new Canadians now live in cities, the rural continues to be associated with white settler society (despite the fact that, historically, many newly arrived immigrants lived by farming). This study seeks to understand how contemporary representations of cities and urban life in Canadian cinema reflect the demographic trends of the past forty years and how these representations have contributed to dismantling the overarching narratives of national identity that were forged in an earlier period.

THE NATIONALIST-REALIST PROJECT AND THE DOCUMENTARY

Under the auspices of the National Film Board of Canada and the vision of its founding father, the British documentary filmmaker John Grierson, the documentary tradition became the bedrock of Canadian cinema. This preoccupation with documentary production as the best way of expressing national identity, and thus encouraging patriotic pride, held sway from the time the NFB was founded, in 1939, until the 1970s, when feature film production became more common.[4] In its documentary mode, Canadian cinema embraced a strong sense of place as intrinsic to the definition of Canadian identity. This

sense of place was most commonly evoked through images of the natural landscape—oceans, grasslands, tundra, boreal forests, and mountains, as well as the flora and fauna associated with them. The landscape is also governed by seasons, by the turning of the leaves and snowy winters.

Canadian film scholar Jim Leach calls this orientation toward place in Canadian cinema the "nationalist-realist project."[5] In nationalist-realist cinema, Canada's natural landscape is privileged as an abiding way of visualizing national identity. The country's essence is located in timeless images of unspoiled wilderness and vast, unpopulated spaces, which stand in unspoken contrast to Europe's relatively confined rural areas and cities crowded with people and densely layered with history. If settler society defined the fledgling Canadian nation in opposition to the Aboriginal population (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) by appropriating "the land," it also opposed Canada to the European homelands of the founding settlers, establishing a dichotomy between the "old country" and the new land. Canadian nationalism would be best served by an emphasis on its distinct landscape was the response. This approach ended up privileging wilderness as a powerful (though not the sole) component of the distinct landscape. Much of this privileging was rooted in exploration literature, which promoted the concept of an idyllic or sublime wilderness, while ignoring the reality of what colonialism was doing to Native peoples.

The impulse to define Canada in terms of landscape is visible in the paintings of the Group of Seven, whose images of the rugged, barren landscapes of the Precambrian Shield reflected the group's conviction that a distinctly Canadian form of art rested on the embrace of nature. The lack of a human presence in many of the images encouraged the view that Canadian identity had to be forged from an association with nature and what it implied about human nature. The documentary film tradition was comfortable with this approach because it allowed apparently realistic images to be exploited for their mythologizing potential. In its classical form, the documentary seeks not merely to chronicle its subject but to do so with the appearance of detachment and objectivity. We are encouraged to believe that what we are seeing is "the truth," as opposed to an interpretation of empirical reality. The documentary thus had an inherent capacity to serve ideological, educational, social, and political functions that made it well suited to the nationalist-realist project.

The NFB, as an agency of the state, eschewed the imaginary fictional film (other than in animation) in order to project a unified, modernist self-image appropriate to nation building.[6]

W. H. New considers the concept of the land to be "a verbal trope" in Canadian writing, arguing that Canadian culture created a "language of land" and a "reading of land" as the basic ingredients of national identity in both fictional and nonfictional representation.[7] This position is confirmed by Douglas Ivison and Justin Edwards in *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities,* when they point out that the urban "has often been elided from our public discourse, our national mythologies, and critical discussions about Canadian literature and culture."[8] As they rightly observe, the "privileging of the wilderness and nordicity as defining characteristics of Canadian identity not only fails to recognize the lived experiences of the vast majority of Canadians, but also distances Canadian readers from their literature."[9] Margaret Atwood admits, for example, that in her discussion of Canadian literature during her 1991 Clarendon Lectures at Oxford University, she privileged "the North, or the wilderness, or snow, or bears or cannibalism" over "the literature of urban life." It was much more fun, she says, to talk to the English about how their cultural fantasies of Canada had played out in Canadian literature than to discuss urban life, which they knew so well.[10]

The nationalist identification with iconic features of landscape and a relatively circumscribed set of nonurban social worlds (the fisherman of the coasts, the grain farmer of the prairies, the British Columbia logger, etc.) results in the marginalization of urban spaces in general and, in particular, a denial of their inherent heterogeneity. The trope of the land casts urban life as an unrelenting monoculture, even though anyone who has lived in Canadian cities knows that this is patently untrue. Nationalist-realist rhetoric portrays the cityscape as a conflicted expression of welcome economic power, on the one hand, and social ills, on the other. It gives the city no moral weight, and it includes no recognition of the diversity in Canadian cities as contributing to the construction of a national identity, given that the differences both among cities and within them would tend to complicate a unified vision of "Canada" as a panorama of landscapes stretching from coast to coast.

If the nationalist-realist project, with its emphasis on the land, seeks to encourage a unified nation-state perspective on Canadian identity, a city-state

perspective instead encourages multiple variations on that identity. The self-referential multiplicity of urban spaces thwarts any attempt at a superficial categorization of cities as uniform. An urban perspective eschews the land in favour of cultural and industrial production, techno-realities, and ethnic and class identities. It is precisely this perspective that began influencing Canadian fictive films of the postmodern era, films that contributed to the diversification of national identity into a plurality of competing voices and imagery. With its focus on urban settings and urban life, recent Canadian cinema has challenged the trope of the land and has offered alternative ways of seeing national identity. In place of the nationalist-realist project of the documentary era, it has adopted an *urban imaginary* perspective—a term I use to refer to the pivotal position of urban spaces and urban characters in postmodern Canadian feature films and to the way in which Canadian filmmakers have imagined Canadian cities and the people who live and work there. Through the use of visual imagery, soundscapes, storyline, and characters, these filmmakers have created imaginative portraits of urban experience that undermine both documentary realism and the goals of nationalism.

The unravelling of the modernist conception of national identity—that is, the nationalist-realist project—in the postmodern period and its replacement by the urban imaginary is the central subject of this study.[11] Why did this unravelling occur? First, the extensive global migration to Canada in the closing decades of the twentieth century resulted in the growth of a multiracial society that has come to characterize Canada's major urban centres. Second, the rise of the nationalisms of separatist Québec and of Canada's First Nations produced counternarratives and counternational identities that demanded to be incorporated into a new, postcolonial sense of Canadian political and cultural identity. These competing voices challenged the Anglo-Canadian hegemonic identity and contributed to a growing postmodern sensibility. Finally, globalization has undermined Canada's traditional tendency toward insularity. Both the traditional media and the new social media, primarily urban in orientation and keenly conscious of demographics, have encouraged a postnationalist consciousness among younger generations—or, at the very least, a rethinking of the vision of Canadian identity as something monocultural and anchored above all in rural space. At the same time, digital technologies have globalized the workplace, underscoring the links between our neoliberal economy and

capitalist production worldwide and contributing to new sense that Canadians are citizens of the world. Together, these factors have influenced the creation of an urban cinema that is both a more accurate reflection of contemporary Canadian realities and a medium of articulation for the various counternarratives that have irrevocably called into question the older nationalist ideology and its definitions. While modernism grounded its adherents' secure sense of the future in the illusion of an unchangeable natural past, postmodernism grounds an insecure future in a turbulent, ever-changing present that is all about conflicted beginnings and endings.

THE URBAN IMAGINARY AND THE GARRISON MENTALITY

In part because of its size, Canada was only gradually colonized, over a period of some three centuries. Cities thus came into being in different eras and for different reasons, marking each with a distinctive character. Urban populations had a variety of linguistic, religious, and national roots, and, as trade and commerce evolved, cities came to play differing economic roles. The differences among the country's cities are recognized in Canadian cinema. Canadian filmmakers generally either identify a Canadian city by its proper name or else reference it through certain distinctive features (of architecture, geography, and so on). Canadian audiences can thus recognize, or at least imagine that they recognize, the location depicted in the film. Canadian filmmakers in turn offer an engagement with Canadian cities that is personal and idiosyncratic and, ultimately, more revelatory of a city's peculiar character, as refracted through the filmmaker's experience. This means that the experience of urban space conveyed in the film can be quite different from the experience of other inhabitants of that space. As Allan Siegel rightly claims, every city is multifaceted, encompassing "ideological concepts, economic forces, and social spaces that reflect a diversity of cultural, historical, and geographical markers."[12] This diversity, in combination with the filmmaker's powers of imagination, means that a city can be portrayed on the screen in a limitless number of ways.

Despite their social and cultural diversity, Canada's urban populations share a common root in what might be termed "urban insecurity," which arises specifically from the mythic ruralization and "wildernization" of national

identity in the modernist era. The great Canadian literary thinker Northrop Frye called this urban insecurity the "garrison mentality."[13] In the early centuries of the settlement of Canada, the power of Aboriginal peoples and of the "natural" world was so overwhelming, he argued, that it challenged the viability of colonization and so created a defensive mentality in the settlers. The garrison mentality was characterized by a sense of being besieged by a hostile external environment. Inside the walls, it was safe, but this sense of safety, as Frye noted, had another side to it. Those within the garrison felt trapped, as if they were living in a kind of prison from which they longed to escape. This dualism is captured, for example, in the 1991 film *Black Robe,* based on the novel of the same title by Brian Moore. Set in seventeenth-century New France, the story follows the missionaries and *coureurs de bois* who left the confines of Montréal for the hinterland. Their mission required forsaking the relative comfort of the "garrison" so as to increase its influence, whether through the fur trade or conversion. If the external was potentially dangerous, it was also full of possibility. This sense of conflicted attitudes could be said to underpin our confused sense of how to value the urban.

We might conclude that Canadian filmmakers also suffer from a garrison mentality. The city seldom evokes a sense of freedom or liberation in Canadian cinema. Whether one is viewing Montréal filmmaker Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo,* with its dark, anguished interiors and tormented souls, or Torontonian Atom Egoyan's *Exotica,* with its even more intense atmosphere of repression and soulful hunger, one feels besieged, claustrophobic, and unnerved. Entrapment and enclosure are the norm. Because every urban space is similarly claustrophobic and yet differs in its character, each urban space can generate its own specific personality within a common field of insecurity. In the absence of a significant Canadian market for Canadian films, the Canadian audience operates like a void, an unknown wilderness that requires exploration by intrepid filmmakers.

Urban cinematic space as an expression of a garrison mentality mirrors the historic construction of Canadian cities as forts, wooden versions of European walled cities or castles. Whether one is talking about sixteenth-century Montréal or nineteenth-century Calgary, one is dealing with nothing less than a fortress mentality as the defining origin of the Canadian city—an insider-versus-outsider paradigm in which nature, like a femme fatale, is both

beautiful and threatening. Films about city life tend to be more libidinal and confrontational, more imbued with inner conflict, than films that glorify the freedom of the human spirit in the great outdoors. Metaphorically, the North-West Mounted Police sergeant tending a garden or building a shed is a rather unimpressive figure compared to the lone man on horseback silhouetted against the setting sun and surrounded by a magnificent landscape both threatening and enticing.

Curiously, then, the garrison mentality results in the construction of an opposite Other that is simultaneously feared as threatening and embraced as desired—nature romanticized both as terrifying wilderness and as what Victorian explorers termed the "sublime." This ambivalence, this tension between fear and attraction, is what the Canadian urban consciousness inherited from its origins in the garrison mentality. It was the garrison mentality that produced the binary split of nature into both the demonic and the divine, while at the same time associating safety with entrapment.[14] It constructed a myopic, conflicted universe for the city, opposing it to the "purity" of the open land or wilderness. The artists of the Group of Seven, who lauded Canada's wilderness, illustrate the contradictory impulses of the garrison mentality: they were city people who left the comforts of urban life to commune with the wilderness during the summer months, but then returned to their homes and to earning their livelihood.

Central Canada's original fort walls also symbolized victory over the threatening, impenetrable density of forests: the vertical logs of a palisade were meant to be stronger than the living trees they walled out. As a human creation, the city must be more powerful than the inhuman forces that threaten it with destruction. Similarly, the nation must be delineated and enclosed to preserve its sense of integrity, wholeness, and distinctness. If its boundaries are indeterminate, its identity will dissipate. In this reading, identity is not defined positively, in terms of qualities that the members of a group hold in common, but negatively, in terms of the dividing line between self and the Other. A focus on cities, with their inherent differences, reminds us that the self is not one but many, fragmented and conflicted, and thus fractures the illusion of unity.

As constructed by the nationalist-realist paradigm, the rural is also a place of wholesomeness—the fishers of the Maritimes, the farmers and ranchers of the West, the loggers of British Columbia, who breathe fresh air and whose

physical labour leaves them strong and healthy. The city stands at the opposite pole, as an unsavoury place, the site of depravity, criminality, and poverty. Furthermore, given that the geographic location of urban space (that is, non-land) is deemed to be irrelevant (a bus driver in Vancouver is much the same as a bus driver in Halifax, while a Prairie farmer can never be confused with a Maritime fisher), all cities are assumed to be alike. In representing a city in all its specificity, the Canadian urban film undermines what might be called the "urban myth," the fiction of urban uniformity. In short, the practitioners of the urban imaginary expose the nationalist-realist construction of the Canadian city as an ideological fantasy.

The subversion of the nationalist-realist paradigm of Canadian identity is not difficult in the postmodern era, in which the certainty of singular or grand narratives has dissolved and been replaced with multiple narratives rooted in very specific experiential realities. But to attempt to equate national identity with a variety of urban spaces—that is, to replace the discourse of the nationalist-realist project with one rooted in heterogeneity—is not easy. As Jim Leach points out, given "the complex ways in which films engage with the political, cultural, and mythic dimensions of national life," film becomes a multifaceted telling.[15] Because the urban imaginary cannot produce a unified discourse about national identity, it has engaged instead in compiling identities, all of which are viewed as having equal value. This storytelling is not an alternate narrative so much as it is a compilation of alternative narratives.

CONSTRUCTING THE URBAN IMAGINARY PROJECT

Two films from the early period of Canadian narrative film, both set in Toronto, have become part of the Canadian canon—Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1964) and Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* (1970). *Goin' Down the Road,* in particular, featured the vitality of Toronto in its story of two men from the Maritimes encountering the big city. For the first time, the traditionally staid city of Toronto was portrayed cinematically as a metropolis with nightlife and city blocks filled with flashing neon lights. It was a youthful and energizing image that had once been reserved for metropolitan centres like New York, Los Angeles, London, and Paris. In the same year, Claude Jutra produced the

Québec masterpiece *Mon oncle Antoine* (1970), a film that was profoundly rural and nostalgic. Clearly, then, both orientations were present in this late modernist period.

In 1968, the Canadian government at long last created funding for Canadian feature films, through the newly founded Film Development Corporation. This move, which was intended as a statement of cinematic maturity associated with the patriotism of the 1967 centennial celebrations, coincided with the nation's increased urbanism: by this time almost 75 percent of Canadians were urban dwellers.[16] During the so-called tax shelter era of the late 1970s, many feature films were made in Canada, but few became part of the canon.[17] It was only with the founding of Telefilm Canada in 1982 that a new era really began. A new standard of urban representation was established by Patricia Rozema's portrayal of urban alienation in Toronto with *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987) and, in Québec, by Denis Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986), which was set among the intellectual class in Montréal and won the International Critics Prize at Cannes and a nomination for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars.

In the same decade, sociological changes were transforming major Canadian cities into contemporary expressions of multilingual, multi-ethnic urban culture. This metamorphosis was part of a vast postcolonial transformation of European and North American cities involving tens of millions of migrants, comparable in magnitude to the wave of immigration to North America in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These changes eventually made their way to the screen. The urban imaginary became the new voice of Canadian cinema, growing in importance as the nationalist-realist project declined, in tandem with the gradually shrinking budgets and diminishing relevance of the NFB.

Unlike contemporary literature, however, which occupies a central position in critical discussions of national culture(s), contemporary Canadian cinema continues to occupy a distinctly peripheral space, for the simple reason that so few Canadians ever see Canadian feature films. This is especially true for English Canadians films, which, for several decades now, have generated a mere 1 to 2 percent of Canadian theatrical box office revenue. Such films are, moreover, generally relegated to the art-house cinema circuit, which exists only in the country's large metropolitan centers. Although

the situation is better in Québec, the relative invisibility of Canadian cinema, together with the marginalization of urban settings in popular mythology, makes the contribution of urban-themed cinema to national identity more problematic to assess than that of other art forms.[18]

Undeniably, though, the growth of a feature film industry in Canada allowed directors new scope for creative expression. Canadian narrative film is, on the whole, director driven, more so than mainstream Hollywood film, which is chiefly driven by the box office and relies on a star system to attract viewers. Especially in the case of English Canadian cinema, state-supported production practices have contributed to the valorization of directors. Because so much of Canadian feature film funding is dependent on Telefilm support, and so little of it is tied to who the actors are or to which genre the film belongs, the auteur director is often the film's major selling feature. If a Canadian audience recognizes anyone in the marketing of a Canadian film, it is most likely the director. This study is influenced by this interpretive framing of Canadian film as director driven. In particular, it seeks to build a direct relationship between the cinematic construction of Canadian urban space and authorship.

The emphasis on authorship and artistic agency is rooted in the concept of the director as *auteur,* that is, as the person responsible for creating the screenplay and shaping the film in many of its aspects. Theories about the practice of authorship in cinema have moved beyond a simple celebration of the auteur to focus on the complex of influences that create the final work. Roland Barthes's classic 1968 essay, "The Death of the Author," challenged European auteur fetishism (the author-god) by moving power to the reader (audience) in relationship to the text (the film). Subsequent studies of the industrial practices of film production revealed not only the multifaceted nature of cinematic authorship, now understood as a collaborative effort of numerous creative talents in scriptwriting, cinematography, editing, and sound, but also the influence of finance (the market) on both the content and process of filmmaking.

However, writing at about the same time as Barthes, Peter Wollen defended auteur theory in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), arguing that the approach was "indispensable" for grasping the artistic strategies at work in a film.[19] All those who exercise the power of decision making in relation to a film infuse it with their intentionality, but a director-driven cinema gives more weight to directorial vision, especially when the director also

conceived and wrote the screenplay. When a single individual writes or co-writes a screenplay, convinces funders of its value, selects and then directs the actors, and plays other important roles such as producer or editor, then this agency has to be recognized. Even in films in which directors do nothing more than direct, there are still personal influences on them that come into play. Especially given that the filmmakers discussed here are themselves rooted in the urban realities they depict in their films, it is not unreasonable to consider the ways in which these films reflect their personal relationship to their cities. In fact, a number of the films discussed here—notably Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* and Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*—are overtly autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. If we are to understand the representations of cities in Canadian cinema in all their multiple dimensions, we need to understand the background of the directors and how their life circumstances may have shaped their portrayal of an urban life in which they actively participated.

In his discussion of the role of the writer in depicting urban life, Burton Pike writes that "the process by which the writer evokes the city appears to parallel the process by which the citizen seeks to encompass his experience of it."[20] This suggests that a filmmaker's evocation of a city will resonate more deeply with someone who has actually lived in the city. There is a correlation between the process of creation and the process of reception. A viewer who watches a story set in his or her city will naturally read the film in a way that differs from the reading of someone who lives elsewhere and either has no direct acquaintance with the city at all or has only a superficial relationship to it (as in the case of a tourist). Moreover, even those who reside in the city will read the film differently, depending on their age, gender, class, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. In a sense, what we have are the multiple and sometimes conflicting acts of authorship of the film's creators and the film's interpreters, each of whom imbues the film with specific meanings. As storytelling beings, we create our own story around the stories that others have created for us.

Building on the idea of authorship, this study examines the manner in which a director deploys cinematic elements to establish a setting, tell a story, and evoke a response in the audience. Broadly speaking, these elements can be described under three headings: spatiality, visuality, and orality. Although these are features of every film, I will focus here on how they operate in urban

cinema in particular. Each director manipulates these elements in distinctive ways to conjure up his or her own vision of a particular urban reality—the physical space and experiential texture of a city.

Spatiality

The first element that needs to be addressed in unravelling the complexity of urban representation is the concept of space—urban space versus rural space, urban darkness versus rural light, urban personae versus the personae of the land, all of which are historically and culturally informed. How we construct, view, and use space is socially and culturally determined. In *The Production of Space,* the Marxist philosopher and social critic Henri Lefebvre argues that urban space is constructed through a dialectical interaction among three modes of production: spatial practice (*l'espace perçu*), or space as perceived and defined through the activities of daily life; the representation of space (*l'espace conçu*), or space as conceptualized by planners, urban theorists, economists, and other professionals, in accordance with normative ideologies; and representational space (*l'espace vécu*), or "living" space, space as the locus of imaginative meaning or interpretation. While the first two modes of constructing space do exert an influence on both the filmmaker and the audience, it is the third that is most directly relevant to the discussion of urban space in film. Monumental buildings, temples and churches, commercial towers, even ordinary neighbourhoods constitute distinct cultural realities, each with numerous signifiers and pathways to meaning. There is a complexity in how we and the filmmaker conceive and navigate urban space that allows numerous imaginative variations on that space to emerge. Whereas "place" is primarily something physical, determined by geography, space is also delineated by the elastic contours of individual psychology and the numerous cultural frameworks that inform that psychology.

I use the term *spatiality* to signify the sum total of a site's physical and psychological associations, which viewers understand as having a particular meaning within the context of a film. In comparison to the standard cinematic framing of rural space, urban spatiality is more enclosed, less panoramic, and more compact. Perspective is typically short and intense in the urban film, rather than expansive and distant. Because urban space tends to be confined,

urban scenes do not lend themselves to the lyrical romanticism so often associated with cinematic depictions of the open land. The 1991 film *Black Robe,* mentioned earlier, offers a good example of this lyricism. The film employs panoramic camera angles, accompanied by rhapsodic music, to express the vast space of seventeenth-century Huron territory, as the tiny missionary canoes transit its empty immensity—cinematic techniques that would make little sense if employed in relation to a city. Emptiness in a landscape evokes awe; in a city, emptiness evokes fear. Since urban space is meant to be densely inhabited, the lack of human presence in a city is read as abnormal and threatening; in the wilderness, in contrast, emptiness symbolizes the pristine—the undefiled. As a human construct, a city incarnates all the negativity that our cultural messaging has created about human nature, from Promethean hubris to sexual appetites. Nevertheless, the filmmaker can infuse the city with a redemptive quality, giving it a body inscribed with positive meaning.

In Denys Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal,* for example, the vaulted ceilings of church architecture are contrasted with the deadly, tomb-like spaces of the Métro, whereby the urban body becomes associated with the dead Christ. The basilica (heaven) and the subway (hell) are unified into a single metaphoric sculpture by shared elements of space (emptiness), architecture (enclosing walls), and sound (similar music fills both spaces). By establishing a striking equivalency between contemporary urban space and the historical space of Jerusalem, Arcand incarnates the sacred within the secular. In Guy Maddin's *Saddest Music in the World,* the urban body is instead presented as a steamy, interior space, an arena in which humanity entertains itself to while away the time as it is besieged by an endless winter. Given that this film's plot is driven by a conflict between the power of money and the power of love, its contrast of inner and outer urban space becomes a metaphor. The icy, forbidding landscape of Winnipeg's outdoors represents the coldness and heartlessness of money and its power to constrict, while the indoor space of the arena, in which people perform in order to win that money, represents the life of desire. Whereas Arcand creates an urban body whose spaces carry religious connotations, Maddin gives us an urban body whose psychology (its inner self) is in competition with its physical, outer self (the skin of winter). The directors who, as cinematic auteurs, create these imagined urban bodies are both subjective observers (self-watchers) and objective carriers (projecting

dreamers) of their specific urban cultures. Their cinematic constructions of urban space are radically different, reflecting not only the differences between the two cities but also the differing artistic visions and urban experiences of the two directors.

Representations of urban space in recent Canadian cinema capture what Allan Siegel has called the "practices of spatialization at a particular historical moment."[21] Because, as Lefebvre argues, urban space is dialectically constructed, the ways in which urban space is conceptualized and experienced evolve over time, in accordance with shifting social and ideological circumstances. Urban space thus tends to be contested space, a universe within which diverse perspectives compete. The postmodern Canadian city, especially, is anything but homogenous. By populating urban space with characters who differ in social class, race and/or ethnicity, age, religious background, sexual orientation, world view, and so on, Canadian urban filmmakers both capture and embrace the conflicts of urban life, variously producing heroic or anti-heroic sagas. Historically and ideologically, however, urban space in Canada is itself imbued with the garrison mentality and its characteristic insecurity. Perhaps as a defense against that insecurity, the city is most often represented in Canadian urban cinema as an isolated cosmos, without reference to the land. As a circumscribed space, the city can achieve a totality and coherence all its own, with filmmakers ignoring what exists outside its perimeter. This sense of an urban body that is a world unto itself rests on the conceptual (and emotional) annihilation of the at once threatening and desired rural Other projected by the garrison mentality. This annihilation of the rural is destined to fail, however, because, as it constructs and delimits urban space, the garrison mentality is subconsciously aware of, and in competition with, its Other.

Visuality

Canada's greatest thinker on visual media, Marshall McLuhan, although dealing primarily with the phenomenon of television and its impact on cultural discourse, gave the eye a sensual primacy that is retained in cinema. We go to "see" a film; we don't go to "hear" it (even though sound has been integral to the experience of film for some eighty years). At least as much as on dialogue,

the audience's reading of characters and settings is based on the visual information presented in a film.

Visuality refers to the manner in which a film conveys meaning and emotion through its framing of specific visual images, which takes place within the broader space established in the film. By consciously delimiting that space and framing visual images in certain ways, the director can focus the viewers' attention on a specific detail or manipulate their perceptions so as to create a certain mood or awareness. The camera can create a hot or cold city, a bright or dark space, an image of cleanliness or filth, all of which have culturally conditioned meanings for the audience. The creative eye of the director (and/or the cinematographer) constructs a vision, one in which viewers see only what the camera allows them to see. The director's gaze becomes the viewer's gaze. By *gaze* I mean both the perspective established by the film's creators, who make culturally informed choices on how to present the action of the film, and the reciprocal gaze of the audience members, who view and interpret the images depicted on the screen.[22] Although the gaze offered to the viewer is sometimes determined by the conventions of a genre, it more often represents the dramatic imperative of the director, whose narrative unfolds for the audience through a carefully crafted series of visual statements.

Because Canadian narrative cinema is not a popular cinema in the Hollywood mode of appealing to a mass audience, idiosyncratic directorial visions can proliferate. But these visions must contend with the fact that Canadian cinema is almost literally unseen, and audiences are thus blind to its often innovative use of visuality: they have no frame of reference. Canadian audiences are accustomed to Hollywood films and have unconsciously absorbed certain systems of visual signification. To the extent that Canadian directors depart from Hollywood norms, the visual content of their films can seem alien and unexpected, as if the film is speaking in a visual language that its audience cannot comprehend. At the same time, Canadian films frequently employ images and urban settings that audiences recognize as distinctly Canadian and that provide a point of entry or identification. In other words, Canadian audiences can view Canadian cinematic imagery in two ways: either as anomalous and bizarre, perhaps to the point of incomprehensibility, or as profoundly expressive of an urban identity in which audience members are able to recognize themselves. These contradictory or oppositional readings

mean that Canadian cinema can pose something of a challenge for the majority of film audiences, even as it creates a strong sense of difference from, or otherness to, the American cinema to which they are accustomed. Curiously, the very displacement of Canadian cinema to a position of cultural marginality gives it an edge, a tension—an expressive anxiety rooted in marginality itself.

Any consideration of cinematic imagery must acknowledge that visuality, as it exists both in the film product itself and in the viewing experience of the audience, is presently mutating. Because a film's visual content is increasingly viewed not in theatres but on various kinds of digital screens, from laptop computers to smart phones, McLuhan's insights about the visual impact of television now extend to film: the two now appear on similar platforms. This integration of television and film began much earlier, of course, when films previously released in theatres were later screened on television. The earlier stand-alone cinematic experience as a theatrical moment has continued a migration onto other platforms (beginning with television sixty years ago), in ways that transform both spatiality and visuality. These new sites of presentation radically transform both visual images and the viewer's experience. Digital modes of delivery not only flatten and shrink the image recorded on film but frequently distort its original shape. Details that can easily be read on a theatrical screen become all but invisible, while the proportional relationship between the cinematic image and its immediate surroundings is essentially reversed. The gigantic screen of the theatre, which encompasses the viewer's entire field of vision, is replaced by an image that must compete for the viewer's attention with peripheral visual information. Moreover, whereas in the medium of film images are projected onto to screen, from a place behind the viewer, digital media project visual material outward, directly at the viewer (as in television). In McLuhan's terms, a hot medium has become a cool one.

Cinema scholar Stephen Barber points out that the contemporary period in visual reproduction is therefore a liminal one: the age of filmic creation and digital creation are overlapping. Barber argues that digital media create a different kind of spectatorship, one that involves an "un-screening" of the filmic experience, with the traditional theatrical experience relegated to an archive.[23] The concept of un-screening might also be termed "post-screening," in the sense that the original, singular experience of theatrical projection has migrated onto a variety of platforms (beginning with television), yielding a

multiplicity of viewing experiences that are increasing under the audience's control. The way a film is viewed, as well as where and when it is viewed, is now predominantly a matter of the viewer's discretion. Although, for the most part, the visual thinking of filmmakers remains keyed to the theatrical screen, this screen is increasingly irrelevant to the consumption of film. It seems likely, then, that, in the not-too-distant future, filmmakers will cease to frame images with the theatrical screen in mind and will instead create images intended for digital delivery. The films discussed here, however, were made to be shown in theatres, and what this study has to say about urban film remains tied to the era of theatrical projection, even as this form of viewing is being increasingly compartmentalized through the proliferation of new media.

Because digital technology is currently reconfiguring so much of human experience, it is also be altering our experience of the urban . In *A Theory of Urbanity* (1998), Anton Zijderveld responds to the postmodernist view that digital technologies have rendered the world "increasingly fragmented and borderless," with the result that the very idea of a distinct urban culture has become "superfluous" and even "meaningless."[24] According to this view, in response to the technological imperative of modernization, the cities of the world are becoming homogenized, while at the same time the increasing power of that imperative makes the distinctions among them irrelevant for those who live in them. Zijderveld rejects this argument on the grounds that it constructs urban life as "a meaningless and abstract order," without reference to interurban diversity or even concrete reality.[25] Our absorption with cyberspace may be an increasing aspect of contemporary life, but our human needs—for food and shelter, transportation, and so on—and our economic activities and social interactions persist despite this absorption. As long as people continue to live in the physical space of a city and experience its sensual reality, each city will retain its distinctive character, and artists will strive to capture that distinctness.

Orality

While narrative cinema is considered primarily a visual art, it also depends heavily on dialogue and sound, not only to convey information that moves the plot forward but to create character and mood. Along with their physical appearance, including the clothing they wear, what the characters in a film

say, and how they say it, establishes their identities. In addition, a film uses background music, ambient location sounds, and imported sounds to create a complex and integrated soundscape. Together these elements constitute the orality of the film. Orality plays a vital role in the audience's response to a film. What viewers hear creates an additional field of meaning that helps them to interpret what they are seeing. While orality is often considered secondary to a film's visuality, the audience's experience of sound in the film may actually be a primary field of meaning. In the era of silent cinema, filmmakers relied on intertitles to enable the audience to better grasp what was happening on screen, and theatre owners generally arranged for live music to accompany the film. These were attempts to emulate the orality of human storytelling. In this study, spatiality, visuality, and orality are given equal status: there is no subordination of one to another.

Narrative film employs orality in a manner distinct from that of the documentary. In its classic form, the documentary relies on a diegetic mode of storytelling, often in the form of a voice-over: a disembodied voice, that of the omniscient narrator, guides the viewer's interpretation of the images on the screen. The film may also feature other speakers (such as interview subjects) who likewise furnish information or provide impressions that we assume to be reliable. The audience is passive more than active: we are invited to listen more than to interpret and evaluate. In contrast, storytelling in narrative films is mimetic. Such films depend on a dialogical multiplicity of voices, through which the film's narrative emerges. There is no single, authoritative voice, no unified interpretation, but rather many voices that give us information from a variety of sometimes conflicting perspectives. This multiplicity is especially appropriate to urban cinema: the contemporary city is profoundly polyphonic. Filmmakers can thus employ orality in ways that express the diversity of urban voices and cultures, in order to capture the heterogeneity characteristic of contemporary urban reality in Canada.

URBANITY AND IDENTITY

The urban world is a human construct, both physically and ideologically, with the result that every city has its own peculiar identity, its own spirit, as well as

its own history, through which it is embedded in national (and perhaps international) mythologies. It is this peculiar character—a city's aura—to which filmmakers are responding when they portray a particular city on the screen. I use the term *urbanity* to refer to the overall impression of a city that filmmakers create in the course of their narrative representation. A film's urbanity consists in the way that the story, the characters, and the cinematic techniques used by the filmmaker combine to create a singular sense of the city in which the film is set. The filmmaker imbues the city with a particular aura, to which we in turn respond: we are able to read that city as having certain characteristics. These characteristics arise from the filmmaker's personal experience with the city, as well as his or her identity and background (including ethnic ties, religious heritage, gender and sexual orientation, generation, and class affiliations) and cinematic values. Toronto, as imagined by Atom Egoyan in *Exotica,* has a distinct cinematic urbanity, which differs from the urbanity of Toronto that emerges in Clement Virgo's *Rude*. While, for example, *Rude* is dominated by its Caribbean Canadian characters and ghetto locale, *Exotica* establishes a multicultural and multiracial framework, in which Caribbean characters appear in a peripheral manner, as one element among many. Egoyan has his Toronto, and Virgo has his—and, as an audience, we benefit from this diversity of viewpoints.

In one respect, then, a film's urbanity is a subjective phenomenon, the product of the influences at work in the inner life of the filmmaker. But urbanity can also be analyzed in terms of its outward manifestations, as seen through the lens of various disciplines. First, one can speak most obviously of the physicality, or *architecture,* of urban space, which varies from city to city. Second, urbanity encompasses the *ecology* of urban environments. The city is akin to an ecosystem, the various components of which interact, while the system as a whole also interacts with the broader environment. The way in which a filmmaker captures this urban ecology enhances our understanding of how the system evolves and the imbalances that can disturb it. Third, urbanity involves a general mood that can be ascribed to a specific city—a *psychology* that informs its character, its emotional texture, and its guiding ethos. Fourth, urbanity reflects the *philosophy* of the city, an idea or theoretical construct that is meant both to encompass and to explain the meaning of the city—its "truth." In the filmmaker's mind, this meaning can coalesce into a single key metaphor or fundamental insight about the characteristics of a city. Fifth, urbanity references the *economics* or

work life of a city, including its diverse commercial enterprises and its manufacturing, transportation, and service industries. Sixth, urbanity deals with the *technology* embodied in urban life and how it impinges on human life. Seventh, there is the *sociology* of urban life, to which the ethnic diversity of the city contributes. Eighth, there is the *aesthetics* of urbanity—the artistic framing of urban spaces and their inhabitants that gives these spaces colour and vitality. Finally, each city has a *history,* the story of its beginnings and its evolution across time. Balancing this sense of history is the speculative or utopian *vision* of a city's future—a dream of becoming and surpassing, often called "progress," or its opposite, a dystopian future of gradual decay, of unravelling and decline. Although the study of visions is not a discipline, this visionary quality is a crucial aspect of urbanity, one that allows filmmakers to imagine a city's potential tomorrows. One can thus speak of the "sociological" orientation of a film, or its "historical" dimensions, or its "psychological" focus, all of which both reflect and express the forces that have shaped the director's experience.

Filmmakers, like other artists who work with urban themes, sense what Zijderveld calls the "solidarity, worldview, and ethos" that constitute a particular city and then articulate it in their own way.[26] These filmmakers create multiple variations on a single city, depending on their own subjectivity. Just as a multidisciplinary perspective presents the same city from different angles, films about a particular Canadian city will offer differing representations of that city, no one of which is definitive. The identity of the city, like Canadian identity itself, appears in a series of fragments, all of them partial—nor, taken together, do they yield a consistent or comprehensive portrait. This postmodern emphasis on difference, on multiplicity and incompleteness, runs throughout this study, suggesting that "urban cinema" is itself a construct that lacks a unified referent.

To determine how a city is represented through the eyes of a filmmaker and how the city influences the films of that filmmaker, one can examine the cultural values that the film exhibits. Pamela Hutton notes that, "the material environment, social customs, and linguistic usage create a collective psychological milieu in which the individual mind is immersed."[27] Although a filmmaker's reading of a city will always be personal and idiosyncratic, filmmakers necessarily exist within this broader psychological milieu, and the fact that they speak in part from a shared psychosocial foundation allows their

films to resonate with others. This immersion in the collectivity infuses that director's creative output with a public meaning, as well as a private one.

R. Bruce Elder, in his groundbreaking philosophical work on Canadian film and culture, *Image and Identity* (1989), rightly criticizes the obsessive search for distinctive or defining features of Canadian culture on the grounds that this preoccupation distracts us from trying to understand the deeper elements of human identity and their artistic expression.[28] The notion of an urban self may well be one of the deeper elements of Canadian identity, one that manifests itself in the urbanity framed by a filmmaker. By focusing on how filmmakers give artistic expression to the cities in which they live and work and on how their art is influenced by these cities, this study tries to deepen our understanding of Canadian identity. In so doing, it calls into question the quest for some unique and overarching definition of "Canada" so beloved of modernism. The concept of the urban self, with its emphasis on diverse and potentially disruptive voices, undermines the illusion of a unified identity. In place of national space, the urban imaginary posits a postnational space, or spaces in which "discourses are transnational."[29] In this formulation, the national question is subordinated to a discussion of issues that either lie outside national discourse altogether or concern multiple places and spaces, heavily influenced and framed by urban life itself. In the early twenty-first century, all Canadian urban spaces have become the site of transnational discourses. This splintering of identity does not, however, weaken the claim that Canadian cities open up an alternative paradigm of national identity. By allowing urban individuality and community identities to express themselves and to challenge the validity of a homogeneous view of Canadianness, the urban imaginary places heterogeneity at the core of identity.

As we have seen, films about city space and life deal with factors disquieting to the rural myth—issues of cosmopolitanism, materialism, sexuality, racial and cultural diversity, radicalism and liberalism, sexual deviance and violent transgressiveness, suburban dysfunction, economic oppression, and global political influences (to name a few). But, historically, the rural myth has been so strongly attached to the urban psyche that it has created within that psyche a kind of self-alienation. Because the cityscape is in a constant state of flux brought on by rapid historical change, urban dwellers imagine the land and rural life as unchanging and, perhaps, as superior to their own universe

of flux. Given that, in the nationalist-realist ideology, urbanism was accorded the inferior position in the urban-rural relationship, filmmakers may have trouble conceiving of the city as a dominant paradigm of identity. Moreover, self-doubts about the urban imaginary's credibility as an alternative narrative encourage a rejection of any kind of ideological or messianic mission among those who are nonetheless aligned with this new perspective. These filmmakers rightly reject the old narrative, the myth of a unified national identity, but they also have little interest in replacing it. Perhaps for that reason, that myth hangs over the urban imaginary vision like a repressive authority figure. When a filmmaker generates a narrative about an urban self, whether individual or collective, it is almost inevitably a conflicted one.

The urban imaginary is based on diverse cultural discourses more concerned with self-expression than with formulating definitions and imposing them on others. This liberates the individual self from older constructions, but it also leaves the wider audience to its own devices, with the concomitant risk of a relapse into the nationalist-realism of the past. Because of the limited audience in Canada for its own narrative cinema, the chances of the urban imaginary becoming a dominant cultural discourse are probably slim. In contrast, Québec films, which have a much greater penetration in the francophone market, can be said to provide a valid paradigm for the evolution of Québec society in the postmodern period. The tiny intellectual elite in English Canada that cares about postmodern Canadian feature films can only stand in envy of the reception awarded to Québec film, which has come to constitute a national cinema among its own people. Not only is Canadian cinematic reality divided, thus regionalizing the impact of the urban imaginary, but it is also being assaulted by the digital age and its global prerogatives.

Marc Eli Blanchard has argued elegantly that every city exudes a mythic quality and that every city has a hold on the human imagination by which it is metaphorized and anthropomorphized.[30] Canadian cities are, and will remain, central to the lives of Canadians. As long as there are cinematic representations of the lives lived in these cities—however constructed, transmitted, or viewed—films will continue to capture and communicate a vibrant sense of the urban that dominates the consciousness and self-image of twenty-first-century Canadians.

1

THE CITY OF FAITH

Navigating Piety in Arcand's Jésus de Montréal *(1989)*

Integrative understanding, which seeks to pull together various elements or aspects, often from different disciplinary perspectives, works best when one is selective in the concepts applied to any particular film. In the case of *Jésus de Montréal,* my focus will be on the specificity of the film's authorship and how that authorship gets translated into a film. With respect to *Jésus,* the primary distinguishing characteristics of both the film and its authorship are nationality, religion, and language. They create the film's sense of the urban with a specific ethno-religious spatiality, visuality, and orality. Montréal becomes the site of a Catholic Christian drama whose narrative arrived with the settler society in the sixteenth century and continues to this day.

Bill Marshall, a leading authority on Québec cinema, argues that two streams exist within Québec film. The first is "unified, masculine, heterosexual,"

while the second is "more heterogeneous, challenging that dominant masculine position, qualifying it by seeking to articulate with it other key terms such as class."[1] *Jésus de Montréal* is a film that incorporates both positions. It is filled with heterosexual male perspectives, but it also challenges those perspectives. This conflict is rooted in Marshall's description of Québec society—and, by extension, its cinema—as having a "minority, peripheral status" in relationship to English Canada, the United States, and France.[2] The codes of inferiority generated by this multiple-colonized consciousness become, for Marshall, the wellsprings of "innovation." Marshall is referring to the emergence of a postcolonial cultural consciousness, one in which Québec's previous position of inferiority (as a colony of France, of England, and of Canada) forms the basis of demands for a new status and identity. *Jésus* is a highly innovative film whose foundations lie in a distinct system of cultural meanings that link a new sense of de-colonized nationality with Catholicism, the French language, and Québec national identity.

Drawing on Fredric Jameson's "Third World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986), Marshall points out how "any individual utterance" can become a statement of the whole collectivity.[3] Arcand's film is not simply a statement of personal creativity; it is a statement emanating from a collectivity with a distinct cultural history. Drawing on these wellsprings, Arcand has become a contemporary Québec filmmaker of world stature (his 2003 film, *Les invasions barbares,* won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film); he is viewed as representing his culture as it articulates a new, noncolonized identity on the world stage, while still remaining rooted in the historical traumas of second-class status and marginality. In Marshall's view, the failure to achieve full nation-state status encourages cinematic innovation as a way of expressing this struggle for identity.

Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* (1989), which appeared in the wake of *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (*The Decline of the American Empire,* 1986), winner of the FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes, should be viewed as a highly innovative cinematic statement in terms of articulating the new Québec. His setting, the Christian Passion play in contemporary Montréal, was a major departure from the historical dramas and epics associated with biblical cinema.[4] This novel approach in Christian-themed filmmaking resulted from the clash between his traditional Catholic upbringing (from his birth in 1940 to 1959) and his

emergence as a filmmaker in the period of the Quiet Revolution (1960–75), during which Québec society became secularized, and the sovereigntist period of the Parti Québécois that followed.[5] The film secularizes the Passion while retaining its Christian symbolism, a hybridity that represents the multiple worlds that Arcand had experienced.

It is important to note that for Arcand, Montréal is an adopted city. He was raised in the village of Deschambault on the St. Lawrence River, not far from Québec City. He also made the village his home when he was forging his career as a filmmaker from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Yet he spent his high school and college years (1950s) in Montréal and, later on, worked there, first for the National Film Board and later as an independent film-maker. He came to Montréal as a student migrant from rural Québec, whose own psychological and cultural space was formed by the religious and secular ideologies of a conservative Québec Catholicism. These ideologies empha-sized the preservation of the French language as equally important to the core of the older French Canadianism as religious patrimony, the sanctity of the traditional heterosexual family, and a veneration of the land. This con-servative, rural foundation clashed with the sophisticated and self-conscious urbaneness of Montréal and the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, which sought to inaugurate a modern, secular world view befitting a nation-state-in-waiting. Arcand knew both worlds, which he amalgamated into a new, critical, and personal consciousness—an awareness of the problems inherent in both his religious past and its secular replacement. This is what made *Jésus de Montréal* a site of contested values. Arcand described the personal context of the film:

> *Jesus of Montreal* was born from juxtaposing the themes of the Passion according to Saint Mark, my memories of life as an altar boy in a remote village that had been Catholic for centuries, and my daily experience as a filmmaker in a big cosmopolitan city. I will always be nostalgic about that time of my life, when religion provided a soothing answer to the most insolvable problems, while remaining quite aware of how much obscurantism and dema-gogy these false solutions contained. . . . Through the thick fog of the past, I hear the echo of a profoundly disturbing voice. . . . All my films exude this loss of faith. It's always with me.[6]

Le déclin de l'empire américain, which preceded *Jésus de Montréal,* received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film after its recognition at Cannes.[7] The film is an exploration of the seemingly vain and hedonistic pursuits of urbane academics. Although set in Montréal, it maintains a powerful rural presence when the academics head to the countryside for a weekend getaway. This escape from the city acknowledges the power of the land in formulating consciousness and culture. While the city in the film is coded as signifying competition, hypocrisy, and what one might call "false consciousness," the countryside, which is meant to be read by audiences as the authentic Québec, offers some degree of conviviality and community. Here is an urban story that carries an overpowering rural myth.

A few years later, Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* relegated the rural to a marginal role, dropping the symbolic dualism of city and country visible in *Le déclin de l'empire américain* in favour of an urbancentric story in which the land or issues of national identity were completely eclipsed. Arcand, as the film's auteur writer and director, questions whether the historical flow from "obscurantism and demagogy" to cosmopolitanism is progressive in terms of the human condition. As a migrant to Montréal, Arcand would have experienced how strange this multicultural (anglophone and allophone) city was to other francophone Québécois, who then saw it transformed into a home for a secular sense of national identity.[8]

Arcand (in the quotation above) portrays Montréal as the city where he lost his original, natal faith. But the faith that he lost was a traditional one, associated with a repressed past that in adulthood he considers dysfunctional and empty. In *Jésus de Montréal,* he posits another faith—fresh, alive, and engaged, but still profoundly Christian. It is a "heretical" interpretation stripped of clerical encrustation and naked in its biblical purity. Arcand achieves this revitalized sense of Christian values and devotion by blending the past (the New Testament story of two thousand years ago) with the present (his contemporary Montréal), the religious (the Passion of Christ) with the secular (the theatre), rural park space (Mont Royal) with the deeply urban (soup kitchens and revolving restaurant towers). His own loss of faith liberated him to put his own stamp on his religious upbringing.

The great Québec filmmaker Michel Brault has described Arcand's films as "a kind of history project on modern Quebec."[9] Of late, that history has been

volatile, revolutionary, and modernizing. What is crucial to *Jésus* is the film-maker's religious background. In *Jésus de Montréal,* he confronts both the Catholicism of the past and the secularism of his adulthood in equally condemning tones. He connects these two worlds through the story of the Passion, recreating the world of New Testament Jerusalem in post–Quiet Revolution Québec. By situating the Passion story in the present and stripping away the past, Arcand eliminates the narrative distancing of history and so brings the Passion story to a mythological level.[10] History and the passage of time are replaced with the eternal present. Dressing the film in the personalities, voices, and situations of contemporary Montréal, while costuming the actors in biblical garb, Arcand sets up an equation between Montréal and Jerusalem, thereby producing a sophisticated interpretive milieu that cannot be found in period-piece re-creations of the Passion. By erasing the historical and cultural differences between the two cities, he revitalizes the universal and mythic attributes of the Passion. It is no longer a story of then and them, but of now and us.

Arcand's view that the religiocentric world of his Duplessis-era childhood and its antithesis the secularized world of his Lévesque-era adulthood are equally problematic is rooted in a Catholic conviction that, despite transitory surface changes that might seem indicative of progress, history remains the expression of an unchanging, flawed, and fundamentally sinful human nature. When, in the film, a Catholic cleric turns to an actor to "update" the local church's traditional Passion play so that it will be more appealing to contemporary viewers, his attempt to capture an audience becomes a statement of the inauthenticity of the Catholic Church's response to political and social change. The revival of the play becomes more than the cleric had bargained for, just as the preaching of Christ became problematic for the religious establishment in Jerusalem. Only a filmmaker who knows Catholic orthodoxy but is removed from it spiritually could attempt such a bold project.

Arcand's sensitivity to the inherent power of the biblical story infuses his film with an anti-establishment message that was part of the revolutionary nature of early Christianity. The sense of religious revolt and renewal that Christianity represented in its first centuries is translated to contemporary Montréal, where, ironically, it is the Catholic establishment rather than Judaic religious authority that represents the status quo. Situating Christ's Passion in

the contemporary world in the guise of its re-enactment raises issues of performativity, secularity, and social change. When Canadian director Norman Jewison tried to deal with the same subject (the Passion) in his film adaptation of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) sixteen years earlier, the result was not half as engaging as Arcand's film. That wellspring of religiosity that defined Québec for so many centuries offered Arcand a rich pool of conscious and subconscious imagery that propels his film. It would seem that a devout Catholic upbringing like Arcand's and his subsequent immersion in a dynamic, secular Montréal lifestyle were the two antithetical forces that generated both deep angst and profound insight, a combination that allowed Arcand's own ethics to arise from a "lost" faith.

The inaugural spark for Arcand's Montréal urbanity was his traditional Jesuit education. "I owe what I am to them," he has remarked.[11] The Jesuits, as he relates, introduced him to the power of Italian neo-realist film in its heyday. For this rural migrant, the relatively educated and cosmopolitan interests of his Jesuit teachers caused a breakthrough to a new world, while the artistry of postwar Italian cinema with its intense Catholic context provided the bridge. It was the city that opened Arcand's eyes to cinema. (Québec had a law against children attending movie theatres.) It was his status in the world of the intelligentsia that made European cinema, rather than Hollywood, so attractive. When Arcand joined the National Film Board at the age of twenty-one, he became a documentarist, because neither Québec nor Canada had a feature film industry at that time. It was the birth of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s that pointed in the direction of self-expression and opened the possibility for creating something new.

The National Film Board, or Office national du film du Canada (ONF), which was making Montréal its new organizational home with a distinct French-language production unit, was the second factor in Arcand's urbanity. The 1960s was a decade of cinematic renewal with new developments in the documentary mode, especially the approach referred to as *cinéma direct,* which emphasized populist subjects and narrative spontaneity. The renewal was fuelled by a new cadre of daring, young filmmakers who knew each other and worked together. The nationalist impulse was exploding in Québec in the radical sixties. This impulse to rid the province of its old identity as cleric-ridden, insular, and backward-looking and foster a new identity as an independent

Québec, one that would be a master of its own destiny, appealed to the cultural and intellectual elite to which Arcand belonged.

A third factor was the rebirth of Québec feature films, incubated by the ONF, of which Claude Jutra's masterful *Mon oncle Antoine* (1970) is the most famous example. Cultural self-assertion—no longer limited to French-language television, literature, or the stage and music—came to include narrative cinema. Arcand's association with the ONF taught him his craft, but it also generated the desire to go beyond the documentary mode. The 1960s were about removing the old restrictions, and Arcand was swept up in that energizing process of cultural liberation. One of the old restrictions was the limitation of the documentary mode. The narratives of the new society, which emphasized the francophone fact and its new sense of self-achievement, found a high level of fulfillment in narrative cinema.

The fourth and integrating element in Arcand's distinct urbanity was the political revolution centred in Montréal—the movement for Québec independence, which in the radical 1960s was decidedly leftist and national liberation–oriented. In his 1970 ONF documentary on the working class, *On est au coton,* Arcand acknowledged the importance of the factory worker, an emphasis that was part of the ideological milieu of the time. His hard-hitting portrayal of women workers in a cotton mill was so controversial that the ONF refused to release it. The original was finally shown in 1994 and only released in 2004, thirty-four years after it was made! While still living in his native village of Deschambault, he also wrote and directed *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973), a film about a Montréal mobster, which was followed a year later with *Gina* (1974), a docudrama about the censorship of *On est au coton*. Every one of these films is centred on Montréal. Arcand even did a short film on a hospital workers' labour dispute in the Eastern Townships. But it was not until the electoral radicalism of the 1970s (the triumph of René Lévesque's Parti Québécois as the province's government) ended with the loss of the 1980 independence referendum that Arcand was able to express the contradictions in this new Québec. The palpable disappointment of the sovereignists over the public's hesitancy toward independence was a catalyst for self-reflection and self-criticism. The promise that had motivated the intelligentsia had been overturned by corporate and populist reality. It was time to satirize that class and its ideology, which is what Arcand did in *Le déclin de l'empire américain*.

Arcand's friend and biographer, Réal La Rochelle, believes that both *Le déclin* and *Jésus* are "intimately linked to Montreal."[12] This was Arcand's world as a filmmaker. He was intimate with it—close, understanding, and revelatory. Eventually, by returning to the Montréal characters from *Le déclin,* Arcand linked both of these earlier films, albeit in different ways, to his most successful and much later film, *Les invasions barbares* (2003), which won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film. La Rochelle points out in a chapter of his biography titled "Denys of Montreal" that "most of Arcand's films take place in Montreal, which is certainly the case in his feature films."[13] That Arcand used a fictive Montréal as the site of his narratives suggests that he wanted to express his view of the city framed with his own cultural values.

Mont Royal, which overlooks the city, serves as a symbol of the rural in *Jésus,* while in both *Le déclin* and *Les invasions barbares* the same rural retreat serves to represent the "other," more traditional Québec. This suggests that the signifiers associated with the urban and the rural are present in all three films.[14] In the three films, the city is presented as a place of ideological fashionableness and spiritual emptiness, a place crying out for redemption in some fundamental way, while the countryside is presented as a place for introspection and conviviality, a place of human community, which the city lacks. This dichotomy reflects the dichotomy of the past and the present in Arcand's own life. He works and struggles in the city, while in the countryside, he finds solace and space for contemplation. The city is the site of articulation; the countryside the site of reflection, the place of being rather than acting. In his adult life up to the mid-1980s, Arcand used a village retreat for creative endeavours, while the city was the locus of the turmoil and struggle associated with cinematic production.

Montréal, clearly central to Arcand's cinema, is described metaphorically by La Rochelle as "the cocoon of his intellectual and artistic training . . . the flip side of Deschambault-de-Portneuf."[15] One may view Arcand's urban experience as a kind of barbarian assault on his originating rural psyche. The urban world posited a new reality in opposition to his traditional upbringing, but it could not erase that upbringing. The past persisted, and when it came in contact with urban life, it turned it into a vital mythology or metaphor—the city of faith. The energizing and optimistic urban secularity that Arcand experienced in the 1960s and 1970s radically changed the identity he had brought

with him to the city, but it also left him dissatisfied, questioning the substitutes for religion that modernization offered. Arcand highlighted the conflict when he said that "secularity is doubtless the most obvious acquisition of the Quiet Revolution."[16] Beginning with *Le déclin,* continuing with *Jésus,* and then reiterated in *Les invasions,* Arcand presents secularity as a spiritual poison equivalent to the poison of traditional Catholicism, a hypocrisy that demands confrontation and exposure. The Quiet Revolution's triumph of secularity over religion is presented in *Jésus de Montréal* as a fundamentally empty triumph. For Arcand, replacing the cassock with a business suit is not a sign of authentic progress. It is the role of the artist to make this kind of judgment, even though his work reflects both kinds of garb. Arcand, as the film's maker, becomes an incarnation of the clerical character in his film because he has to first don a business suit to make the film/play/re-enactment happen. The temptations of that role are manifest in various scenes and characters in the film, just as Arcand's other alter ego, the actor Daniel, assumes a saintly garb without compromise. The dialogue between the priest and the actor symbolizes Québec's dialogue with its past, as well as the debate between the rural and urban sides of Arcand himself.

THE CITY OF MARY

The plot of *Jésus* centres on an actor named Daniel (Lothaire Bluteau), who is recruited by a cleric to rejuvenate an annual Passion play staged at his church for the edification of the parishioners. Like Christ and his New Testament disciples, Daniel collects a disparate group of actors engaged in various unappealing jobs and turns them into vehicles and examples of his message. The production that Daniel mounts proves popular with churchgoers, but its interpretation of the Gospels is heretical, and the play is eventually shut down by the priest. During the confrontation over terminating the play, Daniel is injured and eventually dies from those injuries. The film contains a number of scenes based on the New Testament narrative, including Christ's driving the moneychangers out of the temple and Christ's resurrection: the Montréal Métro serves as a symbolic tomb, from which Daniel "arises" much as Christ did. Bill Marshall, in his magisterial *Quebec National Cinema,* sees the film

as "a reworking of an old myth" rather than as an exploration of something new.[17] "Reworking" is an understatement for what Arcand has done in *Jésus*. He has, in fact, provided a fundamental exegesis of the Passion, a powerful hermeneutic that matches and surpasses the best work on the subject by other filmmakers. While the life of Christ has been told cinematically many times, the success of Arcand's retelling comes from its profound connection to French Canadian culture. Without his deep Catholic roots, the reverence for the Christ story with which Arcand imbues the film would be diminished. Arcand brings to the subject his residual piety. He is able to build an overpowering Christian imagery by using a contemporary venue and the conceit of a play within a play/movie. Although Marshall feels that the film contains no "new cultural hybridities," I would argue that Arcand's dehistoricization, contemporiza- tion, and relocation of the Passion play make it postmodern.[18] His presentation of Montréal as a city of multiculturalism (the safe haven of the anglophone Jewish hospital) engages Montréal's inherent diversity.

Marshall confirms this analysis when he states that the film casts Montréal itself "as a generalized Cité, a place of sin, corruption, modest hero- ics" and that its representation in the film is "crucial to an understanding of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity."[19] Montréal is the place in Québec where modernization and secularization were born and tri- umphed. Marshall points out that Montréal, prior to the Quiet Revolution, was an alien place for rural French Canadians because of its economic domi- nation by anglophones and its principal ethnic enclaves (Jewish, Irish, and Greek). The presence of the Other was an excuse to view Montréal as differ- ent from the rest of Québec—supposedly the authentic Québec. What Arcand did in *Jésus* was bring that sense of a divided and hierarchical urbanscape and its aura of temptation and distraction into the broader Québec identity. In his film, Montréal is no longer some external dark force that must be resisted. It represents instead a dark force that resides within the body politic itself and includes every Québecer. The embrace of secularity, which threatens to under- mine traditional francophone identity, is no longer the fault the anglophone and allophone Other. It is the product of francophones who want to look out- ward and compete in the broader world—who aspire to become *maîtres chez nous,* masters of their own house. Dreams of political equality and the desire to promote francophone capitalist enterprise lie at the heart of the new Montréal.

For those who have seen the claustrophobic rural universe presented in Claude Jutra's *Mon oncle Antoine,* set in the era prior to the Quiet Revolution, it is easy to imagine Arcand's boyhood. That world stands in sharp contrast to the commercially vibrant Montréal of *Jésus* some forty years later. In Jutra's film, *les maudits anglais* (roughly translated as "the accursed English") cast a shadow that suggests an outside cause of dysfunction, death, and hopelessness, while in *Jésus* the source of evil is within the francophone community itself. Arcand's film expresses an innate pessimism about the human condition that harks back to the traditionalism of his childhood. He carries within himself the moralist's critique of progress. He sees an unchanging human condition in which the results of being *maîtres chez nous* are empty. This is most evident in the opening scene of the film, in which the spiritually empty, celebrity-focused theatregoers symbolize the amoral climate created by secular consciousness, in which the disturbing moral issue of suicide presented in the play they have been attending is placed on par with decisions about where to go for an after-theatre meal.

The injection of a divinely inspired moral order into Montréal's secular universe is what Arcand takes from the Gospel narrative. He brings a Christ-figure into the midst of Montréal society with results similar to those described by the Evangelists in regard to Jerusalem's society. Both cities are central to their own societies and cultures. Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish society and of Roman power in Palestine. Montréal is an equally important centre for its society and has only very recently overturned the "Roman" power of the former ruling English elite. Pierre Nepveu and Gilles Marcotte, editors of *Montréal imaginaire,* believe that Montréal is the archetypal source of Québécois identity, which may be why it serves as such a powerful metaphor for Québec's collective unconscious: "Montréal n'est pas tout; elle est peut-être l'image du tout," they write.[20] They call the city "la ville-mère, la ville-marie," emphasizing the city's sacredness by invoking the name of the original settlement (Ville-Marie, or the City of Mary), which honoured the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.[21] Montréal may be symbolically associated with divinity as a city of faith, but it still is a mortal city requiring salvation. The loss of faith (we are all sinners) and the finding of faith (we are all redeemable) are the polarities that Arcand juxtaposes and unites in his highly sympathetic treatment of human beings as failed creatures. That he can see the biblical drama unfolding on Montréal's streets and inside its buildings is a reflection of the power

of Catholicism in his own life. The emptiness of secular Montréal makes the city an appropriate site for redemption, just as Jerusalem was an appropriate site for the Passion because of its sacred character. The conflict between the forces of secularism and the forces of faith that Arcand injects into Montréal easily leads into a "greater debate about the cultures in which they [the films] are produced, screened and seen."[22] The overtness of Christianity in the film affirms its centrality to the culture of the province, even in an age dominated by secularism in its public life. Arcand uses the multiple Passion play narratives to undermine the film mode itself, which is associated with celebrity, commerce, and valorization of art. The impact of the film rested on its Québec audience, who could draw on their cultural and religious roots for an immediate appreciation of the metaphoric power of the film.

Arcand's imagining of Montréal is both historically specific and mythologically universal. Bringing the Passion to Montréal turns the city into a universal entity, which projects itself on every city and every person. At the same time, Arcand represents the city as it was in 1989. Simon Harel, of the Université du Québec à Montréal, writes about the anglophone and allophone realities of Montréal in his essay "La parole orpheline de l'écrivain migrant." What he has to say about immigrant writers who have made Montréal their home also applies to rural migrants such as Arcand. Sociologically, linguistically, ethnically, and geographically, Montréal is distinct from the rest of Québec society, including Québec City. Its heterogeneity has made it a kind of Other relative to more francophone parts of Québec. As a francophone, Arcand belongs to one part of Montréal. In the film, he presents the anglophone part of the city (the Jewish hospital) as a successful opposite to the crowding and chaos of the francophone hospital. The nonfrancophone segments of the city are presented as more under control, more competent, and more professional than the confused francophone parts. It is the conflict within and the failures of the francophone community that is his focus. While the francophone world of Montréal is inward looking and chaotic, the Other reaches out to the world, as signified by Daniel's postmortem organs that are flown to all parts of the globe to help others. It is through these global connections that the francophone body is universalized. Although there may not be "cultural hybridities" in Arcand's film, there is global awareness.[23] This awareness is associated with the universality of Christianity, irrespective of ethnicity or nationality.

One may consider Arcand an outsider who must somehow make Montréal his own through his films. The stance of the outsider represents a consciousness that is often critical, aware of the failings and problems glossed over by those for whom the city is second nature. A postcolonial writer in Montréal might write of the racism and hardships facing his or her group from the francophone majority. Arcand can't do this because he belongs to the dominant group, but he can find something problematic with his own group, just as Mordecai Richler did with the Jewish community in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. It is fair to say that Arcand's initial feeling of not being at home in Montréal and his later comfort with Montréal as his home suggests a process of liberation from the past that allows him to embrace the present as the past's equal. He does not pine for the past: he critiques it. He does not laud the present: he critiques it. It is always, Harel argues, the self of the future—the potential, possible, or idealized self—that is at play.[24] That is why the film ends with a hopeful message, a hopefulness that bespeaks not only the original biblical message of redemption but also Arcand's autobiographical new beginning in Montréal. In *Jésus* and *Le déclin,* he created his own new testament to the future of the city.

Montréal, as the place of familiarity and difference, is ethnically divided, but these divisions are not presented as spiritually fundamental, whatever their sociological import. What is fundamental is the overarching moral crisis of a secularism that requires salvation, and it is this crisis that simultaneously imparts a singularity and universality to Montréal. In commenting about *Les invasions barbares* (2003), also set in Montréal, Arcand said, "After Duplessis and the Church, Quebec woke up to a world without structure."[25] In *Jésus,* Arcand reinstated a "structure" to the new Québec, which offers a purified or idealized version of its religious past. Arcand took his sense of the sacred and transferred it to a complex urban environment whose diversity he saw from one side only. On the one hand, the sacredness of the film is diegetic—an envelope that surrounds the audience with spiritual references. On the other hand, the secularity of the film is dialogical, because it involves the inherent specificity of time, place, and people or actors. But the dialogical aspect, because Arcand makes it symbolic, is also clothed in the diegetic myth of the Passion. In this way, the city's Métro is both the tomb of Christ and Daniel (sacred) and a subway (secular). The actor Daniel is both an actor (secular) and a saintly embodiment

of Christ (sacred). Mont Royal is both a park (secular) and Golgotha (sacred). Montréal is both Jerusalem, the city of the temple, and Sodom and Gomorrah, the city of sin. Because of the intensity of these associations, Arcand's Montréal cannot be the Montréal of others—of writers like Hugh MacLennan or Mordecai Richler, for instance, whose religious roots were not Catholic. But what Arcand, who speaks out of the majority, shares with these minority writers is what Harel sees as melancholy and what the English Canadian film scholar, Jim Leach, calls "ingrained pessimism."[26] The tragic is appealing to a writer, who feels estranged. *Jésus de Montréal* is not about happiness; it is about the necessity of suffering and sacrifice for spiritual awakening and human transformation. With its message of hope and resurrection (in a reconfiguration of the Eucharist, Daniel's bodily organs are transplanted into those who require them to be renewed), the film parallels both the narrative trajectory and the theological dimension of the biblical story very closely. Personal sacrifice is the main idea. The interaction of the divine and the human (the basic binary that underlies Arcand's other binaries) results in a world of "double vision" with two opposing but united aspects constantly at play.[27] The audience can view any event in the film from either the secular or the sacred side. In fact, one could say that the whole thrust of the film is a display of how the secular is redeemable through divine intervention. Daniel, the actor, is transformed from his secular occupation as an actor to a divine saviour.

Jésus de Montréal is a statement of Arcand's transition from his rural childhood, signified by the park at Mont Royal as the site of the enacted Passion play, to his urban adulthood, signified by the business dealings in the revolving restaurant high above the city. The theme of transition between the old and the new, the rural and the urban is also present in both *Le déclin* and *Les invasions*. The two films use the same country retreat where the same characters from both films gather to reflect and celebrate conviviality and community. At the country retreat, the unilingual universe of Québec's secularized intellectual elite, which is Arcand's immediate community, has replaced Catholicism with secular ideologies of the day. In *Jésus,* the hilltop park plays the same role as the country house—it is a space of spiritual understanding far from the economic and political interests of the day. For Arcand, Mont Royal is a sacred place. Spiritual values flow from the rural to the urban, where they clash with their secular nemesis.

A closer examination of one or two key scenes and characterizations illuminates the sense of what a city of faith means for Arcand, of how Christian narrative and symbolism drive the film, and of how death is the overarching partner of redemption. The film begins with a depiction of a theatrical production in which the protagonist commits suicide because he sees the future as a void and rejects the Christian message of hope and salvation. The film ends with a character, also an actor in a play (and a film), who offers hope by dying for the sake of others. The two deaths that anchor the filmic narrative are contrasted in a theological way—the former condemned for its hopelessness and the latter held up as a model for redemption. In both cases, the paradigm of a play creates a church-like sanctuary for a ritual performance. Arcand creates a moral dichotomy by having the audience for the first play praise the actor for his portrayal of a suicide while not being touched by its moral implications. In contrast, the audience for the second, Christ-like death is nonexistent except for a few loyal fellow actors, who have been converted to Daniel's Christian view of the world. Being in the Passion play has redeemed them by turning them into biblical characters. Arcand has the public-as-audience speak platitudes about the first play when they leave the production, while it stands silent and distant at the end of the second. The audience for Daniel's Passion performance is touched by the performance before the play is shut down, but it does not then act in a transformative way. It absorbs but does not return. Only Daniel's fellow actors, following the New Testament narrative and having "lived" through the Passion, are able to embrace the message. By using the mechanism of a play within a film, Arcand is able to equate the filmic audience for the play with the audience that is viewing the film. In both cases, they watch, they are moved emotionally, but they then leave and carry on their daily lives untouched by the message of either the Passion or the film.

The Catholicism that underpins the whole film is one that contains both traditional and countertraditional elements, a juxtaposition that can be said to reflect Arcand's own relationship to the faith. One particular scene expresses this curious blend of past and present that inhabits the film. When Daniel meets the priest, who wants to reinvigorate his church's annual Passion play and so increase the audience, the two encounter each other in

a cathedral-like church, a vast space empty except for the two of them. They are like two isolated gladiators facing off, or two private businessmen negotiating a deal, or two believers (the penitent and the priest) in the solitude of the confessional. The lack of other witnesses to the event heightens the sense of moral imperative and individual decision making that is at the core of the film. The scene is also a reflection of the old piety of Québec, expressed in its grand churches, but the emptiness of the church also suggests a lack of congregation, an emptying of the religious vessel. The Church is now a shell of its former self. Turning to an actor to revitalize the church's play suggests that the Church is not interested in real piety, only the emotional equivalent that an actor can put on. In this one scene, the traditional spatiality of the Church in traditional Québec society is vacated and hollowed out. Visually, the Church is still there in its architectural grandeur, but that grandeur is superficial. It can be seen but not felt, which adds to the pathos of the situation. Finally, the orality associated with this visualized space is nonrhetorical. The orality is not a booming sermon spoken to a large audience of attentive believers. It is a one-on-one quiet conversation, almost secretive in tone as it attempts to overcome a problem in a private way. Arcand is satirizing the idea that a play can save the Church because the problem of loss of faith is so deep. He equates the moral superficiality of the audience in the film's opening scene at the theatre with the moral superficiality of the priest's search for an audience for the church's Passion play production. The issue for the priest is one of quantity, nothing more.

The dramatic decline of traditional Catholicism in Québec is a sociological fact whose cultural significance Arcand comprehends. He juxtaposes the "empty sepulchre," referred to in the Bible as salvific because Christ rose from it, with the "empty sepulchre" of the church and its priest, who is himself without faith, acting in a role in which he no longer believes. He is presented as a technician rather than a spiritual leader. In the biblical narrative, the emptying of the tomb brings hope and new life. In Arcand's metaphor, the emptiness of the basilica represents death and a dying power. The priest has no real hope for genuine renewal. He only wants to look successful, and he believes that "updating" the Passion play is all that it will take. Arcand posits the view that salvation cannot come from the empty vessel of traditional Catholicism; it must come from the outside, from those who are morally pure.

The French critic Guy Hennebelle quotes Jean Chabot, the auteur director of the film *Mon enfance à Montréal,* as saying that the 1970s saw the death of the concept of a French Canadian cinema and the birth of a Québec cinema.[28] Arcand's cinema is clearly of the Québécois variety, but it is conscious of and referential to the French Canadian past. The French Canadian roots cannot be hidden or erased from the new identity. It persists and Arcand creates a powerful continuity between the two identities—the traditional one and the modernized one. Having experienced two distinct worlds and the historical link between them within his own life, Arcand was able to marry effectively the story of first-century Jerusalem and twentieth-century Montréal. Because of Québec's religious history, it is possible to turn contemporary Québec society into a reflection of Judaic society in the Roman era. Without that religious past, the film is inconceivable. For some, like Bill Marshall, this may be a drawback and an ethnic limitation, but one can also argue that this singularity creates dramatic potential filled with universal significance. The universality of *Jésus* allows any audience to embrace Montréal as a stage on which it can see itself. The staging of the Passion play and the transformation of its actors into personifications of biblical figures in their "real lives" is the conceit that turns the film into a dramatic tour de force. For a non-Catholic, non-Québec audience, the familiarity of the Christian story is what maintains interest. Once the Christ-figure—the lean, soft-spoken, yet intense Daniel—appears, the audience is drawn into the obvious religious dimensions of the story.

Arcand's personal and historical journey from a pious, conservative French Canadian boy from the countryside to a Québécois filmmaker in the metropolitan centre is one of personal transformation. This is the message of the film and the message of the Passion play itself. Even though Arcand is trapped by history and his own place in that history, the morality he portrays in the film resonates with diverse audiences. If he had not been a migrant from the past, he could not have viewed the present with such critical force. If he had not been imbued with his earlier spiritual values, he could not have been interested in the contemporary state of Québec and its religious dimension. By moving Christ's Passion to contemporary Montréal, Arcand has resacralized his city. When one Russian critic termed Arcand "the last humanist" of current cinema, he could easily have been referring to Arcand's ability to lift the mundane and the secular to a higher spiritual plane.[29]

When a city is made into a city of a certain faith—in this case, Catholic Christianity—then there is a concern that this expresses homogeneity or a monolithic reality, which goes against the grain of postmodernism's current privileging of diversity. Bill Marshall rightly states that "we must look elsewhere for a fuller engagement with the so-called postmodern realities of the city."[30] Arcand's Montréal is heavily francophone. But, it may be argued, so was Jerusalem a heavily Jewish city in the Roman occupation period, and the biblical story is told within that community's life and within that historical moment. Montréal was originally a French creation like Jerusalem was a Jewish creation, but like all cities, Montréal underwent historical transformation through war and occupation. When Montréal was captured by the English, as Jerusalem was captured by the Romans, the stories of each city expanded. There is no need to conclude that the telling of one aspect of the city's reality is necessarily a diminishment of other aspects. That single aspect is a doorway into a certain reality, which for Arcand, the humanist, is applicable to everyone. He sought to raise Montréal from a sociological statement to a moral one that encompasses everyone, even if that morality comes from the history of one community.[31]

ARCAND AND URBANISM

Because of Arcand's francocentrism, the urban space of his Montréal is only one of many ways in which the city is inhabited. The power of Arcand's presentation of the city comes from his outsider stance, a theme that may also be found in the Passion play itself, in which Christ is presented as an outsider to both the religious and the secular power entrenched in Jerusalem at the time. Arcand's youthful piety met its first major secular test in Montréal's urban space. The result was the birth of a different morality that judged the old spirituality as inadequate, even barren. The religious baggage that he carried with him to the city was jettisoned in one way (its institutional orthodoxy) but reborn in another (its fundamental message). In *Jésus,* Arcand created a vision of Québec that expressed the evolution of his own people in a way that could be both understood by them and appreciated by those who had not undergone that evolution.

Overlaying representational space on spatial practice, Arcand's film raises familiar sites like the basilica or Mont Royal to a level of religious equivalency. By turning a modern city into a sacred space where the divine intervenes and presents itself to the population, Arcand has converted the secular space of his city into an age-old identity associated with religious beliefs. This identity transforms the inhabitants of the city into actors or players in a divine drama (the Passion play), and in turn, the film helps its viewing audience to identify with either the actors performing the play or its audience. This returning of the city to sacral roots, whether conceived as a centre of worship (Catholicism's Rome) or a covenant between a people and God (Judaism's Jerusalem), is an achievement rooted in Québec's language, its religious legacy, and the transitional generation to which Arcand belongs. The ways in which the filmmaker has embraced and represented the sacral and secular spaces of the city are associated with his earlier loss of faith (the emptiness of the church) and his transformation of secular elements (the Métro) into religious symbols. The viewers of the film experience its treatment of urban space as transformative.

The visual power of the film emerges from Arcand's fundamental sense of the transformation that he brought to the city's spaces. The camera sets up scenes reminiscent of biblical narratives, allowing the audience to equate a secular place (audition theatre) with a sacred space (the temple). He then reverses this when he takes a sacred place (the basilica) and makes it a scene of business (negotiating a contract for the Passion play). The camera plays up the characteristics of the scene that highlight the contradictions in the public significance accorded certain places. Because the Passion—most often experienced by Catholics as the Stations of the Cross, which are mounted on Catholic church walls—is seen in a certain way, the Montréal-Jerusalem transitions that Arcand wants us to notice are linked to these earlier visual representations. The scenes presented through the lens of the cinematographer have been chosen to illustrate certain moments in the Passion narrative that viewers who are acquainted with it will recognize. The film is generally dark rather than light because of the suffering that infuses the event. A sense of doom pervades the imagery. Most importantly, the visual elements are primarily interior shots, representative of the inwardness of the film and its focus on conscience. There is little in the way of streetscapes in the film. The most exterior scene is the re-enactment of the Passion in the park, but since the play is performed in

the dark, even this outdoor scene is genuinely claustrophobic, with very little distance or perspective or landscape. In fact, most of the scenes of the Passion play consist of close-ups of either the actors or the audience members as they react, as befits the focus on the Christ-like character's suffering and message. Interestingly, the most expressive sense of space or distance in Montréal is in the empty basilica or the near-empty subway station where Daniel dies. Both, of course, are enclosed sepulchres where the negativity of death excludes the living. That a subway platform can be presented as a potentially religious space and a Christian basilica as a potentially secular (business) space makes the location of the sacred in nature (the park) especially poignant and symbolic. Arcand wants to emulate the life of the earliest Christians, who had to create a new space for worship outside the orthodoxies of either Greco-Roman paganism or Judaism.

The orality of the film uses the ethereal and parable-like economy of language used by the Jesus character to contrast with the naïve excitement and lack of foresight by the rest of the cast. Daniel's enigmatic speech, parts of which are taken directly from the New Testament accounts, highlights his divine nature and contrasts it with the ordinariness of his fellow actors. The use of English at the end of the film suggests the global mission of Christianity as it expanded beyond its Jewish origins. Music in the film is integral to its orality. The film's beginning and ending credits are accompanied by the triumphant singing of a church choir. In this way, the film is presented as a religious experience equivalent to a church service, where the soul is meant to be healed and feelings of spiritual euphoria are articulated.

The gaze of the film (the director's perspective) is that of the heterosexual male who authored the text and directed its performance. But the film is also informed by the gaze of the story's original male authors, the Evangelists, on whose narratives Arcand draws. Having the ethereal Daniel as the film's focal lead represents yet another male gaze, although Daniel is demasculinized into an androgynous figure, someone who is beyond gender. The film's francophone universe is almost total but is presented as a small part of a global reality, which fits with Arcand's view of Québec nationalism as a conflicted and contradictory reality. Kevin Pask describes the Québec nationalism of this period as "late nationalism" in which citizenship is no longer an intrinsic identity.[32] It is a postclassical nationalism, meaning that it can have a national identity without

a nation-state expressing that identity. Québec held two referenda (1980 and 1995) under sovereignty-association governments, both of which failed to win a majority for an independent nation-state in Québec. Arcand's simultaneous critique of secular nationalism and its commercial imperatives and of the Church reflects a conflicted loyalty between the past (the world associated with the term *French Canadian* and its rigid Church controls) and the present (the world associated with a secular Québec state). In the battle to define what belongs to Caesar/Canada and what belongs to God/Québec, Arcand sits happily, like many Québecers, on the fence.

Arcand made this film in his late forties, so it represents a certain generational maturity that brings gravitas to the topic. His generation experienced the two worlds, conservative and radical, religious and secular, whose differing discourses he learned so well. If he had been raised within the singular world of post–Quiet Revolution Québec with its diminished religious power, it would have been unlikely that he would have conceived this film in the novel way he did. The film receives its power from his earlier Catholicism, while its form is garnered from the secular arts. This hybridity infuses the film with a metaphoric power that is a departure from the typical period piece about the life of Christ. Likewise, its tangential Gnosticism is sufficiently heretical to be a further departure from orthodox cinematic treatments of the Jesus story.

Arcand's Québec nationality, his French language, and his Catholic religious roots create a dialogue or interaction between the filmmaker, the film, and its initial Québec audience. These three elements create a structure of meaning that links the creator, the creation, and its reception. The codes and symbols found in the imagery, the language, and the religious narrative of the film are shared ones. That is why a francophone Montréal audience has a different relationship to the film than an American or English Canadian audience might have. Arcand has projected his own trajectory as a Québecer, a Catholic, and a francophone into the film, a trajectory known to or experienced by his primary Québec audience. For example, the film does not dwell on political debates concerning Québec nationalism; rather, it gives us Arcand's critique of the relative importance of these debates in comparison to deep, moral issues, while also capturing his Québec audience's sense of ambivalence about the nationalist project. Likewise, the film's French language is imbued with Arcand's own class character and that of the audience for the film, which he

references inside the film as the audience for the two plays. This holds true for the Catholicism of Québec, which has its own cultural history. A contemporary Québec generation's relationship to the film is itself a historical one, because the film is now a quarter-century old. Québec's sense of nationalism has evolved, and the secularity that Arcand challenges in the film is now more firmly entrenched, as evidenced in his 2003 film *Les invasions barbares,* in which his own generation now faces the issue of death and the children of that generation live in a globalized, commercialized, nonreligious environment.

The most prominent disciplinary characteristic of the film is history. Scholar Jim Leach views Arcand's work as infused with historical sensibility.[33] But this historical sensibility is in turn subsumed by the film's moralism, a combination of theology and philosophy. By this, I mean that Arcand, who was no longer a believer when he made the film, gives the Christ story a moral patina rather than positioning the Passion as an article of faith. The universal themes of sacrifice, moral values, and conscience are widely applicable beyond a specific religious faith. Arcand also makes a reference to the fine arts, especially in regard to Shakespeare's comment on life as a stage and all of us as actors upon it. Arcand's reflections on role-playing and theatrical performance at every level of human existence permeates the film and serves as a commentary on both filmmaking as art and its ability to reveal truths about the human condition. In his portrayal of Montréal, Arcand raises the city to new heights of meaning, far beyond its role as the focal point of Québec nationalist culture. He gives the city biblical dimensions, and in so doing, he undermines its secular nationalist character, as the centre of a new political identity, by positing the superiority of a moral humanism rooted in the selfsame past that the Quiet Revolution overthrew. *Jésus de Montréal* is a statement of the fundamental role of religion in Québec's identity, even at a time when religion is sociologically and ideologically absent.

As a filmmaker, Arcand sought to build a bridge the urban reality of Montréal, symbol of the new Québec, and his rural origins, which rooted him in the Québec of the past. In contrast, a new generation of Montréal-born filmmakers experienced the city from a perspective that differed quite radically from Arcand's. Not only were they born and raised in the heart of the new, urban Québec, but their francophone world was defined more strongly by Montréal's diversity and by the competing groups who claimed the city as their

home. While Arcand has never produced a film about his own coming of age in rural Québec, Jean-Claude Lauzon created a masterpiece of his growing up in Montréal's Mile End working-class district. *Léolo* came out only a few years after *Jésus de Montréal,* yet its treatment of the city is fundamentally opposed to Arcand's. Where Arcand finds redemption, Lauzon finds madness, yet, as the next chapter will show, the religious imagery of Lauzon's film is almost as powerful as that of Arcand. The film's pagan spirit is resplendent with Christian motifs. Also, both films involve a going back or a return to some kind of pristine place. Arcand's film follows a collective religious narrative rooted in his childhood that audiences grasp easily, while in Lauzon's film, the return to childhood is individual and idiosyncratic. If Arcand's Montréal is contemporary with his film, Lauzon's Montréal is set in the late 1950s, when the old Québec still reigned. These two different Montréal urbanities, one before and the other after the Quiet Revolution, are linked through their national, religious, and linguistic commonality. But this commonality is more symbolic and metaphoric than literal because Lauzon's Montréal is conceived by an insider raised in a problematic and tense environment where the francophone fact was in constant conflict with the allophone and anglophone. Arcand's city of faith is transformed by Lauzon into a city of failed dreams. The nominal identities that he shares with Arcand (male heterosexuality, francophone nationality, Catholicism) are overshadowed by Lauzon's working-class origins and the traumas of repression and rebellion. With Lauzon, we step beyond Arcand's middle-class world of theatre, restaurants, and lawyers, and we enter the bowels of a gritty and troubling urban space where the redemptive power of the Cross is replaced with the redemptive power of Jungian water and art.

2

THE CITY OF DREAMS

The Sexual Self in Lauzon's Léolo *(1992)*

The opening sequence in Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo* begins with the peaked cornice of a Montréal tenement embossed with the year of its construction: 1909. The camera pans downward to a boy in a cowboy outfit, sitting on an iron staircase and aiming his toy rifle onto the street and at the camera. He aims the rifle at the camera and so at us—the audience. We are about to be shot by the vision of the film's writer and director, who was once that boy. Yet we are an unvisualized target of his gaze, a chimera of his imagination. He can only dream who we might be.

Using the lens as our eye, Lauzon brings us down onto his street in the inner city. We follow the camera as it descends from the world of reality represented by the higher echelons of historical fact and consciousness (the date of 1909) to the murkier ground or street level of costumed identity, of play

and fantasy, of daydreaming, where we will be assaulted by the filmmaker's fictionalized memories. Eventually, the film will take us below ground level to the darkened cellars of the subconscious, where the phantasmagorical swims freely. This is Lauzon's tripartite universe of heaven/eternity, the realm of the desired ideal, of hope and joy; earth/time, the realm of physical limitations and the angst that leads to despair and defeat; and finally, our subconscious hell, the realm of the demonically magical power that seeks to destroy. The tenement becomes a metaphor for all three levels because it copies the three levels of the psyche: it rises above the earth to be silhouetted against heaven, it is entered at street level via a staircase, and finally, it contains a basement that is the foundation on which the person's identity stands.

This structuring of the building is also transferred by Lauzon to the structure of the city. The psychological constructs of a Freudian universe comprise the controlling superego, which offers an ideal way of being (heaven); the ego, which brings the ideal and the subconscious together (earth); and the id, with its subterranean outpourings and anti-rational desires (the underworld). The city is a construct that shares this structure. It has its idealized locales like churches, schools, and courthouses, which represent human ideals of justice, love, and learning. It has its mundane locales like suburbs, shopping malls, and office towers, which represent our physical or earthly needs and desires. And it has its sexually charged side, represented by nightclubs, bars, and brothels.

The psychological framing that Lauzon uses to equate the human personality with a building and a city also embraces the metaphorical territory occupied by the stern patriarchal father on one side, the embracing matriarchal mother on the other, and the entrapped space between them occupied by the Oedipal and incestuous son. From this rich humus of Freudian emotions and desires arises another world of Jungian archetypes, in which time and its product, history, slip away. In this archetypal universe, Lauzon's life is converted into a personal mythic space in tune with a universal male psyche. The coming-of-age narrative in the film is universalized as a statement of every pubescent male's entrance into sexuality. While the cultural framing of *Léolo* is similar to that of Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* in terms of Québec nationality, the heterosexual male gaze, and Catholicism, it is quite different in terms of its prime ethos: the psyche and its torments. Rather than creating a connection between the old Québec and the new Québec, which was Arcand's

generational project, Lauzon, who was born in 1953, preferred to connect his individual psyche with a collective unconscious that lies beyond questions of national and religious identity. While Arcand's narrative embraces his francophone identity, Lauzon's narrative rejects it. While Arcand built a narrative edifice on his religious upbringing, Lauzon used the categories of twentieth-century secular psychology rather than Christian theology. This does not mean that *Léolo* is bereft of Catholic religious symbolism: like Arcand, Lauzon could not escape his Québec upbringing. The film is full of Catholic imagery, but it is there as an external signifier rather than an expression of a core identity. Both filmmakers rebelled against their orthodox upbringing but in different ways. Where Arcand found a city of faith and a moral compass, Lauzon found only failed dreams. They shared a mutual disillusionment with the new Québec but from different perspectives. The irony of all this pessimism is that Lauzon himself is an example of the success of the Québec artist. Unlike the protagonist in his film, he exemplifies personal triumph and achievement. That his art demanded, at least in his eyes, a tragic ending is more a statement about the culture he came from than about his career.

Lauzon used the image of the building in which he lived as a boy to situate his audience between the factual and the imaginary. The shot moves seamlessly from "history" or "age" (1909) to about 1960, when he was seven years old. History is only a backdrop to this youthful story, he seems to be saying. What and where things happened in our personal histories make the spaces that we occupied central to our identities. This brief autobiographical nod at the beginning of the film is an intentional foil to the film's unerring focus on the primacy of timeless dream life that is the film's ideological mantra. Using the genre of the confessional, autobiographical, coming-of-age story, the film brings us into a heterosexual male, inner-city working-class childhood in a way that is totally unconventional and anti-sentimental. Several critics have even turned the portrayal of Léolo's hetero-abnormality (the wimpy artist figure) into a discussion of the film's queer qualities.[1] The film exposes hetero-male fantasies and sexual practices through magic realism; Lauzon's magic realist constructions are a tribute to the autonomous power of the dream to construct its own confused and contradictory realities. For the viewer, rationalizing the how and the why of events portrayed in the film is frustrating, counterproductive, and ultimately fruitless because the film is constructed as a disturbing

dream with numerous non sequiturs and loose ends. Linear narration and physical laws are meaningless in fantasy because the reasoning of the unconscious and its associations do not require either to generate meaning. The kid in Montréal's historic Mile End district, dressed in a now-dated cowboy outfit, stands for the truth of the human condition, which Lauzon saw as costumed and fantastical. The boy living in fantasy signifies everyone who is creative. In this equation, urban space is palpably psychological rather than architectural. In fact, while much of the film is taken up with the presence of physical realities of all kinds, from buildings to parents, these "real" places and "real" people are either discounted or made grotesque or absurd. From Léolo's claiming to have been conceived by a tomato on which a Sicilian peasant had masturbated and on which his mother had accidentally fallen while shopping, to the amazing contraption he concocts with which to strangle his grandfather, symbolic constructions projected by dream states and their emotional roots permeate the film.

"The unconscious is an autonomous psychic entity," Carl Jung wrote, "beyond the reach of subjective arbitrary control."[2] The prime realm of the unconscious is the dream, which Jung considered a purposive balance to the "rationalizations of consciousness" that reject dreams as irrelevant and invalid.[3] Both Lauzon and Arcand explore the meaning of love, but for Arcand love is asexual, while for Lauzon, love is pubescent eroticism and infatuation. Arcand uses the specificities of an urban space (Montréal today) to provide a context for the Passion, while Lauzon views the specificities of Montréal as a psychological arena of explosive emotions. Lauzon's Montréal is a world overwhelmed by an intense psyche that consumes all in its path. Matter is crushed by the mind, and fantasy rules. There is nothing sacred in his Montréal.

Léolo presents us with a constant flow of metaphoric imagery that juxtaposes the traumas of personal history with the dreams that are meant to liberate identity from those traumas. Lauzon acknowledges that we are made by family, history, and society, but that this self generates alternate fantasies about who we might be, fantasies arising from archetypal forms that we share with all other humans. Because they are archetypes, they embrace codes that are accessible to the audience. To help the audience make sense of the film's fantastical images and their supposed rationality in a dream-world, Lauzon creates a voice-over narrator who is our guide to the "reality" of the film, an

authority figure who guides the narrative for the audience. The voice of the narrator reads from a diary, an autobiographical text that seeks to "explain" the film's events through a highly idiosyncratic interpretation provided by its purported author, Léolo, the boy in the film and Lauzon's alter ego. The narrator's reading of the diary allows the authorial voice a presence in the story and suggests that the only interpretation of life that matters is one's own. That a diary is typically an expression of its writer's innermost thoughts and feelings is meant to convey the authenticity and importance of the subjective viewpoint.

Lauzon seems to be saying that the physical and the psychological are bound together. In publicizing the private self, he makes use of sombre music and vocals that serve to heighten the depth of youthful angst. The audience is asked to gaze on the world as the boy gazes on it, to feel his reactions, to experience the traumas of his life, and thus to enter his psyche as deeply as the filmmaker wants us to. The initial scene of the boy in his cowboy outfit sitting in front of Lauzon's ancestral home establishes the inside/outside paradigm that frames the whole film and that makes urban existence a battleground between the physical and social on one side and the mental and personal on the other. Urban life, like any other physically "located" life, can only be escaped through dreams, which come with a price. By juxtaposing the rather brutish reality of urban life for a working-class francophone boy with the boy's escapist fantasies, the filmmaker turns the city into an antagonist, a reality that generates antithetical responses in his protagonist.

The opening shot continues panning right over an urban landscape, while the authorial voice-over explains, "This is my place, Mile End, Montréal, Canada."[4] The place is immediately situated in a geographic and historical reality for the viewer and the viewer's interpretations of Québec, however limited or profound. But this geographic identity is immediately dismissed as irrelevant by the authorial voice-over, which claims that the spatial and ethnic identity that is represented in the urban images is unimportant. "Because I dream," the voice emphasizes, "that is not what I am." Just as Arcand used religious imagery to universalize Montréal, so Lauzon uses psychological categories to do the same. He tells us that the main signifier of identity is the dream.

The boy's consciousness is formed through a voice-over that seems spectral: the voice reading from the boy's diary sounds too mature to be that of the young boy on the screen, as is confirmed when he actually speaks. In the film,

the diary is discovered by a rather silent, or wordless, figure, the "Dompteur des vers," who is something of a cross between a derelict and a priest. His dual character is apparent in the ambiguity of his name, which some translate as "Word Tamer" (with *vers* understood in its liturgical sense, as "lines" or "verse") and others as "Worm Tamer" (with *vers* taken as the plural of *ver,* "worm" or "maggot"). Perhaps, then, the voice of the narrator is that of the Word/Worm Tamer.The viewer is therefore conflicted about how to read the voice. It is first-person singular, but it is the voice of another, which could even be a representation of the audience as it "reads" the film. This clash of the autobiographical with the biographical, the internal with the external, is what Lauzon plays out for us. Although we are guided by Lauzon the storyteller, we are bound primarily by the viewing of the film, so his storytelling ends up enmeshed in our own voices and how we imagine Québec, Montréal, young males, and families. Spectators have their own story through which they read the young Léo. Each of those stories is different.

Within the film itself, the dichotomy between the objective and the subjective is quickly established. Dates and history are always "lying" because they mean different things to different people.[5] These are our own "truths" that balance collective narratives of truth. "Those who trust only their own truth call me 'Léolo Lozone,'" the boy cries defiantly at the world. His "real" name is presented as Léo Lozeau or Léo Lauzon, depending on the version of the film.[6] Who I am, young Léo declares, is not who you or my family think I am; I am who I dream I am. The reality of the city and the reality of a lived life (one's familial history and place in it) are positioned against the created truth of the individual mind that rejects the strictures of the given. In *Léolo,* the struggle between the viewer's inner voice trying to make sense of the film's world and the inner voice of the lead character, who demands that we see reality through his eyes, creates the fundamental tension of the narrative. The viewer's desire to make sense of what is being viewed and heard, the act of integrating imagery and sound into something coherent and understandable, is constantly being challenged by a deep tension between the visual and oral narratives of the film. The constant flow of dark imagery, the litany of voice-over pronouncements, and the powerful, moody music create a spirit of tension, even angst, in the viewer. The anxiety expressed in the film mirrors our own inner anxiety about our secret lives. The film highlights a battle between our public identities and

our private ones. The film's auditory privileging of dream through music and voice clashes with the visual in the film, because the visual (seeing is believing) prejudices us toward its representations of reality.

Léolo's heroic struggle to live inside his dream ends in his final coma in a bathtub full of ice water in a psychiatric institution, where his relatives also reside.[7] The water represents scientific reality's cold and bitter anti-amniotic fluid (death) in stark contrast with the warm and protective womb from which he emerged (birth). The voice of the diary stops; the film ends with an English-language lament. Both the boy and the film become wordless, and the viewer is left, like the reader of the diary, with an internalization of the filmmaker's/ author's creation. The spectator is suspended, like the character of Léolo himself, between the mental and the physical worlds. When we reach the end of the film, we understand that Léolo's pointing his phallic toy rifle at us in the first scene is Lauzon's way of saying that we, too, can be killed by our fantasies. Eros leads to Thanatos. The film posits a choice between the treacheries of reality and the treacheries of dreams. The refrain of dreams defining our inner being is a salute to the creative, artistic life. The sombre and grief-like mourning of the closing scene equates the "entombment" of the diary by the Word/Worm Tamer at the end with the "burial" of Léolo in the insane asylum. These burials are metaphors for a state of wordlessness, the end of narrative, a story that is over.

THE EMBODIED DREAM

Flight from the body has been a basic element in Western thinking for millennia. Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" is Western philosophy's most famous statement of subjectivity and an affirmation of a split between mind and body. Lauzon cleverly introduces his own postmodernist take on this philosophical epigram by adding a refrain, "I dream, therefore I am not," which he has Léolo repeat, mantra-like, throughout the film. Being alive implies dreaming and imagining. Lauzon's own name is suggested in the boy's "real" name, Lozeau, and his "imagined" name, Lozone. This cascade of association suggests the masks that humans generate for themselves as they cope with reality. We are dealing again with three levels: the historical Lauzon, the fictive Lozeau, and the imagined Lozone. Art lies layered between fantasy and reality, between the

imagined and the remembered. "I wanted my film to be a kind of homage to dream," Lauzon explained in an interview. "And I wanted to make a film that paid homage to creativity."[8]

Lauzon's sublimation of his own life's transformation from a working-class troublemaker in East End Montréal into a heralded filmmaker using a narrative of an imagined failure is indicative of the ironies of art. If the film had accurately portrayed his real worldly success, it would not have had the same impact. Twisting the film's narrative into a fabulist statement about the constant war between dream and reality limits the importance of the historical, the geographic, and the specifically autobiographical in the film. It raises human psychology to a metaphysical level on par with the religious power of *Jésus de Montréal*.

And yet the historical and autobiographical reality of Lauzon as a product of Montréal and its urban landscape cannot be dismissed since it is the world that the protagonist denounces as unreal. Montréal is embodied in the narration and the visual imagery as a site of negativity and violence to the self. It is a place where dreams are drowned by the constant outpourings of reality, to which the diary repeatedly refers as an assault on the psyche. By equating the externalities of urban life (home, family, jobs, streetscapes, institutions, etc.) with the limitations of the boy's body as it struggles to achieve sexual maturity, Lauzon has created a powerful metaphor of the body/mind dichotomy. In this case, the mind-body split is a division between the boy's fantasy of the self and the self's imprisonment in its socio-urban landscape. Léolo insists on the superiority of his imaginary narrative over that of his family, whose narrative is grounded in francophone Montréal. And yet narrative closure is the destiny of any story just as death is the destiny of any life.[9] Like any pubescent boy's desire to escape into maturity, into full and unfettered sexuality, away from the parental eye and familial strictures, Léolo's desire for freedom symbolizes transformation. Is the city only a prison whose walls are parents and siblings, language, ethnicity, and class, all of which must be transcended? At one level, it is; otherwise, the mind could not and would not want to invent an otherness, which Lauzon represents as bucolic country scenes in Sicily. But on another level, embodiment in a city is fundamental to creating the conditions for desire and flight. It is the girl-next-door figure that is his love object, and it is the back lanes of his neighbourhood that give him an urban framework. Lauzon posits

Montréal as the driver of his anti-hero's imagination, and it is in Montréal's institutional framework (the asylum) that the story ends. Both Arcand and Lauzon have created homages to Montréal and transferred its urban dominance to a suprageographic and supranational realm.

The Canadian philosopher Mark Kingwell describes cities as "free-ranging, energized conversations, restless and inventive confabs."[10] Their role is incubational, and it is dreaming that allows the new to emerge. That is how Lauzon reads Montréal—as a space that is filled with dreams that seek to recreate the self. The only self that can triumph over the city is one that does not accept its strictures. That is why Léolo's father is presented as a failure—because he accepts his lot in life. So the city is both enemy and friend, both womb and tomb. The energized conversation that the young Léolo has with his diary—and through it, with us—is restless and inventive; it is a source of insight into the human condition. He is an inner-city boy, driven by pubescent heterosexual desire and in active rebellion against his family and its working-class dilemmas. That Lauzon eventually freed himself of his class origins may appeal to the mythology of American success, but in Lauzon's claustrophobic Québec universe, that liberation cannot be trumpeted from the rooftops. It carries a burden of guilt, especially when his lead character denies his Québec identity. Léolo urinates from the balcony of his tenement in symbolic denunciation of his rotten world. Piss on you, he says. I can be whatever I want to be. But in the end, he can't. In spite of Lauzon's personal triumph, Québec is presented in *Léolo* as a statement of failure rather than an American statement of triumph over adversity, which indicates how deeply the cultural parameters of his society are embedded in his psyche and that of his prime audience.

In his role as diarist, Léolo represents the figure of the artist, a figure who, in Lauzon's world, is a denizen of the classless imagination rather than of an ethnocentric, class-conscious reality. For example, after the opening scene with the boy and his toy gun, the narration moves to an image of a sweaty, rotund man carrying a sack of coal in a foundry, the epitome of blue-collar drudgery. He is the father figure, a lowly worker who is rejected by the narrator in favour of a conjured "real" father, a Sicilian peasant, who masturbated on a tomato that was shipped to "America" and then miraculously impregnated his mother in the market when she tripped over a vegetable stand. Léolo's creation myth—for that is, in essence, what it is—is a brilliant parody of the biblical

Eden (the round tomato as the round apple) as well as a statement of how we are all "adopted" here on earth. The Father and the Mother (Adam and Eve) have been driven out of blissful existence in an Eden-like Sicily into the slavery of working-class Québec. The way the film idealizes rural life as a fantasy is part and parcel of the urban imaginary, in which the urban consciousness seeks to escape a world that it views as a concrete jungle.[11]

Léolo Lozone/Lozeau/Lauzon's creation myth also carries non-Christian Freudian baggage: rejection of the father and embracing of the mother. While his dream of idyllic rural Sicily, beautifully filmed, represents a lost Eden, his earthly father's working-class, factory-dominated city is a purgatory out of which he must dream himself. The son wants to return to the Edenic garden because his real life—brutish and bookless, as he tells us—is only worthy of escape. He argues that one would have to be insane to accept reality as he knows it. This reasoning uses the logic of the subconscious to subvert conscious reality. Considering some of the escapades portrayed later in the film, one might perceive Lauzon's Montréal as a monstrous world. Yet it is this very world that holds the viewer enthralled with its darkly rich, deeply textured, mesmerizing visuality. The bucolic scenes from Sicily are emotionally empty for the audience; they are too dreamy in their presentation. Instead, the audience is enthralled with the rich "Old Masters" lighting of scenes of Montréal and the tenement apartment, especially when lit by candlelight or fires. It is this earthly world that makes the film interesting and engaging, rather than the world of pure love that Léolo dreams. So Lauzon undermines visually the dream-reality that is praised orally in the film. In this way, he foreshadows the ending.

The film displays a metaphysical or ethereal quality that suggests to the viewer that the main character's rather one-sided narration of reality lacks substance. As we watch the magic realism of an amazing Montréal unfold before our eyes, we are attracted by its imagery, magnetized by its music, and engaged with the physicality and visuality that is represented as urban life. The visual elements of the film represent exaggeration and ritualization. Its oral narration, augmented by deep sonorous music, is equally rich and enchanting. It holds our attention even though it is disembodied. The truth that emerges from the film for the spectator is a triangle composed of authorial intent, filmic reality, and the audience's reading. It may be that some in the audience can see elements of their own existence in the *cri de coeur* that emanates from the

troubled mind and volatile emotions of this young lad. Even if this is not possible, the audience is captivated by the visual representation of the depths of the psyche.

The diary (narrative) is a text that Léo's family cannot read because it is hidden from them. (The cultural construction of juvenile confession has as its major theme not being understood by adults and being hidden from them.) But we, the audience, are included in the world of the diary's "readers" because we are listening to the diary as it "confesses" to us. This confessional mode turns us into priests who must pronounce judgment on its transgressions. The diary is a form of forbidden knowledge. Like the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, it is only available to those who partake of it, which Léolo's family does not, but which his guardian angel, the Word/Worm Tamer, does. The biblical allusions that underlie the film's text are evidence of the power of religious Catholicism in the Québec identity. The avuncular figure of the Word/Worm Tamer is played by the late Pierre Bourgeault, a firebrand orator in his nationalist days but reduced in this film to an ironic silence. He (in the film) and we (in the audience) are asked to treat the diary like a sacred text, which the Word/Worm Tamer later carries in a pseudo-religious procession to its final entombment on a shelf in the cellar of his home, illuminated by a thousand candles found at the end of a seemingly endless spiral staircase, which represents the subconscious. It is enshrined as a holy object to be venerated, just as a film can be enshrined as a classic text that all should revere. As a religious memento or icon, it stands for the memory of its author, who has been raised to a level of martyred sainthood in the film. The diary is "saved" by the Word/Worm Tamer, but it is now dead since it no longer speaks to us. When Léolo is silenced, the diary stops, the voice-over stops, and the film ends because the film itself parallels the diary—from the first page to the last. This equating of the two art forms (diary and film) is simply one more creative link between Lauzon, his city, and his imaginative reconstruction of his own life.

While the film, via the diary, can be considered a meditation on all kinds of love—filial, maternal, sexual—it is more a meditation on the benefits and costs to those who live the creative life.[12] The world of *Léolo* is a dialogical engagement in which we can try to understand the director of the film through the characters he has created for us. Everything of consequence that has spurred his imagination has some connection to his life. Lauzon's desperate

urban upbringing and its visual and dramatic richness underly the creation of the dream world that is a film. Dreams are most often constructed out of experiences in the real world but are rearranged in archetypal ways. The film implies that any historical moment, with its buildings and streetscapes, can be mythologized, universalized, and made archetypal because of the human psyche's ties to the collective subconscious. The cultures associated with Catholicism (religion), the Quiet Revolution (generation), male heterosexuality (sexual orientation), Québec nationality and the French language, and, of course, class figure prominently in *Léolo* because this is the culture in which Lauzon grew up. These elements of this culture also influenced Arcand, albeit in a different way. Arcand was twenty in 1960, when the Quiet Revolution began, while Lauzon was only seven. The two filmmakers are separated by less than a single generation, and yet Lauzon was educated within the newly secularized Québec, while Arcand was not. Lauzon was much more a child of the Quiet Revolution than was Arcand. This meant that, for Lauzon, the world was framed in a more secular manner than Arcand's education allowed. *Léolo* belongs to a modern myth, while *Jésus* belongs to an ancient one, and so expressions of class, nationalism, and language in each film differ radically.

AUTHORSHIP AND THE DIARY

This 1992 film looks backward into the collective realities of the twentieth century and forward to a future that neither the character in the film nor its director was to experience because Lauzon died in a tragic plane crash five years after the film was released. The boy never comes of age and Lauzon left us with only two feature films, which serve as his diary to us. The diary form, like this film, is the place of an articulated life, of a self-reflecting narrative that is as irrational as it is rational because it is based on a singular viewpoint. Diaries are often the textual home of the dreams we have about ourselves, and they contain the universe of self-creation and self-interpretation that society either ignores or rejects. The dreams expressed in *Léolo*'s fictional diary are partially the site of the idealized heavenly fantasy of another, more glorious world, and they are also an expression of trauma—of growing up in working-class Montréal in the 1950s. Unlike Arcand's Montréal, which was formed by

the halls of Jesuit higher education, Lauzon's Montréal was formed by a low-income, industrialized, blue-collar working-class universe of street thugs, fishmongers, and recycled newspapers. In this situation, one makes one's life out of what is discarded, a metaphor for the status of the district's inhabitants. This francophone class that is integral to Montréal's identity is completely different from the snobbish, educated elite that populate Arcand's Montréal. There are no rural retreats for the denizens of Mile End. Instead of the spacious lakeside cottage for weekend relaxation that Arcand's characters enjoy in *Le d*éclin*,* Léolo's "escape" to a rural rest consists of taking the bus to the Montréal docksides for a Sunday family picnic. In *Jésus de Montréal,* Mont Royal is the site "outside" the city that hosts the Passion play, but even this prominent urban park is missing from the inner-city lives portrayed in *Léolo*. They have no green space at all, so if they are to have it, they must dream it.

The device of the diary creates a highly textualized narrative thread for the film. The authorial/autobiographical voice that is sometimes youthful and sometimes aged forces the audience to reflect on authorship, on the power of narrative, on the "truth" of text and the filmmaker's fictional reconstruction of the nonfictional. The diary is not a memoir because it presents the author as engaged directly with events as they happen. These events and their author's role are recreated on the screen. Because its narrative spans an indeterminate period of time in Léolo's life, the sense of time's passage is compressed. The account sandwiches the audience between a young body seeking to overcome its pubescence and the rational reading offered by the much older Word/Worm Tamer figure, who wanders the garbage-strewn lanes of the urban jungle searching for the textual remnants of other people's lives.[13] The Word/Worm Tamer can only relate to humans through their texts, the way an archivist might. He is the incarnation of an understanding father figure (another version of Léolo's dreamed and anonymous father, the Sicilian peasant), who does not exist in Léolo's "real" family. He is an outsider, like members of the audience, who treats Léolo's words with attentive reverence because they form a manuscript. The Word/Worm Tamer's salvaging of the diary from the garbage provides it with significance and authenticity. The filmmaker wants us to react to his film in the way the Word/Worm Tamer reacts to the diary because he believes that art deserves reverence.[14] But the diary is an imaginary entity that signifies the autobiographical memory. While the outside world considers such

musings garbage, its creator does not. While Léolo's family tries to "save" him from his escapist imagination with repeated calls to return to their reality, the eccentric Word/Worm Tamer also fails to save the boy's life because he cannot intervene effectively.[15] Guardian angels simply watch. Through the Tamer, who is the memoirist and the archival aspect of Lauzon, the text is kept from the worms (dust to dust, ashes to ashes) by saving it from a destructive and ignoble resting place in a trash can and thus from its return to the earth. Lauzon's ironic play on words in the name "Dompteur des vers" (*ver* and *vers* are homonyms) implies that worms and words have a mutual covenant of destruction and ultimate transformation.

"My family had become caricatures—characters in a fiction," the voice of the diary tells us. Lauzon is warning us that his film is a fiction filled with caricatures of his family. But these caricatures symbolize universal figures with archetypal qualities: the father, the mother, the brother, the sister, and so on. This "familial" structure is equivalent to the familiarity of the city structure for a young person for whom an apartment or a small neighbourhood is a total universe. The rest of the city does not exist. Cartooning the mother or the father or the sister is part of the young mind as it lives in a comic book universe. Such constructions of the family do not detract from the essential role that each person plays in the family drama. Likewise, the gang of prepubescent boys, smoking and sniffing glue, represents the clan culture of adolescence. The visual elements in the film recreate the immediacy of each episode, while the authorial voice, which is sometimes the Tamer's reading and sometimes Léolo's, creates a temporal distancing for the audience so that the subject in the writing becomes objectivized. We gaze upon Léolo and his stories as curious bystanders positioned as judge and jury. The diary is Léolo's statement of his subjective voice, while its being read to us creates the illusion of an objective statement that can be analyzed and reflected upon. The diary is a metaphor for the film itself in the sense that the film is simultaneously a subjective statement of the auteur and an objective work of art that can be analyzed and interpreted by the audience.

The diary and the film are Léolo's ghosts, his words from the grave. When Léolo and his diary are finally silenced at the end of the film, we are so far underground in the subconscious of his psyche (reflected in the endlessly downward spiralling staircase that the Tamer descends, holding the diary as

book) that the urban realm, where the ego once lived and breathed and fought for existence, has totally disappeared. The world of dreams is the world of the id, and human life is not sustainable at that level. Instead, we enter, along with the Tamer, a sacred space symbolized by the Tamer's priest-like procession into a catacomb ablaze with candlelight and the shadowy shapes of artistic and pseudo-religious artifacts. This treatment of a boy's diary as a revered work of art bestows a religious status on the artist. When a life or a text is completed, this "ending" signifies a valid passage to a new form. Lauzon's valorization of authorship and art has its parallels in *Jésus de Montréal,* where Arcand makes the Christ-figure an actor and the theatricality of the Passion play an artistic expression closely aligned with faith.[16] In spite of significant differences between the two filmmakers and their filmic expressions of Montréal, the matter of art and its creation binds them.

DREAMING AS LIFE

The emphasis on the word "dream" as the basic mantra of the film adds to the film's ghostly aura. The diary as the great explainer is the voice from the beyond, disembodied and ethereal. The co-relation between the dream-life of a young boy and its narration in a diary suggests that a good part of an adolescent's life is spent dreaming up bio-tales. *Léolo* reminds us over and over that dreaming is the way in which reality can be negated. It is quite common for adolescent daydreaming to justify its inherent narcissism through the manufacturing of a love object. The dream or fantasy wants to be *realized* by reaching out to its other or beloved that is a real person. Léolo's Bianca is not just his fantasy; she is a flesh-and-blood object of desire. The dream-world projects beauty next door as a way of rejecting the ugliness it perceives in its own life. If his family apartment is the embodiment of ugliness, then Bianca becomes the embodiment of unattainable beauty. In this way, the city fills with the dreams of its inhabitants. Lauzon recreates Montréal's urbanscape in a dream-like way—confused, convoluted, emphatic, and manic. The parts are easily identifiable, but they are often lacking in rationality. Montréal embodies mental processes that become endless conflicts. And that is what the film offers— conflicts that are internal to families and conflicts with the flotsam of urban

existence. Both are shut out by dreaming, and dreams find their embodiment in the diary, which turns into a castle in which Léolo lives. The desires and opinions that he offers create an alienation/attraction paradigm. Bianca is real enough, but she is also a fantasy creature, an idealized persona conjured up from his own desire. Although he fails to destroy his opponent, the grandfather, who pays Bianca for sexual favours, Léolo is energized by his life-and-death struggle to achieve sexual equality with adults. While he seeks the solitude of his dream-life, of his inner self, that selfhood is contextualized and made meaningful by the external world to which he is reacting. The solitariness of his world is accentuated by two entities: the one book that supposedly exists in the family home and, of course, his diary. The former he reads; the latter he writes. But the result is always the loneliness of the person as artist or as an art appreciator. Léolo obviously wants to overcome this solitariness through an engagement with Bianca, but it remains an unfulfilled desire.

Curiously, his infatuation with Bianca only makes him more alone and isolated. The more he wants her, the greater the obstacles to his connecting with her. The family apartment in which he lives is a symbol of urban life, of loneliness and struggle in the midst of overcrowding. The apartment, like the city, is filled with people and furniture and happenings, but these only drive Léolo further into himself, since the world of the flat is an affront to his desired identity. Only by dreaming of not being a boy, of not being a kid in a tenement, of being strong enough to kill his grandfather can he be his idea of an adult, an equal to those who are oppressing him. The inescapable solitariness of his life is symbolized by the ice water–filled tub that entombs him at the end of the film. Lauzon's urban world is made up of exactly this contradiction between urban crowding and solitariness. It's a universe of strangers walking past each other, filled with their own dreams.

A dream is a disjointed, contradictory remembering of the vaguely familiar. In each dream, there exists a play of opposites in which the future (dream-wish) and the past (nightmare) are combined into a restless and tormented present. Lauzon is a genius in portraying this dichotomy through religious metaphors. The family's fetish for regularity in bodily functions and its ritualistic repetition of defecation as a form of cleansing that has to be repeated week after week are held up as insanity by the diary, while the life of reading, the absorption into the cleanliness of a book that has no bodily waste,

the life of the mind and the understanding friendship it generates with a man like the Tamer are held up for their purity and eternity. The book is the home of the ideal, while the home is the realm of ugly reality.

Léolo's juvenile perception of the human condition, which always seeks to elevate the self beyond the restraints of the given (not realizing that its aspirations are just a biological tool for his entering adult conventionality and restriction), involves a diminution of the social and an elevation of the personal. Two important scenes in the first twenty minutes of the film explain this solipsistic vision. Both occur in darkness—the darkness of the bathroom (inside) and the darkness of the street (outside)—which indicates that the city is the same indoors and outdoors. In the first scene, Léolo's mother sits as a colossus on the toilet, her skirt raised and legs spread, while she encourages the boy (here a toddler) in potty-training. The crying child looks at her massive bulk (he is only a toddler, after all) and his gaze turns to her pelvis and the mystery of birth. The scene is a difficult one to watch because of its invasion of normative privacy. The loving mother encourages the boy with the words "push, push," just as she may have been encouraged (and cried) while giving birth to him. The two different acts of birth and defecation are equated clearly in a Freudian way. Growing up and taking control of the self is a process of effort and pain.

The second scene has Léolo walking joyfully with the Tamer in a rain-soaked industrial area; both are dressed in worker's rain gear and are carrying pails. The water glistens with film noir lighting as the two figures stride forward in a mood of confidence. Then they are shown seated by a fire fed with books that the Tamer gives the boy. There is, after all, only one book that matters, and that is the personal diary. The two are presented as perfectly happy and content. The music is rousing and triumphal. The voice-over, which introduces the Tamer, describes this adult as someone who knows how to sift through the garbage of the world and pick up what is precious. This is the knowledge that the boy hopes to acquire. And the only wisdom that the Tamer imparts to him is "You have to dream, Léolo." Of course, that advice is the opposite of what his family tells him, which is to adjust to the real world and stop daydreaming. Léolo responds by describing the Tamer as a "reincarnation of Don Quixote." This is a play on both the romantic hero-worshipping, role-model desires of youth and an adult understanding of the uselessness of tilting at windmills. In

this scene, just like the bathroom scene, there is a bonding between the two individuals, but it is clear that the bonding with the Tamer is simply another stage in the life of a heterosexual male, who must bond with those outside the family to become an adult.

The play of light and dark in these two scenes is vital to the philosophy of the film: it presents both the internal world of the home and the external world of the city street as dark and foreboding places. The street has the advantage of movement, of an illusion of freedom, represented by the hobo imagery of the two sitting outside, homeless, and enjoying the vagabond life free of domesticity and its particular violence to the self. The scene symbolizes escape into manhood. The next important urban scene, shot in daylight, is Léolo and his brother picking up discarded newspapers in an alley. Day is the time of work and manual labour, as in the world of his father. There is no joy here, just economic necessity. They are unknowingly imitating the Tamer, who also prowls urban alleys, but they are forced to do this for money, while the Tamer sifts through garbage for philosophical reasons. Their work is of a lower order. In the street, they are part of a multicultural, ethnic, allophone environment, which is played differently in *Jésus de Montréal*. In Arcand's film, the same elements exist but are portrayed as separate worlds that barely touch. In Lauzon's film, the class nature of the neighbourhood brings Italian, Jewish, and English characters close together in direct conflict. These are not distant ghettos but entities that share a contested space. The life of labour includes the Jewish fishmonger, the English bully, the Italian beauty next door, and what unites them and their mutual struggle for survival is proximity itself. In darkness, the city can be a place where companionship and solitude can be celebrated. In daylight, the city is a place of prying eyes, of jostling bodies, of turf wars. Because work life (daytime) is the site of struggle, it is sleep life (nighttime) where imagination can bring peace, can free one from enslavement to manual labour and so from the city. In dreams, one can overcome class, filth, and familial demands. Only through dreaming can the city of a working-class kid move beyond its normative ugliness and hopelessness.

The urban in *Léolo* does not have the reverential sense of the sacred found in the Montréal-Jerusalem equation of *Jésus de Montréal*. In fact, religion is either parodied or made ironic—as, for example, when a cruxific falls to the floor while Léolo is masturbating. While Arcand wishes to save the city from

its secularity, to raise it to a spiritual level, Lauzon brings it down to its sordid depths: enjoyment is sought only at night, lit by primitive fires (outdoors) or candles (indoors). That lighting is not part of a typical urban technological fix like centrally supplied electricity: these are ancient and individual illuminations from earliest times. Even so, Lauzon's Montréal is much more grounded in the sociological and the psychological than in the mythic structure created by Arcand. His city is a derelict existence redeemed through individual imagination rather than through Christ, and that imagination is itself constructed from twentieth-century psychological insights. The flame of creativity that Lauzon offers us transforms art into salvation and the diary into a holy book.

THE ELEMENTAL CITY OF FIRE, EARTH, AIR, AND WATER

Lauzon takes an urban working-class tenement environment, which is as far from natural elements as one can imagine, and breaks it down into fundamental archetypes: fire, earth, air, and water. The only treasures that Léolo finds within his home are buried deep below the floorboards in that metaphorical basement of the subconscious, where he and his sister hide out with his bug collection. This incest-alluding scene, filled with the candlelight and comparable to scenes in the home of the Tamer, creates a sense of ritual and mystery, coming as close to religiosity as possible in a world infused with psychological rather than moral categories. With his sister dressed as a kind of priestess, the scene is highly reminiscent of the confused figures and allusions found in dreams. The bug collection is a precious object to the young Léolo, though disgusting to his mother, who prefers that he collect discarded newspapers with his brother because they have some financial value. The bugs are worthless in the real world, but to the child, they are sacramental. In the alchemy of family values, reality imposes the importance of money, while in the universe of individual values, the bug collection is of inestimable value because it represents caring and self-affirmation. Léolo cares for the bugs in the way a mother nurtures a child. It is a kind of ersatz adulthood. At one point, he brings the jar to his institutionalized and catatonic sister as his only gift of love. He "owns" nothing else.

The candlelight of the basement plays a similar role to that of the book-burning bonfire that he shares with the Tamer. This primal lighting (fire

and flame rather than electric light) signifies reverence for the archetypal scene and can, with a stretch, be related to the originating human art found in the caves of Europe. In fact, Lauzon makes much of this detechnologized, deindustrialized environment, which he offers as a return to fundamental soul-affirming humanity. The symbolic value of elemental fire and water are central to the film's imagery. Earth, another in the quartet of elements, is present in a different way. The most earthly thing in the film is excrement.

It would seem that this emphasis on shit is also carried over to his view of the city as a place of shit—of money (filthy lucre), dirt (filth), blood, and grime. Shit means worthless. In one scene, Lauzon has the father eating his lunch from a lunch pail while sitting on the toilet of the factory where he works. Conceiving work as shit, life as shit, the working class being treated like shit means his father's life is worthless and a waste. In the family's universe, art is also shit. Léolo's diary is treated like shit by family members. This bowel movement metaphor continues when the diary describes his going into the basement to see his sister as "hidden in the bowels of the earth." The motion is always downward, where one can be rid of physical limitations and so rise up again to float in the delightful and airy daydreams of youthful imagination. And to do that, one must enter secret worlds, places transformed and hidden far from the prying eyes of family and peers. One must descend into the world of the id and the subconscious libido in order to be free of the shitty, earthy world. Only by going below can one rise above the daily mess.

Film scholar Georges Toles describes *Léolo* as an "exploration of the sensuous surfaces of the decaying material world."[17] The film equates the body with organic matter and material reality. Each urban space has its human counterpart—the business owner, the neighbourhood bully, and the psychiatrist. The material world is presented as a site of decay, demoralization, and, ultimately, death. The idealized dream world is presented as a site of soaring flight, exhilaration, and fulfillment. The city entombs the body through its grotesque reality, while flights of fancy are the only tools allowing one to soar above its decay, demoralization, and death. The city as reality is a gravitational force that is always trying to pull poor little Léolo down to earth.

But Lauzon's city is also sensuous, especially at night, when, in the rain-slicked reflections of its streets, it shimmers with moonlight. In daylight, it is a mutation of sensuality, a kind of cancer. The city in daylight is an illness, or

what Toles calls an "affliction."[18] The city in darkness merges with the dream world and so reflects freedom from reality and the world of sunlight. The only illumination that one needs in the world of dreams is primitive candlelight or a fire. Fire, the symbolic element of individual creativity, exists in the city, but it also threatens urban life. Fires such as those created by derelicts to keep warm are a threat to a fire-wary public just as candlelight is associated with the danger of house fires. While electricity is safe when it is channelled through wires, an open flame is a worrisome, anti-urban threat. Through its association with fire, the flame of creativity can be read as a threat to the established order of things and as needing to be extinguished. That is why fire's opposite, water, is equally prevalent in the film and becomes the symbol of extinguishment, of the end of individual creativity.[19] Fire and water become the organic elements that bring the city to life or to death.

While fire is presented as a positive symbol because of its destructive, obliterating power, and earth is associated with defecation, water is the element that extinguishes fire and passion. Lauzon's portrayal of water as a Jungian archetype is important. There is the water of the concrete-encased city docks, where the family spends its Sunday picnicking and where Léolo must dive for lost fishing lures as a pathetic economic enterprise that is almost worthless. There is the water of his summertime play pool, where his grandfather tries to drown him. Then there is the water of his grandfather's bathtub, where Léolo creates his amazing rope-and-pulley contraption in order to murder his grandfather because he views him as a sexual rival. There is the water of a fantasy sequence related to a near-death experience where he dives for buried treasure as his grandfather tries to strangle him. The shallow, outdoor, plastic blow-up play pool of the real world turns into a deep, magnificent, azure-coloured tropical ocean as Léolo loses consciousness and sees a buried treasure, which represents liberation from this world. In the film, water is both physical and metaphysical, both historical and archetypal, a representation of the conscious and the subconscious.

Yet another aspect of water in the film comes from its association with the womb and the amniotic fluid that surrounds the fetus. Water represents more than just the subconscious; it is also about birthing. The film is rife with images of passage, of tunnel-like entities, of canals that lead downward, as in the final scene, in which the Tamer carries the diary down into a seemingly endless

spiral staircase to a candlelit catacomb for burial. Even the St. Lawrence River, which surrounds Montréal, can be conceived as a birth canal that carries life. But this bringing-into-the-world sense of water has to be aligned with the negative connotations of the world for Lauzon's film. The world's brutality, its ugliness, pain, and suffering, are qualities given to the city. So water is associated with death, whether by drowning or by an ice bath–induced coma. Since fire and water are opposites, Léolo's fiery desires must be quenched with icy water. If his dreams were to come true and his enraptured Sicilian self were to become realized, then Montréal, imagined as a francophone city, would be destroyed.

The city of Montréal is an island surrounded by the waters of the St. Lawrence River, which was and remains its lifeline—economic, recreational, and literary. The flow of the river equates with the flow of history: it is the river that brought initial French power, lost to the English when they massed on the river to scale the heights leading to the Plains of Abraham at Québec, which in turn made Montréal an important "seaport" and, up to the mid–twentieth century, a centre of English commercial power. If one takes the fire/water binary (comparable to the earth/air binary) and parallels it with the urban/rural split in Québec identity, we have a representation of the collective subconscious on several levels. Bill Marshall, in *Quebec National Cinema,* writes that "Montreal is at the heart of the national-allegorical tension in Quebec culture." He considers Montréal to be the definer of francophone specificity and this specificity, in the 1990s, meant "a particular space in which European nostalgia, melancholy, and alienation co-exist with a North American utopianism."[20] *Léolo* is nostalgic because it looks back. A film made in the 1990s about the early 1960s does reflect on the francophone identity in Montréal in an earlier period. A mood of melancholy and disenchantment is palpable throughout the film, and the spirit of alienation is fundamental to its narrative. There is no triumphant Quiet Revolution here. Instead, we have an idealized alien landscape of "Italy" that is the core of Léolo's fantasy because he only "knows" when he is dreaming.

Scott MacKenzie argues that Québec had to create "new public spheres" where collective definitions could arise to replace the old identities. One of the public spaces that encourages a dialogue on identity is cinema.[21] Bill Marshall states that Montréal symbolized Québec's progressive identity. In the new culture, the city is presented as "crucial to an understanding of the

relationship between modernity and postmodernity" and to "the construction of the 'national-popular.'"[22] This is precisely the message of *Léolo,* which deconstructs the "national-popular" with its undermining of the sanctity of the francophone world by having its protagonist deny his French Canadian identity in favour of an allophone one. His rebellion against the overpowering mother, the enslaved father, and the emotionally weak brother—all of which can be read as Québec—is a cry for freedom from the given. The fire of creative individuality and the burning up of the past in the flame of redefinition is extinguished by the icy waters of the concluding institutional-therapeutic bath, where both the fevered brow and the fevered heart are cooled down to a state of hibernation. The boy is locked down. Lauzon presents a battle against the givens of Québec identity—its French language, its *chansonnier* music, its Catholic religious heritage—because of its failure to create real individual or collective liberation. Only art can achieve that.

The film presents the new public sphere as an ideological battleground. The casting of Pierre Bourgeault as the Tamer is not accidental. It represents the quieting of a turbulent era in Québec history, along the lines expressed in *Jésus* by Arcand, who sees no redemptive power in Québec's secularity. Léolo's desire to become the other or the allophone represents the creation of a creole consciousness in Québec history brought on by ethnic diversity and racial change.[23] Otherness and diversity are already within us, Lauzon says, so why not go all the way and become the Other, as symbolized by Bianca and Sicily. Jenny Burman contrasts Montréal's "multiculturalism" with Toronto's "diasporism"; she sees Montréal as a layered demographic with a coherent sense of common history, while Toronto's identity has become completely hybridized.[24] So Lauzon presents the Other from the still-dominant francophone perspective, where Montréal communities are culturally layered rather than integrated.

Both Arcand and Lauzon have embraced the urban imaginary as their prime narrative vehicle and, in so doing, have filled it with amazingly inventive content: the city of faith and the city of dreams. Both "cities" are aware of the rural other in terms of Québec identity, but their sense of history means that they relegate the rural to the past. Ironically, when Lauzon sought to escape the pressures of urban life and his career in advertising, he earned the luxury of flying his own plane to northern Québec to fish and hunt. In *Jean-Claude Lauzon: Le poète,* photos of his last trip to the north show him with his fishing

and hunting buddies, looking like a Native guide.[25] This flight to Québec's primordial landscape and away from the urban world meant flying over the old peasant identity, which was irrelevant to a working-class kid from Mile End. Likewise, Arcand acknowledges the rural in *Le déclin* and *Les invasions* with his country retreat, where his cast of urbanites have no interaction with the old rural Québec and its denizens.

DREAMING LOVE AND FAILURE

The dream that urban life gives rise to in the film is a dream of primal love or lust. Unbeknownst to Léolo, this love is a tool for recreating the very reality that the individual seeks to escape. It is every person's dream of family and adulthood. George Toles claims that the film's dream is a love-dream, wherein the final silence of Léolo signifies the failure of achieving a mature love.[26] The boy's consciousness is stopped at the level of a juvenile infatuation. Lauzon configured Montréal as the site of fantasy as strongly as Arcand configured the city as the site of the sacred. That both auteur directors could represent such different Montréals is a reflection of disparate individual histories, their immersion in different classes, and the city's own range of urban francophone identities in the artistic elite.

The visuality of *Léolo* is so Fellini-esque in its exaggeration that its urban identity takes on a phantasmagorical quality. The night street scenes and the dark interior scenes are intense and distorted. But one must compare the hallucinatory quality of the film with the equally magical escape that Lauzon himself effected from his destiny as the son of a worker who had tried to murder his own family.[27] The orality of the film is expressed through the authorial voice-over of the diary and the non-Québec global music and song, which represent the otherness of Léolo's consciousness. The theme song of the film, Tom Waits' haunting "Cold, Cold Ground," references the theme of death that underlies everything. The spatiality of the film, tied to the various rooms in the family apartment, reflects the film's emphasis on the inner life of the psyche. When one combines the darkness of the interior spaces with the single narrative voice, one feels caught up in the self-identity. No wonder Lauzon was described posthumously as "un cinéaste sauvage, qui n'avait pas

été domestique par le système" ("an untamed filmmaker, who hadn't been domesticated by the system").[28]

Lauzon frames the city of dreams through perspectives based on gender, generation, nationality, and language. Centred on a heterosexual boy, the film creates numerous scenes of urban juvenile life associated with the male psyche, from prostitution to gangs. Its auteur is a Montréal male who is well aware of Freudian symbolism and Jungian archetypes. The main character's denial of his francophone identity and his desire for a new identity represents a typical generational conflict. The young seek redefinition and a new identity separate from the family, whose perspective is considered irrelevant and damaging. Lauzon's presentation of heterosexual coming of age in a blue-collar environment has been heralded by various filmmakers for its universality, as well as for its brilliance.[29] The boy's fantasy about a different national identity (Italian) questions Québec identity and its limitations. The English-language version released by Alliance in 1993, with its minimal use of French and subtitles, works very well because it puts us into Léolo's interior mind, in which he denies he is a francophone. Alain Chouinard argues that *Léolo*'s "depiction of child sexuality and the protagonist's hybrid cultural identity shapes a destabilized queer identity."[30] By this, he means that the artist-figure does not conform to typical representations of hetero-masculinity. The boy is an outsider, and Chouinard suggests that the boy's alienation from the hetero-normative world creates a space for queerness, as do his explorations of sexuality. Self-assertion through utopian visions of another life is presented as futile in the film, but the path of self-assertion and experimentation that the film "documents" is presented as a noble quest that subverts the family's, and so Québec's, dominant narratives.

Montréal is framed negatively in the film as the antagonist because it represents those dominant narratives of class, religion, gender, and nationality that are embodied in the structures of the city. The city carries the burden of conformity and tradition that seeks to replicate itself with each generation. Its opponent is the next generation struggling for the new and the different, driven by fantasy, imagination, and dream. Does this mean that the city is purely destructive of aspiration? No. The city has positive elements and yields favourable outcomes. For example, resistance can only occur in the presence of a force to push against, a restrictive, superegoistic reality that generates resistance: one cannot dream without reality demanding that we not dream.

The city thus gives rise to art, and dreaming creates a diary, a record of emotion that at least one character other than Léolo—the Tamer—values. The city also provides the context for Lauzon to move issues of a certain boy's identity in a certain place and at a certain time to a universal level. The ethnic and linguistic mix of his working-class universe is something Lauzon cannot overcome, but he can present that world as the context of a universal struggle that happens to every coming-of-age male.

The urban world of inner-city Montréal is the sum total of the main character's real world, and its imprisoning power drives him to rebel. I do not think that Lauzon is condemning urban existence so much as he is critiquing the specificities of his monocultural family home and Québec society's traditional ideal. We ordinarily wake up from our dreams, enter the real world, and then return in sleep to our dreams. Léolo does not wake from his dream. He is defined only by the dream in the same way that he, as a character, is defined only by the film. He does not exist outside it. It may be true that—as Lauzon's friend Louis Grenier, who played the wild-eyed doctor in the film, commented—"the character of Léolo really existed, and it was Jean-Claude himself."[31] But it is also true that Lauzon's cinematic homage to dreams transcends ordinary narrative, as well as the day-to-day realities of Montréal and Québec, and that, in its expression of the male psyche, it approaches (though does not match) the religious power of Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal*. As a narrative of the self, it carries a disquieting universality.

The glue that binds the two films together is historical proximity. Both films stand on the cusp of the new age of globalization that emerged in the 1990s, both films speak of the new Québec identity as one oriented toward the rest of the world (where Daniel's organs are sent and where Léolo projects his identity), and both films embrace their own versions of a universal message that is not ethnocentric, nationalistic, or expressive of a beleaguered minority. They are both stories for a wider audience. This orientation is carried on by Denis Villeneuve in *Maelström,* which appeared in the new millennium. The film, depicting the Montréal of 2000, has a female lead, an urbane sophistication, and a mythic undercurrent that embraces the global focus of Québec as the previous two films only suggest. With *Maelström,* Montréal remains primarily francophone, but it is wedded to an allophone reality that is important for the city's future.

3

THE GENDERED CITY

Feminism in Rozema's Desperanto *(1991), Pool's* Rispondetemi *(1991), and Villeneuve's* Maelström *(2000)*

Dominant social ideologies and established customs around gender roles create ideals and normative practices that challenge filmmakers to make critical responses. The cinematic representation of gender in the city contributes to our understanding of how diverse individuals respond to Canadian urban environments. For example, *Léolo* is a male coming-of-age film infused with male orality (the male narrator and the songs with male vocals), the heterosexual male gaze (the female as either maternal or sexual object), and the preoccupations of the male psyche with patriarchal power as articulated by Freud (patricide). Heterosexual masculine desire drives the main trajectory of the narrative. The stage for this portrayal is a clearly delineated working-class urban setting that is claustrophobic and oppressive. Death, either physical or psychological, is the only liberation from its grasp. Because the film is

presented in the form of an autobiographical statement (the diary), it may be read as articulating male consciousness formed by that class and urban setting. What account of their existence would Léolo's sister or mother have written if they had kept a diary? I suspect it would have been radically different.

Arcand's film *Jésus de Montréal,* while also telling a masculine story, works with a different focus and a different consciousness. The application of a sacred text to a particular contemporary setting means that the thrust of that text's views on gender are the ones articulated in the film. The female players in the biblical story have significant roles, which are enhanced by the film's supposedly heretical interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection. The women in Léolo's life are represented from the viewpoint and experience of a youth. Both *Jésus* and *Léolo* have significant roles for the feminine, but they lack subjective articulation. The construction of Montréal as either Jerusalem (Arcand) or the id (Lauzon) portrays the city as a place of patriarchal authority, driving business, and religion.

The filmic re-creation of Montréal from a female perspective leads to a different city altogether. The reading of streetscapes, domestic life, hierarchical power, sexual relations, and social possibilities is rooted in an experience different from the male one. Several factors differentiate a female auteur's cinema from that of a male auteur. First, the female auteur's film is more likely to feature a predominant array of female characters, including the protagonist. The story often revolves around the struggles of a woman or girl in a restrictive social, familial, or personal relationship. This generalized claim does not exclude male auteurs from creating female leads in their films, as this chapter clearly shows through a discussion of Denis Villeneuve's *Maelström.* Nor does it preclude female directors from alternate storytelling. Female directors direct all sorts of genre films with formulaic plots and characterization, as do numerous male directors. However, when a contemporary Canadian female director has the freedom to tell an auteur story, the record shows that she gravitates to telling women's stories that express the issues and ideologies to which she is drawn. Since the Canadian and Hollywood film industries are male dominated, there is an impetus for female auteurs to represent a feminist perspective. The auteur films of Mina Shum set in Vancouver or Léa Pool's films set in Montréal are good examples of how diverse female grammars can be when they are combined with other cultural factors. A film like Deepa

Mehta's *Heaven on Earth* (2008), set in Toronto and telling the story of a South Asian arranged marriage, is a statement about female solidarity in the face of tradition-based domestic abuse; it is reminiscent of Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), which is set in a completely different class and ethno-racial setting (northern Alberta). Both films speak to women's issues.

A second factor differentiating between female and male auteur cinema is that the consciousness of contemporary Canadian female directors has been informed by feminism, which has been the ideological norm since the 1980s in female-directed Canadian cinema. Feminist films often highlight the achievements of a female character in the face of adversity, the overcoming of barriers, and the rejection of patriarchal norms that foster images of victimization requiring male protection. Third, female-directed Canadian films often contain a strong theme of woman-to-woman relationships, which parallels the tropes of male bonding developed in traditional road movie and war film genres. Most often, this cinematic exploration of female relationships involves mother-daughter generational issues or friendship and support among female characters threatened by patriarchal conventions and power. In a nutshell, one could say that Canadian female auteurs tend to celebrate emancipatory womanhood. Postmodern Canadian cinema is strongly associated with the attitudes of both second- and third-wave feminism and with the diverse sexual orientations of prominent Canadian female auteurs who have contributed to that cinema.[1]

The above comments are not meant to contribute to a ghettoization of female auteurs around women's issues. Gender is no different a category than the other culturally constructed forces such as class, ethnicity, generation, religion, or nationality. Just as these other identities are not meant to limit an auteur's art, gender should be viewed as a contributing, not a determining factor in a film's creation. In fact, there are many possible influences on any filmmaker, and discussing them is meant to enhance our understanding rather than to essentialize a filmmaker into one or two simplistic categories. When discussing the role of gender in any film, that role must be related to a multiplicity of other cultural influences that are at play. Gender, like other cultural identities, is an interpretive tool, not a prescriptive one. As part of any cultural fabric and its mosaic of different threads, a filmmaker is both formed by that fabric and formative of it because the culturally informed film is a form of feedback to a culture, even when it is confrontational and subversive.

The influence of gender in a film is equally applicable to women and to men. I consider it perfectly reasonable to expect Canadian auteur directors to tell stories out of their specific experience, using the language of their time, which, in turn, is informed by the conflicting ideologies and intellectual currents of the day, whether they be politically, socially, or aesthetically rooted. The only caveat is that of genre. In numerous cases, the demands of genre in film take precedence over auteurist storytelling. Both male and female directors work with various factors in their diverse storytelling and range of characters. However, female auteurs are a demographic minority in the film industry, and, as Canadian directors, they must face not only the daily onslaught of American cinema, with its full range of generic material from animation to thrillers and from which they may wish to distinguish themselves as artists, but also the overall male domination of the industry in Canada. In this patriarchal context, it is not surprising that they should want to orient their auteur films toward expressing female voices that offer an alternative perspective to the essentially male viewpoint embedded in most Hollywood films. However, gender is not being presented here as a simple answer to a filmmaker's identity or as an all-encompassing determination of a film's sources of inspiration. It is only one aspect worth exploring.

THE FEMALE AUTEUR AND THE URBAN: PATRICIA ROZEMA AND LÉA POOL

In 1991, a film titled *Montréal vu par . . .* (*Montréal Sextet* in the English-subtitled version) was made in honour of Montréal's 350th anniversary. The film fit the same time frame as *Jésus de Montréal* and *Léolo*. It comprised six short fictional films about the city made by prominent Canadian directors. Of the six films, five were written or co-written by women, which in itself is a strong statement of the notable role of women in Canadian cinema and Montréal urbanity.[2] Patricia Rozema, a non-Montréaler, and Léa Pool, a 1975 francophone immigrant to Montréal from Switzerland, were two contributors who wrote and directed their own films. Rozema, born and raised in Ontario, had already made an auspicious debut with her auteur film *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987), set in Toronto. The film features a female lead, an almost completely female cast, and a strong same-sex erotic undercurrent.

Rozema's lead actor in her short fictional piece for *Montréal vu par . . . ,* titled *Desperanto,* is Sheila McCarthy, who also plays the lead in *Mermaids.* In *Desperanto,* she appears as a similar character—an awkward, single "every-woman" in search of escape from the mundane. She is described pejoratively by an insensitive francophone male character in the film as someone looking for sex. Her problem is compounded by her lack of French. The film is Rozema's commentary on the language divide in Canada, exemplified by the split between the character of Ann Stewart (Sheila McCarthy), who is from Toronto, and members of the francophone Montréal intelligentsia, whom she meets by accident. The film is an anglophone outsider's view of Montréal.

Desperanto is a comedy that plays on the stereotype of Gallic culture in an English society that sees both French and Québec culture as sexually liberated, in contrast to the older stereotype of Toronto as a white Anglo-Protestant site of primness. When Ann Stewart crashes a sophisticated francophone party wearing an inappropriate white dress with red accents (white for innocence and red for passion), she tries to play up to the men at the party, but her limited French leads to a comedy of errors based on her poor language skills. Humiliated, she seeks revenge. She pretends to fall asleep and then has an out-of-body experience in which her white dress is transformed into a lavish gown and her hair is coiffured in a stylish way. She floats through the room with a wine glass in hand; as French words bubble up from the glass, she drinks up the language that has left her tongue-tied. When she returns to her body, two ambulance medics, one female and one male (the latter played by Denys Arcand), take her downstairs, where they indicate that she is fine.[3] She confesses who she really is (Ms. Suburbanite Toronto) and tells them that all she wants to do on her last night in Montréal is dance. So, in a rhapsodic scene, the three of them dance on the rooftop of the building and then rise into the sky atop a line of text that reads "Teach me, oh please, teach me," the lyrics of a French song to which they are dancing. The film ends on this note of fantasy fulfillment. It is through the act of dancing that Ann overcomes all barriers—linguistic, national, class, and gender.

This is Montréal from an outsider's perspective, and the title of the film—*Desperanto*—plays on the name of the purported "universal" language of Esperanto, while also being linked playfully to the desperation of the main character. The title of the English-subtitled version, *Let Sleeping Girls Lie,*

Desperanto (Patricia Rozema, 1991). Credit: Caroline Benjo. Courtesy of Cinémaginaire.

suggests the danger in awakening someone too quickly or prematurely. The supposed "reality" of her awakened state at the end is simply a continuation of her dream but at another level. At this stage, she no longer imagines herself as a Cinderella-like sophisticate but as herself, joyfully fulfilling her wish to dance. She has found a bond with the other outsiders, the working-class paramedics, who don't "belong" to the cultural elite whose party it is.[4] Her identity is affirmed as positive and normal, and that of the Montréal intelligentsia as offensive.

Rozema plays on the stereotype of Montréal as a site of sexual games and libertine attitudes, and ensures that the female stranger, as a generic cinematic character, becomes as dominant a presence on the filmic stage as her male counterpart might be in the Western or private eye genre. Using a female Chaplinesque character, the film critiques the cultural and linguistic divide of the two solitudes with humour, entertainment, and a self-deprecating persona that appeals to both female and male viewers—especially English Canadians, who can readily identify with her awkwardness and sense of inferiority in the face of francophone snobbery. Rozema's use of the comedic genre allows the audience to laugh at the typical English Canadian anxieties. Urban space is gendered in this film in a way that allows the everywoman to triumph over those who feel, for one reason or another, that they are superior. The scenes are all indoors except for the final dance sequence overlooking the city, which is meant to be an image of liberation from the claustrophobic consciousness of francophone interiority. Rozema, like the character she creates, is an anglophone outsider, and she raises that sense of alienation to a heart-warming comic level that plays to the audience.

The level of critique aimed at Montréal in *Desperanto* is raised substantially by the "insider" vision of Léa Pool in *Rispondetemi* (1992). Pool, a European migrant who had lived in Montréal for fifteen years (since her mid-twenties) before making this short film, speaks out of an almost feverish sense of self, which she ties inextricably to a distinct North American urbanity. Arguably Québec's most famous female auteur filmmaker, Léa Pool, when she made this short, had already created her original trilogy of feature films— *Strass Café* (1980), *La femme de l'hôtel* (1984), and *Anne Trister* (1986)—that had established her as a powerful new voice in Québec cinema. Her films deal with the lives of women struggling with displacement, same-sex desires, and

urban alienation. She has gone on to make nine feature films, including several in English, the best known being *The Blue Butterfly* (2002).

The title *Rispondetemi* is another linguistic word game, like Rozema's title. It seems to be an Italian word that echoes the imperative "Answer me," which is directed by a male ambulance medic to a young woman who is being rushed to hospital in a dying state after a traffic accident.[5] The title suggests another kind of "answering" in which one must answer for one's acts. The film begins with a sense of joyful freedom as two female lovers are driving parallel to Montréal's skyline. The city is presented at a distance, an urban outline that does not impinge on the two women. The drive ends in a single-vehicle crash with only one survivor, who is rushed to hospital bleeding and comatose. As the survivor is being attended to by two male medics, her life flashes before her. It begins as a crying baby, moves to her adoption from an orphanage and suggested sexual abuse in a nuclear family, and ends, finally, with Sapphic love.

The ambulance ride is presented negatively. The camera's gaze is dominated by two views—first, repeated overhead shots of the woman on the stretcher, and second, repeated scenes in which the camera moves through the city streets shrouded by high-rise office buildings, with their dark, menacing, phallic shapes forming a looming, satanic forest. These two camera angles create a sense of disturbance and threat. The overhead shots show the medics opening the woman's blouse in order to apply a medical apparatus, but the lingering shot suggests eroticism. The repeated views of the cityscape on either side of the ambulance are not seen by the accident victim, whose eyes are closed and focused on her inner images, nor do they represent the gaze of the medics because the sides of the ambulances are windowless. Rather, it is what the woman would see if the ambulance was roofless, which it is not. So the realism of the scene is discounted. Instead, we are made aware of the metaphorical statement of these buildings as representing a judgmental, patriarchal world that looks askance at her sexual orientation. This is the filmmaker's view adopted by the camera.

In the opening shot of the film, the two lovers are joyfully driving in a convertible with its top down, suggesting freedom from an oppressive universe. The convertible's openness is replaced by the enclosed space of the ambulance. These two conveyances represent motion under one's own control and direction versus motion controlled by strangers. The first vehicle is symbolic of

passion and freedom, while the second symbolizes pain, suffering, and death. These are the conflicting worlds that Pool is contrasting. The attempt by the two male attendants to "save" this woman is not presented in the heroic light normally associated with discourse about paramedics. Instead, it is presented in a suspect way, although the attendants do nothing unprofessional. One can't help but contrast these two male paramedics with the male and female paramedics of Rozema's film, who are valorized as not only medically component and able to diagnose the protagonist's condition but also as psychologically sensitive. In constructing the two male paramedics as dominating, patriarchal figures. Pool creates a gender tension that is absent in Rozema's film. Pool's medics are insensitive to the accident victim's emotional needs, and both the medics and the city exude an overbearing patriarchy—the medics stand over her body and the buildings over the ambulance.

The heterosexual relations portrayed in *Respondetemi* during flashbacks are filled with conflict and trauma. But there is also a sense of impending retribution for what some would consider illicit desire. When one of the medics, who has just administered a jolt to her failing heart, calls out aggressively, "Answer me," and then says, "It's okay," meaning that they will soon be at the hospital where she will be saved, we get an inkling of some sort of confessional absolution by the dominant society, of which they are official representatives. The film ends abruptly with the ambulance's arrival at an antiquated stone structure with a sign "Urgence" (Emergency). The building looks more like a castle or a prison than a hospital; it is ominous rather than salvific.

Pool, who is of Jewish and Catholic origins, uses numerous images of large, hulking churches in dark outline in the film, as well as images of nuns. She is adept at creating moods of separation and distance in all her films: *Respondetemi* includes a reference to the main character being Jewish, which is associated with a vivid image of not belonging—standing in the corner of a classroom and crying. The film portrays religion as problematic and homogenizing, and equates it with patriarchal power. The dark, foreboding buildings of the city, including the towering churches, are meant to symbolize phallic power. While Rozema ends her comedic film on a high note, showing that the challenges of the city can be transcended (figuratively and literally) by sympathetic human contact, Pool's choice of the drama genre ends in a sense of defeat, punishment, and irresolution. The film begins with joy but ends with

despair as the ambulance approaches the forbidding stone walls of the hospital. The choice of a female-male paramedic team in Rozema's optimistic film contrasts with Pool's all-male team in her pessimistic film. While Rozema's anti-hero rises into the night sky, beaming as she rides off on a subtitle (like the stranger in a Western riding off alone into the sunset), Pool's lead is brought to a dungeon-like structure in order to be saved, and she has no say in the matter. There is a hint of Inquisitorial burning-witches-at-the-stake symbolism here that includes the stripping in the ambulance and the final prison-like destination. While Rozema's character stands triumphant and smiling in the company of new-found friends, having overcome Montréal's barriers to communication and met her goal of dancing, Pool's is lying down, battered, bloodied, and near death, unable to help herself. She has been beaten down. She is about to be imprisoned by the city, and her only freedom is in the dreams that recount her life up to that moment.

This divergence in approaches is striking and informative with regard to not only the conventions of different genres (the comic sketch versus the tragic drama) but, more importantly, the diversity of approaches involved in creating the gendered city. Pool is known for expressing urban space in her films as "non-spaces" through which her characters move, unable to connect because of systematic barriers to their desires.[6] *Rispondetemi* is a perfect example of this construction of urban space, which is meant to symbolize negativity. The city is a place of foreboding when one loses one's ability to act in that world. The harsh operating-room light of the ambulance penetrates and exposes, forcing the self to live in dreams rather than reality. The lack of triumph in Pool's film comes from the perceptions of an insider using the dramatic genre to present gender issues and social realities about the dominant society's sexual norms in a way that conveys the world as seriously problematic and difficult to overcome. Although both Rozema and Pool share a similar sexual orientation, their film treatment of Montréal is diametrically opposed. While Pool creates a lesbian character, Rozema does not.

Bill Marshall concludes that "the gendered nature of urban space goes to the heart of debates about modernity and its development into the contemporary postmodern."[7] These two short films have moved our discussion of Canadian films about Québec closer to postmodern norms emphasizing gender equality and diverse voices. Both directors give their female leads a sense of

Rispondetemi (Léa Pool, 1991). Credit: Bertrand Carrière. Courtesy of Cinémaginaire.

happiness when they are in motion, whether they are dancing or driving. This suggests that only when a woman is self-directed and self-expressive is she truly fulfilled. Otherwise, she is trapped. And in both cases, it is the body that is the main vehicle of self-expression. In Rozema's film, the protagonist is linguistically inept, and in Pool's, the protagonist cannot speak. The world of the ambulance in *Rispondetemi* is one that goes in a "straight" line down the streets (emphasized by one shot that portrays the driver's view down a very long straight street), and these straight urban canyons are framed for the audience as devoid of humanity and communication. The message from the patriarchal city, the film suggests, is that any deviation from this straight-and-narrow space is proscribed.

Likewise, the emphasis on body language in *Desperanto* suggests that it is a way of overcoming linguistic barriers. It becomes a form of sign language. When the three characters conclude the film in a dance with a strong diegetic vocal score, the audience feels liberated from the entrapments of language and its power to exclude. The film suggests that music and dance are the universal languages that reduce social alienation and division. In *Rispondetemi,* a flashback to a tender love song provides a comforting, relaxed mood and an alternative to the frantic scene in the ambulance. Both films, then, argue that music and song liberate the body from the strictures of urbanity. The flashback song in *Rispondetemi* is in Italian, suggesting the importance of the allophone identity to Montréal, and is sung by the older (now dead) female lover of the francophone woman who is now comatose. Pool is suggesting that lesbian love in a hetero-normative, patriarchal society is doomed to a tragic end.

With these two short auteur films, the female gaze is presented forcefully, making the urban world a site for problematic gender relations. But in each case, the female gaze is different. While the comedic genre provides a positive narrative enclosure in Rozema's film, Pool's use of the dramatic genre offers the same city as a disturbing site of imprisonment for a woman. Rozema's film also presents the city as a form of imprisonment (through language), but freedom is achieved through dance. Rozema's choice of genre (comedy) is more important than the protagonist's gender, while for Pool, gender, sexual orientation, and feminist ideology are paramount. The everywoman role created by Rozema is a nonthreatening one for audiences, who can revel in the comedic genre and its clever special effects, while Pool's overt imagery associated with tragic drama is

more challenging and confrontational. *Rispondetemi* relates its subject matter to the medical sciences and to architecture, while *Desperanto* is more about psychology, although it too has a medical aspect. Neither film offers a historical commentary like Arcand's *Jésus,* nor do they have a Jungian archetypal structure like Lauzon's *Léolo.* The differences in constructing female characters displayed by these two female directors become more complex when a male auteur creates a female protagonist in the same urban environment.

THE MALE GAZE, THE FEMALE LEAD, AND THE MALE AUTEUR: DENIS VILLENEUVE

Denis Villeneuve's *Maelström* (2000) forges a female lead conceived by a male auteur. The film won five Genies: Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, and Best Actress. It also won Best Canadian Film at the Montréal Film Festival and two Jutra Awards from the Québec film industry, for Best Screenplay and Best Direction. For the thirty-three-year-old auteur, this was a singular triumph, and for Québec cinema, it heralded a new generation's engagement with urban life.

Maelström was Villeneuve's second feature film. The first, *Un 32 août sur terre* (1998), has an American setting and a theme of youthful escape from urban alienation.[8] The film has important parallels to *Maelström,* including a female lead, a life-changing car accident, and a female-male relationship driven by peculiar circumstances. Villeneuve has continued his orientation toward female leads with *Polytechnique* (2009), which is about the massacre of female students at the École Polytechnique in Montréal by a lone male gunman, and with *Incendies* (2010), shortlisted for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars in 2011. Although both films focus on female characters, *Polytechnique* is based on historical material, while *Incendies* is adapted from a play by another writer. For this reason, I will focus on *Maelström* as a purer expression of auteurism.

Villeneuve was born in Gentilly, Québec, near the St. Lawrence River town of Trois Rivières, in 1967. He went to Montréal to study at the Université du Québec à Montréal, beginning in science and ending with communication and film. He joined the Office national du film du Canada and also became well known for producing music videos for bands and singers. Along with his

colleague André Turpin, who was the director of photography for *Maelström,* he represents a generation born into an emancipatory, secular, and economically dynamic post–Quiet Revolution Québec. Unlike Arcand and Lauzon, both of whom experienced the dark age of the reactionary Duplessis era, which stretched from the 1930s through the 1950s, Villeneuve was a product of a new and seemingly different society. Yet his encounter with Montréal was similar to that of another internal immigrant, Arcand: both had a small-town upbringing on the St. Lawrence, followed by a Montréal education and a stint at the ONF. The key difference between the two men is the new, secular, and francophone-dominated Montréal that was the womb of Villeneuve's generation.

A journalist who interviewed Villeneuve in 2000 described him as "a boyish, thirtysomething father of three."[9] He and his family were living outside Montréal at the time. Although Villeneuve expresses a generational viewpoint about Montréal that can be distinguished from that of Arcand and Lauzon because his generation didn't experience the earlier cleric-driven, francophone Montréal, his film is linked closely to the imagery and psychoanalytical and mythological content of *Léolo.* An important connection between Lauzon's film and Villeneuve's is the Jungian archetype of water. "Water is about the relationship with the subconscious and fiction," Villeneuve is quoted as saying, "and the relationship with the beginning of life."[10] And symbolic water abounds in his film, as it does in Lauzon's. Like Lauzon, Villeneuve also uses the gravelly voice of the American singer Tom Waits in his film. The distinguishing characteristic of Villeneuve's filmic Montréal is having a female heroine, which links him to Pool and Rozema. But the youthful female characters in both *Un 32 aôut sur terre* and *Maelström* are alienated and filled with discontent. They are both searching for fulfillment beyond the professional rewards they have in the city. In *Un 32 aôut sur terre,* the heroine decides—after a traumatic car accident, which she survives—to do something more meaningful: she wants to conceive a child, but it doesn't work out. In *Maelström,* the car accident results in a painful attempt to escape guilt brought on by the protagonist's sense of responsibility for the accident.

One critic considers Villeneuve's work to be a pure expression of "psycho-spiritual urban estrangement."[11] The Canadian film scholar Brenda Longfellow situates cinematic alienation in a re-imagining of Canadian cities "in relation to global flows of capital and architectural traditions. In each, the city has been

transformed by the power of global corporate culture into a dystopian, soul-less site of claustrophobic anonymity and redundant functionalism: chrome, steel and glass, food courts and malls."[12] But how does the alienation rooted in the economies and built-environments of contemporary cities compare to the alienation expressed by Rozema and Pool in their short films about Montréal a decade earlier? *Maelström*'s opening scene is that of a sterile, technologically induced abortion that has emotional consequences for the woman who has just undergone the procedure—the central character, Bibiane (Bibi) Champagne (Marie-Josée Croze). Bibi is a successful businesswoman in her mid-twenties. In dealing with the emotional fallout from this act, Bibi hits and kills a man while driving in a distracted, inebriated state. The accident only adds to her sense of confusion and guilt.

New York Times critic Stephen Holden makes the alienation specific when he describes *Maelstr*öm as "a meditation on the disconnection between the glossy surfaces of high-end urban existence and the life-and-death reali-ties they camouflage."[13] This suggests a parallel between scenes involving architecture in Pool's *Rispondetemi* and scenes in *Maelström,* where cor-porate architectural anonymity seems to scream "masculine culture." The film's association of birth, amniotic fluid, water, life, and the organic reality of human existence is heightened by the curious device of a talking fish, who has the task of being the narrator and the representative of all storytellers. The fish raises Villeneuve's film to a mythic level, but not quite to the same exalted level as the sacred storytelling of *Jésus de Montréal.* The audience is asked to accept this implausible talking fish as a necessary, philosophical part of the film. The fish, the fishmonger (the man struck by Bibi's car), a woman in the fashion industry, and an underwater diver, who is the son of the fish-monger, are linked in the story. Otherness is represented by the Norwegian ethnicity of the fishmonger and his son. The fact that both Lauzon's *Léolo* and Villeneuve's *Maelström* use the white ethnic as the symbol of Otherness rather than immigrants from countries like Haiti, which by 2000 were promi-nent in Montréal, indicates a Eurocentric mentality that reflects Villeneuve's own origins outside the metropolitan centre. It was not until his 2010 film, *Incendies,* that he engaged with the Other outside a Eurocentric world view (in that film, Middle Eastern).

Additional commonalities to those mentioned above link *Léolo* and *Maelström*. For example, the scene of Bibi's sublimated suicide (she unsuccessfully tries to push the car off the dock to be rid of it, like Lady MacBeth's "damned spot," and then drives it off the dock with herself in it) occurs at the Montréal docks. As she sinks into the realm of a watery unconscious, we are reminded of the Montréal dock scenes in *Léolo*. Likewise, the use of dark lighting and *noire* characteristics are prominent in the cinematography of both films. By adopting the symbol of water, both filmmakers explore subterranean consciousnessness, with strong Jungian archetype overtones. The son of the fishmonger strengthens the water associations through his name, Evian, and his profession as an underwater diver.

The final scene of the film, when the two lovers from two different cultures are alone on a ship's deck at sea, serves as a signifier of openness to the world, as well as a sense of freedom from the claustrophobic city with its entrapments and threatening presences. Brenda Longfellow suggests that, in *Maelström,* Villeneuve ultimately resorts to a "romantic fantasy of non-coded, non-territorialized spaces of nature." She considers the film's final shot to be an expression of "the romantic sublime and archaic pre-modern that can only be ironic given the absolute irrelevance of both to everyday life in a post-modern Québec." This is one possible reading of the basic tension in the film, but it may also be the case that Villeneuve is expressing the conflicted nature of the garrison mentality, in which the natural world is both an alternative to urban anonymity and a reflection of it. While Longfellow contends that the film is "a graphic embodiment of the specularity of late capitalism," I will focus on the kind of female character created by Villeneuve in contrast to those of Rozema and Pool.[14]

Villeneuve's desire to explore the emotional trauma of having an abortion is to be applauded, but his reading of the trauma comes from someone who can never experience it other than as an observer. In watching Bibi's reaction to the events of her life, I do not have the sense that I am positioned in a female gaze informed by contemporary feminism. Unlike Rozema and Pool, who speak out of a certain level of personal understanding of the female experience, Villeneuve gives us a protagonist who is in a state of high emotion, so much so that male intervention is required to rescue her from her anxiety. The bluish lighting in her bedroom, the sterile and bleak colours used in certain

scenes, and the emptiness of her personal space, the apartment, suggest that this female is awash in a mood of despair and, by extension, that she easily succumbs to emotion and lacks self-control. In contrast to Bibi, the male lead, Evian, generally controls his emotional responses, even though it is his father who has been killed. Little fazes him, while everything distresses Bibi. This is quite different from the portrayal of women found in the work of Canadian female auteurs. The implied vulnerability, emotionality, and dependence on male strength in Villeneuve's film is anathema to feminism. Yet these characteristics are at the core of his portrayal.

When the actor Marie-Josée Croze was first offered the part of Bibi, she turned it down because she didn't like the character that she was being asked to play.[15] Villeneuve admitted that he himself had problems with the character he was creating (he said that he had based her on women he knew), but by the time he had finished the production of the film, he felt that he had made the character likeable enough to the audience.[16] The cultural topographies that Villeneuve chose to present as male and female characteristics suggest a certain cinematic stereotyping that reflects the male gaze rather than the gaze of a self-assured female author. The challenge facing a male auteur wanting to represent the female gaze should not be underestimated.[17] When he was interviewed about his previous film, Villeneuve claimed, "I can't make an image if it was not profoundly important to me."[18] This would suggest that he has integrated his own subjective sensibility (heterosexual, patriarchal masculinity) into the objective character of a fictional woman.

Maelström strikes me as an expression of a male consciousness that considers itself sympathetic to and comprehending of gender issues. However, with regard to female characters, the gaze of a heterosexual male auteur inevitably lacks the experiential interiority that Pool and Rozema both draw on and express in their female characters. Insofar as it transcends conventions of genre, the female imagining of a female protagonist entails a form of self-expression. That cannot be said for the male authorship of female characters. For the male auteur working within a fundamentally patriarchal society, the mores, attitudes, prescriptions, and descriptions associated with prevailing cultural standards concerning gender are not as easily deconstructed as they are by auteur women filmmakers, for whom the experience of the impact of dominant ideologies is personal and real.

The predominant image and metaphor in *Maelström* is water. The film begins with the watery wake in the opening credits, where the dark blue of the oceanic water mixes with the white splashes of a boat's wake. The same image reappears at the end of the film. In between these opening and closing scenes, water maintains an inordinately symbolic presence, including in several shower scenes and a car wash scene, and in the midnight-black water in the Port of Montréal, which melds into the dark waters of a hydroelectric dam. The beginning postcredit scene depicts a young woman having an abortion, with a visual emphasis on the suction of bloody fluid from her uterus. This image can be considered gender specific by its very nature and establishes the female protagonist as the core of the story. The story itself is told by a talking fish, whom Villeneuve considers to be a figure representing storytellers from the beginning of time.[19] This piscine narrator has a husky male voice and is situated in what seems to be an overturned wooden ship's hull, where a man in medieval dress prepares to behead the fish. Since the fish presents the story as a riff on a Norse saga, one can read the fish as representing the auteur figure, just as the diary in *Léolo* represents Lauzon.

"The sea and the water element were growing stronger and stronger in the writing of *Maelström,*" Villeneuve said in an interview, later adding, "Water is about the relationship with the subconscious and fiction and the relationship with the beginning of life. It's the roots of the world."[20] Villeneuve seems to be contrasting water as a symbol of organic nature with the waterless or lifeless city, which is portrayed as being composed of concrete buildings, concrete underground parking garages, concrete streets and sidewalks, and a concrete dock in the city's port. The city in its concrete manifestation is immovable, hard, impermeable to water, and unbending to the human touch. It is the opposite of water with its fluidity, its softness and motion, and, as the film shows, its cleansing power. The city's water comes out of hard places like pipes, spouts, and faucets, and the city, when it comes up against water (St. Lawrence River), meets it with concrete (the dock from which Bibi launches herself and the car in a failed attempt at suicide). The contrast is stark and is set up as a commentary on the urban world as a place that does not bend to human needs. Its rigid surfaces repel rather than embrace.

It is out of water—the same watery world in which Bibi almost drowns—that the male saviour, Evian, emerges. He works as a diver (a human amphibian) and comes to Montréal to collect the ashes of his deceased father, the same man she hit with her car. They meet and he falls in love with her without knowing about her role in his father's death. She is tormented by this love because of her guilt over her having "killed" his father. She confesses, he forgives her, and they are healed by a trip to Norway, the home of the deceased, where they scatter his father's ashes over the ocean while standing on the deck of a Norwegian ferry. The scene fades to water and the ship's wake, and the movie ends with the beheading of the talking fish, killed before being able to offer the audience a moral for the story. The nature-urban split that Villeneuve wishes to evoke is emphasized in a telling episode: the young man tries to flush his father's ashes down the toilet, saying that it doesn't matter what happens after death, but he can't do it and is reduced to tears (again, water).

Villeneuve's only concession to female culture in the city is Bibi's female friend who tries to console her after the abortion. The friend hugs her, invites her to her home, feeds her, and offers a place where she is not alone. This empathy and womanly solidarity stands in contrast to the cold-hearted business world of her brother and the professional relations with him that she must endure; his rationalized requirements for order and success are impossible for her to fulfill because of her emotional distress. But the support she gets from her friend is also painted in a rather rational way. She simply advises and expresses her opinions without really connecting with Bibi. In the end, the only healing that Villeneuve offers his character comes from a meaningful heterosexual love affair. This smacks of a Hollywood solution.

The Montréal experienced by this francophone female is a rather desperate and profoundly unhappy place that requires escape. In this case, the urbanite must stand on the deck of a steel ship, which is as rigid as the city, to return human remains (the body) to its natural state. But at least on the ocean, the human body is surrounded by life-giving water, while in the city, it is surrounded by concrete and inhumanity. The moral of the story might be that the circle of life is complete when life stops being about commerce or fame or materialism and becomes ecological—earth returning to earth or ashes to ashes, or in this case, the fishmonger's human remains become fish food in exchange for all the fish that he has killed and consumed. Another "circle of

life" moral is expressed by the unity of male and female humanity against the cruel urban world, a kind of Adam and Eve story. At the end of the film, the couple returns to the ocean, a natural Garden of Eden. And before this, Bibi saves Evian, her lover, from a fiery death in a plane crash by chasing after him and convincing him to stay with her rather than fly back to work. He calls her his angel when he opens the newspaper and sees what might have happened to him. Obviously, being away from water (in the air) results in danger. Evian is clearly a man of the sea, like his father, and a man from the depths. In a Jungian sense, he represents the *anima* of the subconscious, which Jung associated with the female gender and water.

Villeneuve originally claimed that he was creating a "dark comedy," but the film certainly lacks the genre's general characteristics.[21] The comic element with its satirical or sardonic tone and laughter-inducing incidents is completely missing in the final product. The generic confusion that underlies the film may have contributed to its gender portrayal. It lacks the social gravitas and mythological stature of *Jésus de Montréal* and the sombre, introspective confessional exposé quality that characterizes *Léolo*; Villeneuve tried to suggest both, but rather unsuccessfully. First, he created a pagan Nordic myth structure for the film, but the talking fish and the Scandinavian and Viking allusions seem mock-heroic compared to Arcand's Catholic religio-mythic sensibility. Second, he brought out the dark night of the human soul that is at the core of Lauzon's film, but Lauzon portrayed this in a much more tragic way. While Arcand's or Lauzon's characters seem to "own" the city through their freedom of movement and their decisiveness, Villeneuve's protagonist does not. Pool and Rozema, too, in their short films, provide more engaging and thought-provoking portrayals of Montréal using more complex metaphorical structures than does Villeneuve, who seems to read the city as nothing more than the "abstract spaces" highlighted by Henri Lefebvre.[22]

Villeneuve could argue that the estrangement he imposes on the city is a purposeful reflection of Bibi's depressed mental state. Through his character's eyes, everything in Montréal is bleak and hopeless. To portray it otherwise would be to misrepresent the character. This means that an urban centre is, more than anything, simply a mirror of our psychological state and that it lacks autonomous existence or influence. We project onto the city rather than the city projecting onto us. What does influence human beings is water.

Of the three key elements of urban cinema—spatiality, visuality, and orality—the most important in Villeneuve's film is visuality, the language of the camera as it expresses space and our attachment to the various scenes. While the film's framing of urban space through sparse interiors or crowded sidewalks implies psychological and sociological detachment, even alienation, the camera's eye offers a dystopian interpretation of urbanity because of its use of light and darkness and muted colour. The camera presents the urban world of the protagonist in a way that expresses her detachment, despair, and revulsion. Whether she is filmed from above, lying twisted in torment on a bed, or at shoulder height, Bibi is always anguished in her body language or facial expression. When comparing the visuality of Villeneuve's film with that of Arcand's or Lauzon's, one finds its tonality flat and close to monochromatic, a mirror of Bibi's mental state.

Maelström is closer in its visuality to Pool's *Rispondetemi* because of its strong contrast between the dark, outdoor twilight urban scenes and the glaring, operating-room light inside the ambulance. In terms of spatiality, both films express enclosure, although Pool's is more claustrophobic. Her claustrophobia, though, is externally induced, while Villeneuve's expresses an internal psychological state. His sense of being hemmed in is expressed through emptiness rather than through the equipment-packed interior of the ambulance or the menacing buildings leaning onto the viewer. What seems to link Pool and Villeneuve is the dramatic genre, which is what separates Pool's film from Rozema's *Desperanto*. Visually, Rozema retains a much richer palette of colour, to convey positive comedic meaning, than do Villeneuve and Pool. In fact, the richest sense of colour in *Maelström* occurs in the fish scenes, which are beautifully lit in a way that is reminiscent of the medieval, candlelit scenes in *Léolo*. This richness symbolizes the eternality of the storyteller, who stands outside the story.

The complexity of rendering gender roles cinematically becomes evident when a film portrays unconventional sexual identities that redefine gender-based identities beyond a simple male/female heterosexual binary. While Léa Pool's short does bring a gay theme into the urban sphere, the film's very brevity mitigates against a full treatment of the subject, which Pool has

done to critical acclaim in her feature films.[23] The association of the urban milieu with a diversity of lifestyles and communities, and the emergence of a strong egalitarian ethic in regard to sexuality allows the representation of gay identities on the screen. The editors of *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures* recognize this new cultural reality; in their introduction, they write, "The greater visibility and attention paid to queer communities and cultures throughout the world is striking."[24] The next chapter explores this sexual orientation as an aspect of gender and the construction of male gay characters in two important and critically acclaimed Canadian feature films: Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994) and Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* (1996). The gay characters whose stories are told in these two films have their sexual orientation situated in urban settings, yet the cultural framing emanating from disparate urban venues (Toronto and Québec City) suggests that sexual orientation is influenced by nationality, language, class, generation, ethnicity, and cultural history. It is the depth and richness of these multiple elements interacting with each other that generate the varied responses of the films' audiences.

4

THE CITY MADE FLESH

The Embodied Other in Lepage's Le Confessional *(1995)*
and Egoyan's Exotica *(1994)*

In this chapter, we move from a discussion of Montréal's identity to an exploration of cities with very different histories. Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* (1995) and Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994)—set in Québec City and Toronto, respectively—expand on gender roles and sexual identities. As their representation of gay characters demonstrated, Canadian cinema was offering an expanded view of masculinity well before mainstream American cinema did with the release of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). One could argue that Canadian cinema's marginality in the Canadian box office worked to its advantage, encouraging innovation that allowed it to move ahead of the commercially oriented cinema of Hollywood. Gender roles and identities have indeed evolved significantly in the postmodern era. In particular, gay culture and its male and female identities have been culturally repositioned and normalized among

certain sectors of the population, especially the urban middle class. Montréal, Vancouver, and Toronto—Canada's main centres of film production—are all home to large gay communities. Auteurs who choose to highlight gay characters in their films are drawn to narratives in which gay cultures both collide and co-exist with straight cultures. The result can be a complicated characterization that situates sexual orientation within a multifaceted discussion of class, generation, language, and religion, as well as nationality and ethnicity.

Some critics consider identifying a director's non-normative sexual orientation to be stigmatizing or ghettoizing the directors and his or her work; they therefore challenge the discussion of the relationship of an auteur director's sexual orientation to his or her films. They fear that discussing this topic leads to a labelling or categorization that somehow marginalizes or discounts the director or the work and wraps all the director's art in a sexual identity label. They argue that discussion of sexual orientation may distract from a full appreciation of the work; sometimes they even claim that one's sexual orientation is irrelevant to art and that any discussion of it suggests a homophobic tendency on the part of the critic.

This chapter argues against this interpretation, while acknowledging that there is a valid basis for this concern, considering some of the homophobic attitudes that persist in mainstream society. However, the fear of oversimplistic labelling (and therefore dismissal of the artist's abilities) leads to ignoring what I consider to be a valid influence on a filmmaker's art. Precluding discussion of the influence of an auteur's sexuality on a film while approving discussion of the filmmaker's gender or nationality or class background is highly selective and restrictive. As I have made clear from the beginning of this book, a filmmaker carries numerous identities at any one time and these identities interact with one another and influence each other in the production of the filmmaker's art. No one influence is more important or valid than any other. When a filmmaker is formed by a certain national culture, a certain class background, a certain religious tradition, or a certain familial experience—as have the filmmakers like Arcand and Lauzon, discussed earlier—the influence of these backgrounds on a work should not be ignored. When expressing an authentic narrative as an auteur, a filmmaker is communicating what is within to the audience. Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* (1995) fits this framework very well. It deals with Québec's emphasis on the traditional

family and the challenges that this presents to a gay son in the 1990s. Lepage's style of film imagery is sophisticated, theatrical, and cinematically expressive. The powerful blend of dream and reality challenges traditional morality and its consequences. *Le Confessionnal* is also a nuanced film in that it deals with exploitation within gay relations, thereby normalizing gay life within the community rather than simply valorizing or idealizing the film's characters. It also locates gender on a continuum of possibility: it has a male lead who is presented as being asexual or whose sexual identity is indeterminate and a gay prostitute who has fathered a son through a heterosexual relationship. In this way, the film reflects not only queer theory's emphasis on sexual continuities for all human beings but also the importance of gay characterization in cinema as fundamental to the contemporary cultural process of making diverse sexual orientations normative.

In contrast, Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994) offers a symbolic and diffident treatment of its gay character, whose sexual orientation contributes to his being viewed as an "outsider," an observer of and reluctant player in the traumas of heterosexual society. Egoyan uses the protagonist's gay identity as a metaphor for the outsider nature of his own ethnicity. This conflation of sexual orientation and ethnicity makes reading the film more complicated. Superficially, Egoyan's gay character is more hesitant and less straightforward, or "out," than Lepage's. Both films are about hiding and keeping secrets, but the revelatory process, the unmasking of the mystery, is clearer in *Le Confessionnal* because the metaphorical burden carried by the protagonist in *Exotica* adds a layer to the representation. The fictional persona in each film is different, yet the characters' roles as "detectives" solving their respective mysteries position them as the lens through which the audience is forced to engage in the narrative. So the audience comes to identify with the gay characters rather than with the clearly straight ones, who are presented as highly flawed and problematic. In both films, the protagonists are clearly coded as individuals who are Other to the hetero-normative world. They play the role of the outsider who can reveal the secrets of the dominant heterosexual society and its self-valorizing myths such as the sanctity of the traditional family.

The gay characters in both films are rooted in the imagination of the auteur directors. Lepage, a gay auteur, has created a gay character, and Egoyan, a heterosexual auteur, has done the same. The attribution of similarities and

differences in their gay characterizations and whether these have anything to do with the sexual orientations of the auteurs is best dealt with through a full exegesis of each film. In the previous chapter, I argued that in three particular films that involved female leads, those created by two female auteurs were cinematically more successful as gender portrayals for contemporary audiences than the one created by the male auteur. This chapter continues the discussion of authorship.

A TALE OF TWO FILMS, TWO CITIES, TWO NATIONS, AND TWO MEN

Exotica and *Le Confessionnal* are both centred on the dramas and tragedies of heterosexual family history. *Exotica* is a film about internalized human suffering and heterosexual familial dysfunction. Its narrative flow requires some flashbacks, which are minimal and infrequent, so that the mystery can be sustained until the end. For Egoyan's story to be told, the past must remain hidden in the same way that the characters have repressed it psychologically within themselves. *Le Confessionnal,* in contrast, is more playful and intertextual because of its self- referential source in Alfred Hitchcock's 1952 film, *I Confess,* which, like *Le Confessionnal,* was largely filmed in Québec City. Lepage's treatment of the past is seamless and constant so that the story is presented as a single, integrated narrative in which the visual present (1989) is regularly and necessarily informed by the visual past (1952). In this way, the film portrays a single consciousness informed by a lifetime of experience. Lepage melds time through a tracking shot that blends a location seamlessly from one period to another, producing an illusion that temporal difference has been eliminated. In her discussion of *Le Confessionnal,* Monique Tschofen also points out how certain locations and figures mirror each other: "Characters in both the present and the past tense of the film haunt the same restricted locations. . . . Spaces also echo and recall one another. The confessional with its narrow space and Cartesian grid-like grill is recalled in everything from the elevator doors to shutters to private dancing booths in strip clubs to sauna ceilings."[1]

The film's temporal crossover has a historical context, as explained by Bill Marshall: "The relationship between 'now' and 'then' takes place across the caesura of the Quiet Revolution, with the priest-ridden, pious, but hypocritical

society of the 1950s replaced by the commercialism, hedonism, and moral frag-mentation of the 1980s and 1990s."[2] Yet there remains in the film a profound sense of continuity, of a single society carrying its legacy on its shoulders. The concept of a culture leaving a legacy refers to the continuing relevance or adoption of the content of that legacy into contemporary forms of the culture. So even though Catholicism has a more limited social influence in the the film's present, 1989, than it did in 1952, it clearly remains a force, albeit in a different guise. In some cases, one could argue, a facet of culture has more power as a legacy than it did in its original incarnation. This may be one of the viewpoints that Lepage wanted the film to express.

Le Confessionnal was Lepage's debut feature film. As writer and director, he was honoured for the film at the Genies with awards for Best Film, Best First Feature Film, Best Director, and Best Cinematography. The film has been described as expressing a "search for meaning/truth . . . in a world increasingly fragmented, complex, and overwhelming."[3] The search involves Pierre Lamontagne (Lothaire Bluteau, of *Jésus de Montréal*) returning for his father's funeral in Québec City. He succeeds in finding his half-brother Marc (Patrick Goyette), who is alienated from the family and earns his livelihood as a sex worker. The story of Marc's falsified parentage unravels from that of a supposedly orphaned, illegitimate son of an unknown father and Pierre's mother's sister, who committed suicide after he was born, to a realization that Pierre and Marc are half-brothers: their father had an affair with his wife's sister and never acknowledged his paternity of Marc. Interwoven with this contemporary story is a fictionalized treatment of Alfred Hitchcock's making of *I Confess* in Québec City in 1952, during which the father of the two men, Paul-Émile Lamontagne (François Papineau), works as a cabbie driving the director around and members of the family audition for parts in the film. Lepage's film becomes a reflection of Hitchcock's film in terms of both its title and its moral plot.

Although Egoyan also deals with *Exotica*'s characters in both the present and the past, he does so in a more linear way than Lepage. Yes, the present is bound by the past in *Exotica*, but in Lepage's world the past is also constrained by the games of memory. In *Exotica*, the past is replayed in the present as its characters persist in the same ritualized patterns, while in *Le Confessionnal* there is progress toward a kind of religiously themed reconciliation. While

both films engage with family secrets and the trauma of death in contemporary urban life, they do so in different ways, reflecting distinctive authorship. The denial of true identity is at the core of both narratives, but that denial results in different conclusions. Every identity in these films is informed by a personal history that is painful, exploitive, and unnerving, but *Le Confessionnal* ends, like Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal,* with a strong sense of hope and moral victory, while *Exotica* ends, like Lauzon's *Léolo,* in hopelessness and defeat. Likewise, *Exotica's* portrayal of Thomas (Don McKellar), the gay pet-store owner, differs dramatically from the persona of Marc (Patrick Goyette), the gay hustler in *Le Confessionnal,* who is tormented by his identity as a sex worker and his personal history as an adopted son. Reluctantly, he joins his brother Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau), whose sexual orientation is both indeterminate and unimportant, in unravelling the secret of his own paternity. The construction of Marc as the tormented Other is more overt in *Le Confessionnal* than is the construction of Thomas in *Exotica*. I believe these differences have their roots in the different lives and experiences of the directors.

Lepage's film has been noted for its use of some specific autobiographical elements, such as his growing up with adopted siblings, which give it an underlying coherence and authenticity. While Egoyan's film has been praised for its symbolic richness and innovative acting style that bespeaks general urban alienation, its autobiographical sources are more generalized and metaphoric.[4] The difference in cultures of Lepage and Egoyan, informed by nationality and language (Québec/French and Canada/English) and ethnicity (Québecois and Armenian), is a preliminary factor in distinguishing the work of these two male auteurs, but there are others as well—specifically, class and religion. The ideological constructions of radically different urban centres—Québec City in *Le Confessionnal* and Toronto in *Exotica*—raises issues of how cultural environments and inherited identities influence the artistic self-expression of auteurs.

A city's formative role in a filmmaker's life varies with the filmmaker's specific experiences and memories of a certain city—its sense of freedom or lack thereof, its range of possibilities or its restrictions. The autobiographical element openly acknowledged by Lauzon in *Léolo* is matched in *Le Confessionnal*. "Lepage grew up in a bilingual, blended household," writes Peter Dickinson, "the biological French-speaking son of working class parents who had previously adopted two anglophone children. . . . Lepage's bicultural

upbringing [has] been incorporated into the complicated family dynamics and sibling rivalries at the core of most of Lepage's films."[5]

    The theme of adoption and unacknowledgement, the mood of mystery and foreboding, and the sense of "blending" images, identities, time periods, historical fact, and personal memory are major threads in *Le Confessionnal*. There is also a cultural project in Lepage's film that is centred on the role of Québec City in Québécois identity, both previous and current. For Lepage, Québec City as the traditional signifier of a certain Eurocentric, francophone "purity" becomes a framework for all kinds of otherness—national, linguistic, and gendered. The city offers a significant space for the filmmaker to present an alternate viewpoint: he brings in a contrasting 1950s Anglo-American factor and uses Hollywood as the signifier of a rootless cosmopolitanism that feeds on other cultures. Scott MacKenzie calls the film "a meditation of the relation-ship between cinema, memory, and identity."[6] Lepage, having grown up in a nontraditional Québec family, embraces his past by using Hitchcock's *I Confess* film project as a pretext and making his own version of that film. He makes it in French, using imaginary autobiographical links (for example, Lepage's real father did not drive cab for Hitchcock) and a deconstruction of the clerical persona central to Hitchcock's film. *I Confess* was made under the strictures of the Catholic hierarchy of the province, which demanded that it approve the script before it would allow filming on church property. *Le Confessionnal* was not. Lepage incorporates a re-creation of the making of the 1952 film into his film, set in 1989, and insists that the perspective of a native son on the same topic updates our understanding of Québec while still validating Hitchcock's depiction of Duplessis-era life. His perspective is completely postmodern in its articulation—each person has multiple, layered identities and nothing is as it seems on the proverbial surface—while Hitchcock's film is imbued with the clarity of modernism in which a priest was an idealized figure.

    Lepage's film *defamiliarizes* the past, rids it of stereotypes (other than to satirize them), and inscribes the present with a pastiche of characters with conflicting identities who pursue their journeys on divergent paths. The per-sonal identity crises in Lepage's film become a commentary on the instability of imagined collective identities. Lepage shows how once secure and stable historical selves, created through ideology, can dissipate under the pressure of all kinds of otherness. He cleverly links the personal and the public in his film,

showing how the specific identity of Québec City in the 1950s was already a disturbed reality—completely enthralled by Hollywood and its power, which offered a counternarrative to the reactionary ideology imposed by the clerical state—and was embraced by the population. In fact, one could argue that Lepage portrays cinema as a Trojan horse that brings the outside world to fortress Québec. The excitement of having "Hollywood" come to town, as Lepage constructs it in the film, undermines the superficial piety of the characters of the 1950s, who are presented as already torn between their native religiosity and the appeal of Hollywood glamour, so often condemned by their clergy.

In contrast to Lepage, the native son, Egoyan is a double immigrant: an immigrant to Canada (Victoria) but also a migrant to Toronto, where he has forged an impressive film career. Like Lepage, whose film is a blended Anglo-French challenge to francophone singularity, Egoyan brings his own challenge to Canadian nationality. As an Armenian Canadian, he can reflect on the problem of the exotic Other as articulated by European culture. *Le Confessionnal* uses the theme of adoptive identities to challenge family myths and to pay homage to three internalized and interwoven elements: one's home city, the art of cinema itself, and homosexuality. *Exotica* parallels this move by also using the theme of adoptive identities to express ethnic, racial, and sexual diversity in a way that configures these identities as a threat to the mythology of the heterosexual status quo. But Egoyan's approach has a different focus. While Lepage's protagonist is shown to be closely tied to his family identity as he purposefully unravels its secrets, Egoyan's outsider is a figure who floats without a family and sees the traditional family as a false construct. It may be that as a Québec filmmaker, Lepage needs to engage the myth of the francophone, traditional, Catholic family as the wellspring of Québec's identity and reveal its forgotten diversity (and perversity), while Egoyan does not have to face a similar Anglo-Protestant family myth in his Toronto story because he was not part of it originally. What he sees in his adoptive city of Toronto is diversity, which would not have been the case in Toronto in the 1950s but was real in the 1980s, when Egoyan arrived. While all of *Exotica*'s characters are connected sociologically, they are all disconnected psychologically. Egoyan's Toronto is an urban space filled with strangers who cannot or will not communicate with each other. The revelatory aspect of Egoyan's film does not change the behaviour of its characters. Fundamentally, Egoyan presents us with a world fixated

on a past identity that is now only a re-enacted dream: it is no longer real and so remains disconnected from the present. Lepage, in contrast, gives his audience an otherness that offers hope, responsible love, and justice. The familial in Egoyan's film remains broken and in perpetual pain. The familial in Lepage's film embarks on a new definition that is inclusive of diverse configurations and structures. Lepage writes as an insider exploring his own past, while Egoyan writes as an outsider, watching a society that is strange to him.

In spite of their differences, the two films both engage in powerful dialogues on the theme of masculinity. In the case of *Exotica,* both heterosexual and homosexual masculinities are shown to be problematic. Every significant male character in the film is wounded in one way or another. Each one suffers from the secrets that he carries. The female characters are equally wounded when they come under male influence. In *Le Confessionnal,* the power struggle between the brothers as they embark on solving the mystery of Marc's paternity leads to Marc's suicide, while the accusatory dialogue between Pierre and Marc's sexual exploiter about Marc's death defines masculinity as a moral battle. The women portrayed in *Le Confessionnal* also face suicide because of the destructive mores imposed by society. In both films, the theme of a troubled masculinity drives the narrative. Both filmmakers use profession, family roles, sexual orientation, and even happenstance to create male characters in conflict with themselves and the society around them. In Lepage's case, the character is led to redemption; Egoyan's character remains buried in obsessive behaviour.

LE CONFESSIONNAL AND THE OTHERNESS OF THE PAST

Le Confessionnal, a film about the vicissitudes of fatherhood, heterosexual and homosexual, begins with an opening streetscape much like Lauzon's opening shot in *Léolo,* with a similar voice-over commentary about family locale. The voice-over presents the story autobiographically, as a first-person account. Lepage used the same shadowy, foreboding, black-and-white streetscapes and church interiors that Hitchcock used in *I Confess,* which thus serve as a visual and philosophical contrast to his own colour cinematography of the same locations using the same camera angles.[7] The moodiness of black-and-white

cinematography that Hitchcock exploited in *I Confess* is measured against the nuances of colour cinematography that Lepage used for the same period, thereby suggesting that the scenes are the construction of a contemporary memory.

Both *I Confess* and *Le Confessionnal* convey a sense of deep entrapment in the past. For example, the ancestral home that Pierre returns to is vacant after the death of his father and needs to be cleared of personal effects. Pierre tries to cover up the past by painting the walls, but without total success: the images that were once there return in a ghostly form. Pierre tries to give the past a makeover while seeking out its hidden truths, but he is trapped inside the family narrative and its characters, whom he cannot shake. Similarly, Lepage is trying to repaint the Québec that Hitchcock created in his film, but he cannot totally erase it, as shown by his inclusion of clips from the older film within his film. Hitchcock's film haunts Lepage's film just as the past haunts Lepage's characters. The family home has to be replaced with a new structure (in the film, it is a bridge) that leads to the future rather than the past. This was reflected in Lepage's own life when he developed a significant global practice as a theatre artist, letting his film career lapse.

Pierre, the protagonist, is a penniless artist who arrives in Québec City from a stint abroad and lands a job at the Château Frontenac, the castle-like symbol of old Québec. He is a waiter in a bar, and it is through this job that he finds Marc and Marc's lover, a former priest who knows the story of Marc's paternity and is now a high government official. Trying to trace Marc leads Pierre to Manon, a stripper who is the mother of Marc's diabetic son. In his menial job, Pierre moves through the innards of the Château, an architectural symbol of Québec's fortress-like identity, using narrow hallways, spiral stair-cases reminiscent of psychological vertigo in film noir movies, and closed doors to private rooms as he tries to uncover the secrets of this former world that is hidden to him. The symbolic power of the Château is subverted by his going inside and breaking into its secrets. Scott MacKenzie captures this mytho-heroic quest when he refers to the film's narrative as "labyrinthian."[8]

Most of the film is shot in interior spaces to reflect Pierre's inner search; the few external scenes are of the streets in the old city below the Château and the suburban emptiness near a motel on the wrong side of the tracks, which establish contrasting atmospheres expressive of class divisions and the tension

between public image and private lives. Lepage's primary construction of urban space is one of rooms—rooms in the family house, rooms in the hotel, rooms in the motel—but the film also contains certain interior church scenes. Although these are locations we can relate to, they do not express the fullness of urban life. Instead, they are meant to capture the claustrophobic "confessional" universe of the narrative and the labyrinthian psychology underlying the narration of sins. Québec City serves as a metaphor for a whole society rather than as a unique urban space that needs to be defined and articulated. Kevin Pask, writing at the beginning of the new millennium, called Lepage a "high cultural emblem" of the new internationally oriented Québec; as a filmmaker, he was redefining Québec's identity as supranational.[9] *Le Confessionnal* can be read as one of those phases through which he stepped in order to relate his being Québécois with global high art.

In addition to the Château and the row house of his childhood, an important urban location in *Le Confessionnal* is the Sea Horse bath house, where Pierre goes in search of Marc in order to entice him to return to the family home. His search through the labyrinth of cubicles becomes a symbolic maze filled with old men, who represent the past that he is trying to expose. When he finally corrals Marc in the steam room, their discussion, like their blood relationship, is clouded by mist. The gay bath house is reflected in another problematic urban entity—the low-end motel, where Marc's son is being cared for by his stripper mother. Symbolically placed on the "other side of the tracks," the motel is another substitute "home," like the Château is for the former priest Raymond Massicotte (Normand Daneau) and the former family home is for Pierre. Each of these structures has numerous rooms, where private lives are hidden and family secrets abound. The secrets of the Lamontagne family are convoluted and dysfunctional, just as the three main buildings in the film are confusing internally while maintaining a facade of normality and propriety from the street. Each place is home to unsanctioned relations, while preserving the pretense of functioning as a high-end hotel or a working-class home. Social acceptance and public functionality are the opaque walls that Pierre must see through.

Lepage's narrative is a Cain and Abel parable. Although Pierre cares for Marc (Abel), his unrelenting search for the truth of Marc's paternity culminates in Marc's death, indicating that even the best intentions carry the biblical

Le Confessional (Robert Lepage, 1995). Credit: Claudel Huot. Courtesy of Cinémaginaire.

mark of Cain. This religious allusion is enhanced by the parable of the Prodigal Son: Marc first seems to signify the prodigal while Pierre represents the dutiful son returning to fulfill his familial duties to his father. But the narrative indicates they are both alienated from the father because of the lies they have been forced to live. These mixed biblical allusions are indicative of the Christian culture in which Lepage grew up and which marks Québec society, even in its current secular phase.

The linkages among the father figure, the priest figure, and the two conflicted brothers are captured in the French words for each identity that seem to resonate with each other—*père* (father) and *frère* (brother), and even *prêtre* (priest), because a priest is normally addressed as "Father," or "Père." Father, brother, and priest are all masculine roles within Catholicism, but the gender identity of all the key males, other than the heterosexual father, is gay (Marc and Raymond) or possibly gay (Pierre). Added to this masculine lineup is the patriarchal figure of Alfred Hitchcock, who adds another layer of authorial masculinity to the narrative. When black-clad Hitchcock "acts" as a "confessor" to Pierre's father in a cab ride in Lepage's "Confession," he becomes entwined with the priestly role of both films: his original and Lepage's remake. The priest, like Hitchcock the filmmaker, is a figure of authority. The links among priesthood, maleness, and celibacy as a touchstone of the old Québec are skilfully deconstructed by Lepage when Raymond, who was initially suspected of having illicitly fathered Marc when he was a young priest, reappears in the film as an aging homosexual using his wealth and power to prey on Marc. Lepage's deconstruction of traditional values associated with the Duplessis era in Québec, combined with his placing Hitchcock's anti-Québec Hollywood universe in Québec, is a form of historical revisionism that undermines the complacent homogeneity of the past. That homogeneity is further challenged by Pierre's previous life of art study in China and, finally, by Marc's suicide in Japan. Asia becomes the site of difference and otherness, a global presence that Québec requires in order to expand its identity. These "other geographies" are the escape routes from the insular, claustrophobic Lamontagne family of the 1950s, whose working-class patriarch never left Québec City but whose sons have. It is their home, but they are now foreign to it because the foreign represents their search for freedom and a flight from heterosexual traditionalism.

Biblical allusions permeate this film in a more obvious manner than in *Lèolo* because of the priestly allusion, but less obviously than in *Jésus de Montréal,* whose Passion-play structure is transparently Christian. Lepage's selection of 1989 for the present in *Le Confessionnal,* the same year *Jésus* was released (and in which Lepage appeared in a minor role), cannot be considered a coincidence. Lepage is commenting on Québec's religious identity, on the power of its symbols, and on how a society that has been secularized continues to see itself through the iconography and symbolism of its previous self. The role of the transformed family in *Jésus* is echoed in the reborn family at the end of *Le Confessionnal,* which has resolved into Pierre and his late half-brother's son. The new family of the postmodern present is configured as a male universe of a man and a boy, which stands in contrast to the extended heterosexual family of the 1950s represented in the film. The symbolic bridge crossing at the end of the film suggests a new beginning, a fresh start, a trajectory unburdened of a deceitful past. As his artistic career attests, Lepage is much more a citizen of the world than were the filmmakers of Arcand's generation.[10]

While religion and gender identities are central to *Le Confessionnal,* class is another key identifier. It begins with the working-class reality of the Lamontagne family, whose father "moves up" to a position as a taxi driver, away from blue-collar factory work. Even though the family views a service job at the Château as a better alternative to taxi work, it is Pierre, a generation later, who actually "achieves" that position. And it is the character of Pierre who represents Lepage in the film. Pierre's artistic self is equated with Lepage as a filmmaker and theatre director. In general, the artist is self-employed, as is a taxi driver who depends on fares, so Pierre is simply continuing his father's role.

Working-class realities are reproduced when Pierre becomes a waiter at the Château and Marc earns his living as a sex worker. Manon, the mother of Marc's son, is also a sex worker. All live a marginal economic existence, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation. In fact, the economic stability of the working class is portrayed in the film as having decreased over time, while those who had authority in the modernist era (the clergy) are shown to have made economic progress. Lepage uses iconic buildings in the film to codify class. The Château represents wealth and power; the motel represents the poverty and instability of the underclass; and the Lamontagne home, now empty, represents the solid working class and suggests its evisceration. Only

the "artist" role assigned to Pierre suggests escape from the working class. His waiter job is only temporary. It is not a career.

Another structure that has class overtones is the signature bridge in Québec City from which Marc's mother threw herself after his birth and over which Pierre and the boy walk at the end of the film, signalling overcoming. This immense steel structure, much like the foundry in *Léolo,* is an expression of blue-collar sweat, of foundry, of mining, of an older industrial era. It is a stable human construct that connects two immovable shores and spans flowing water that represents the passage of time. At the start of the film, the narrator says (during a shot of the bridge) that "the past carries the present like a child on its shoulders." This is what Pierre does at the end of the film: he is the past that carries the present when he puts the boy on his shoulders. The class nature of the bridge is part of the cultural text that also signifies Québec City as a historical reality and whose ideological framing rusts with time. The bridge, like the ideology it represents, ages because time, represented by the water that passes continually underneath, is always in motion, while the bridge is static.

"Film has elements of theatre, architecture and literature," Lepage has said, "that play a part in the storytelling, a part that may well have more impact on the viewer than the story but not on a conscious level."[11] The references to the Château Frontenac, the motel, the family home, and now the bridge are the signifiers of the role of urban classes and their relationships to each other. This sociological dimension of the film is overshadowed by the importance of postmodern culture in relationship to the modernist past: in particular, the Québec City of Hitchcock's film—clerical, conservative, and introspective. Lepage provides a looser reading of society in the Duplessis era because he does not view it monolithically, the way an outsider might experience it. As an insider, he knows the society is flawed, its facades filled with cracks. He provides a postmodernist subversion of the society and its ideology, while Hitchcock's modernist world, some forty years earlier, is one of either/or binaries and conventional melodramatic elements. Hitchcock had to have his film script vetted by the Catholic clergy prior to filming, while Lepage's film reflects the loss of that earlier power.[12]

Jim Leach points out that Lepage "has acknowledged Michel Tremblay's ritualistic plays about working-class Montreal as a major influence."[13] Tremblay's dysfunctional family dramas set in Montréal have their roots in

both his working-class upbringing and his gay identity, which was subjected to a traditionally homophobic environment.

While *Le Confessionnal* acknowledges a separation between past and present, it also confirms the continuities between them. For example, in the ultimate scene in the film, the uncle and the nephew, who up to this point are two separate bodies, coalesce into one figure when Pierre lifts the boy onto his shoulders. The symbolic unity of the two stands as a bridge between the death of the boy's grandmother in 1952 and the death of his father in 1989. What is valuable about the bridge as a symbolic structure is that it is an open, transparent reality, a place of passage rather than of hiding. What is on the bridge can be seen. While the singularity of the bridge implies the aloneness of orphanhood, the two shores that it links imply the parental or sibling binary. What Lepage has done is link the masculine world of fathers, sons, and grandsons with a bridge that the males in the film must walk across. Whatever "displacement" their bodies have experienced is now bridged. The gay Other is integrated into the common selfhood of the Lamontagnes and of Québec.

A sense of orphanhood can also be applied to the film: Québec society and culture were seen as orphaned (removed) from the modern era via *I Confess,* when Hitchcock presented Québec as a backward and clerically oppressed society. Christopher Gittings rightly claims that through this 1952 Hollywood film, Québec City was imaged negatively for a global audience because of Hollywood's extensive power of representation.[14] Of course, this public persona for Québec and Québec City was not historically "real" for 1952 because the film was based on a fictional work that was published at the beginning of the twentieth century, almost a half-century before the film was produced. Yet Québec was the only francophone political entity that still maintained such a massive clerical power so late in the twentieth century. Lepage is not blind to this legacy. He uses the conceit of Hitchcock's film to comment on that legacy and what he considers its true identity.

The interplay in Lepage's film of various desires in the past (Pierre's mother wanting a baby but suffering from miscarriages and his aunt wanting her daughter to be in the Hitchcock film) with desires in the present (Pierre wanting to unravel the mystery of Marc's patrimony) highlights the power of both past and present to inflate or deflate future possibilities. Intentionality and agency mix in mysterious ways in *Le Confessionnal*. The basic element in

forging a future is blindness, both to the potential effects of our actions and to their original sources. Monique Tschofen considers the theme of blindness to be the structuring principle of the film.[15] There is the purported "blindness" of the priest to whoever is confessing; the blindness caused by diabetes, which links the males in the family; the blindness to the past, represented by Pierre's repainting his father's house; the blindness created by closed doors and closed minds; and finally, blindness as punishment in Greek tragedy. All of these are referenced in the film, in which blindness revolves around family secrets and how past, present, and future are captive to those secrets.

This theme of blindness can be extended to the city, where exteriors hide interior acts and words. All the spaces in the film are constricting and narrowing, just like the cobblestone streets of old Québec City. The cobblestones signify ancientness, the remnants of Europe in the New World—an inherent geopolitical doubleness, as Lepage sees Québec. Some wish to remember what was in order to affirm the distinctness of Québec, but this results in the preservation and valorization of falsehood—a 1989 present that is proud of having rejected the province's Catholic-laden past but still sees that past as its essence. In an interview after the release of the film, Lepage said that the film deals with "a small family unit in a small city in a small province with a small population."[16] This emphasis on smallness as a defining characteristic of the subject of his film is meant to contrast with the bigness associated with Hitchcock, Hollywood, and our media-saturated and now digitally globalized world. The mythological associations in the film, whether biblical or classical Greek, are Lepage's attempt to give the film at least a patina of epic grandeur. Lepage wants his story to be writ large through its contrast with a film by a recognized cinematic master. Yet Lepage also views *Le Confessionnal* as historically superior because his film makes the audience "see" the earlier blindness of which Hitchcock provided only glimpses.[17]

The impact of Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* on his Québec is comparable to that of Hitchcock's *I Confess* on an earlier Québec, which makes Lepage an important and creative cinematic figure, at least for the 1990s, while he was still making films. A major English-language interpreter of Lepage's work is Aleksandar Dunđerović, whose monograph, *The Cinema of Robert Lepage: The Poetics of Memory,* is published in the Directors' Cuts series; the series includes books about Wim Wenders, Ken Loach, George Romero, David Lynch, and

Andrzej Wajda, putting Lepage in excellent directorial company on par with Hitchcock. Dunđerović provides a valuable biographical sketch of Lepage's bicultural family life in the heart of monocultural Québec City.[18] Both parents were fluent in English, and they adopted anglophone children prior to the birth of their own, thus creating a space for valuing difference. Dunđerović claims that this familial bilingualism "meant that he was marginalised because of his family otherness." It may also have led to Lepage's view that the "smallness" of Québec created an incestuous atmosphere for an artist, who requires external influences to flourish. Dunđerović makes a startling revelation about the autobiographical connections of the film: "Lepage's sister and manager had to prevent him from making a film that would severely expose his own family," so the script underwent "a number of changes since its first version."[19]

Le Confessionnal is a postmodern allegory on gender roles, class, and religion told with the confidence of a classical Greek tragedian. Its urbanity is bi-historical (the passage from the "Dark Ages" of Duplessis to the secularism of the new Québec), psychological (family traumas) and architectural (the iconic structures referencing the city itself), but it is also associated with the Catholicism of Québec City and with issues of gender, sexual orientation, and class. The spatiality and visuality that Lepage gives this "small city" tends toward the claustrophobic in physical and psychological ways, but his seamless interplay of the recreated shadowy world of black-and-white film noir represented by *I Confess* with the tantalizing colours of his period scenes and the contemporary period is such that we are seduced into a visually enchanting filmic universe of storytelling. The film works its magic by imitating our own thought processes as they compress, expand, and recreate time, space, speech, and personality.

The claustrophobic character that Lepage gives the city comes from the films extensive use of interior shots, reflective of the "hiding" that occurs within history and family narrative. From the outside, the Château Frontenac depicts a castle-like stability and properness, while inside its rooms all manner of activities occur hidden from prying eyes. This theme of the hidden is an equally powerful driver in Atom Egoyan's portrayal of family life in *Exotica,* but Egoyan's film lacks Lepage's profound sense of the historical. Lepage has created a film that "explores the allure of otherness" in all its manifestations: the otherness of Hollywood to Québec and now the global world, of the past

to the present, of gay to straight, of classical cinema to contemporary cinema, and so forth.[20] In Egoyan's film, otherness is not as alluring. Why? Because it is tied to psychological trauma and personal obsession rather than to history and society. Egoyan's world is burdened by an oppressive fantasy and immovable unreality, while Lepage's world is one of history finding liberation.

EXOTICA AND THE OTHERNESS OF MEMORY

Exotica was completed at about the same time as *Le Confessionnal,* so it shares the same mid-1990s ethos. In both films, common discursive binaries (male-female, old-young, past-present) meld into each other, stereotypes fade away and then reappear in different forms, and a diversity of viewpoints is presented for the audience's attention and reflection. To undermine the linearity of narrative, Egoyan creates an intertextual universe in which normative cultural meanings dissipate. *Exotica* concluded a youthful auteuristic period for Egoyan and brought him a certain degree of renown.[21] Some fifteen years after the film's initial release, the Canadian film scholar and critic William Beard described the film as being Egoyan's "masterpiece to date," even though he has produced a number of successful films since, including *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997; an adaptation of a Russell Banks novel of the same name), which won several Genie Awards and was nominated for two Academy Awards, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay.[22] Nevertheless, *Exotica* had better gross sales than *The Sweet Hereafter*.[23] There is something about *Exotica* that leaves the audience with a haunting feeling. I suspect the difference between the American-inspired *The Sweet Hereafter,* with its victorious narrative closure, and *Exotica* is the latter's sense of pervasive dysfunction and despair, more commonly associated with Canadian than American dramatic films.

Egoyan grew up an immigrant in the heavily anglophile city of Victoria, British Columbia. His Armenian heritage and Egyptian birthplace ensured an ethnic—that is, minority—cultural background for his films that was distinct from the cultural mainstream of francophone and anglophone Canada.[24] Egoyan's transnationality differs substantially from Lepage's career-acquired sense of globalized artistic identity with strong links to Québec's francophone majority culture.[25] For an artist, the concept of transnationality suggests more

than just a possession of multiple national identities. It represents an active attempt by the artist to work across or over or through various national identities. Egoyan did make one film on the Armenian genocide of World War I, which reflected his Armenian roots. The remainder of his work is strongly tied to Canada, so he cannot be considered transnational in the way that a Canadian filmmaker like Deepa Mehta is transnational. Mehta has made her major films in and about India, which is her birthplace. Egoyan's reputation has put him in the top echelons of Canadian filmmaking (along with David Cronenberg and Denys Arcand), which confirms the importance of the ethnic/national element in distinguishing his work. Transnational filmmakers, who work in the context of a national cinema, carry an active awareness of otherness to the national cinemas with which they are engaged. In an interview with Hamid Naficy while *Exotica* was being made, Egoyan spoke of the "cultural baggage" that separates him "from the dominant community."[26] An auteuristic expression of another culture challenges the dominant ideological constructs of Canadian society by substituting the lens of that culture and the experiences associated with it within Canada. Filmic discourses like Egoyan's ensure that postmodern hybridity informs mainstream Canadian cinema and its construction of the urban sphere. These discourses affirm that otherness in a multitude of forms is part of any national identity that is polyphonic and multicultural. Lepage could deconstruct Québec's ideological foundations, but he had to work within its cultural constructs. Egoyan was born an outsider and had to assimilate to different cultural norms, which located him for a time in a certain marginalized social space. It was his Armenian heritage that he found "exotic." Referring to his Armenian and Anglo background, he told Naficy, "I'm really somewhere between those two."[27]

Egoyan situates the ethnocultural conflicts in the film in Toronto, which was at the time of the film's making (and is even more so now) Canada's most culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse city. Like Arcand migrating to Montréal as a youth, Egoyan migrated from insular Victoria to Toronto as a youth. Both went to "the big city" with the goal of getting an education. *Exotica* is immersed in a disturbing psychological moodiness generated by its signature "exotic" Middle Eastern musicality, its transgressive sexual symbolism, and its unrelentingly slow-moving, teasing pace, comparable to the gyrations of a provocative striptease. Naficy situates the film's otherness in its "accented" nature.

In other words, Egoyan filmic language is not that of a native speaker. Naficy goes on to explain Egoyan's accented style as coming from certain "looks, expression, postures, music" as well as "themes of and structures of absence and presence, loss and belonging, abandonment and displacement, obsession and seduction, veiling and unveiling."[28] *Exotica* is gritty and anguished, filled with characters with repressed and perverted inner selves whose psychological lives remain blocked and inaccessible throughout most of the story. While Lepage makes a sociological critique of elite wealth and power and portrays the economics of the working class with realism, Egoyan deals with money purely as a symbol that signifies a loss of human relationship. The ethnic Other experiences the monetary nexus as the predominant, neutral, communicative vehicle of the dominant culture. Every venue portrayed in the film is dominated by financial transactions, often involving rather petty amounts. These transactions signify a fundamental feature of Toronto's urban relations, but they are not a commentary on class consciousness. The pet-store owner protagonist of the film comes from the same class as Egoyan's immigrant family, that of the *petit bourgeois* storeowner.

Exotica is a film about two kinds of mirrors: those that reflect the personas offered to the world (how we try to look to others) and the one-way mirrors that allow unnoticed surveillance, supposedly capturing us in candid moments.[29] The latter is meant to reflect the inherent voyeurism of the film-viewing experience. While Lepage uses stunning track shots to uproot time by flowing seamlessly from 1952 to 1989, Egoyan's camera lingers on the pained and convoluted depths of the anguished human soul in a mood of unalterable eternity. This sense of stasis makes the audience feel uncomfortable, voyeuristic, and alienated from what is happening on the screen. While Lepage's allegory of Québec history makes us marvel at his talent for connecting the personal story and public history, the Toronto that Egoyan constructs becomes a psychoanalytic couch, where he invites us to be both a patient and our own analyst. Lepage's empathy becomes Egoyan's alienation. Lepage's narrative and technique offers the traditional illusion of hope for the audience, but Egoyan's offers nothing of the sort. While Lepage builds associations in a dysfunctional family universe, Egoyan pushes us ever deeper into dysfunctionality and dissociation. In other words, Lepage's urban narrative has an upward motion, while Egoyan's holds us pinned to the ground, unable to move.

The plot of *Exotica* centres around a Revenue Canada auditor named Francis (Bruce Greenwood) who frequents the Exotica club to watch a young girl named Christina (Mia Kirshner), dressed in a school uniform, perform suggestive dances. Francis is doing an audit on a pet-store owner named Thomas (Don McKellar), who ends up being blackmailed by Francis into participating in his obsession at the strip club. The film features three other significant characters: Zoe (Arsinée Khanjian), who owns the club; the club's emcee, Eric (Elias Koteas), a former lover of Christina's and the father of Zoe's soon-to-be-born child; and finally, Tracey (Sarah Polley), who pretends to "babysit" Francis's deceased daughter while he is at the club. The intertwining of these strangers and employees in a web of sexual and psychological abuse is the core of the film.

Exotica is a highly urbanized film in its locales: a strip club, a pet store, an opera house, and an airport, all of which are integral to metropolitan areas. The only "at home" shots are flashbacks. For Egoyan, the urban person in primarily depicted in public space, where interacting with others means that private selves are protected from view, while, for Lepage, it is always private space that is important: urban life consists of individuals who pursue personal meanings and attachments, oblivious to the surrounding throng. In *Exotica,* the alienation produced by keeping up a pretense adds to the anonymity of the city, while in *Le Confessionnal* the city is overwhelmed by interconnected personal narratives, shared images, and troubling relationships. A good example of this from *Le Confessionnal* is the bartender at the Château Laurier, who, rather than being an impersonal figure who simply responds to customers' requests (the bartender familiar from American films), is actually one of Pierre's relatives, who gets Pierre a job at the hotel. The familial pervades *Le Confessionnal* in a conscious and overt manner—even in the most anonymous of urban locales, there is "the family"—whereas, in *Exotica,* the familial is broken and repressed. Lepage opens up family secrets to some sort of resolution; Egoyan leaves them mired in irresolution. The absence of genuine human connection is evident in the way that Egoyan associates ethnicity with strangeness and establishes the spirit of alienation as the basic oral and visual texture of *Exotica*. The protagonist's pet store, the antagonist's family home, and the nightclub where the two confront each other offer a public face, a false front, behind which dark and dirty secrets lie. Wherever the character of Thomas is present, he is constructed as an outsider, a stranger who does not feel

comfortable where he is. He is an outsider at the airport when he arrives and is scrutinized by distrusting Canada Customs officials. As a gay man, he is an outsider in the strip club for heterosexual audiences. He is even a stranger to his own business venue, which he uses as a cover for smuggling activities. This retail store never has any customers. Obviously, it is his "wholesale" business of illegal breeding of species that is its essence. And at the opera, the strangeness continues: Thomas goes to the opera not for the performance but to pick up a sexual partner. Everything in which he is outwardly engaged is a false front, a mask that hides his real purpose and identity. Thomas is the perfect metaphor for the ethnic conundrum of maintaining dual or even triple identities, of not being oneself by projecting only what the society wants—or what the outsider thinks it wants—to see. Of course, when one is "audited" by the dominant society, as represented by Revenue Canada, the masks we live by are torn away and we, like Thomas, become vulnerable to blackmail.

The fictional lives of all the characters who inhabit *Exotica* have been described as "landscapes of devastation."[30] The main conflict is between Thomas, representing the Other, and Francis, representing the dominant society of Toronto. While the audience is immediately shown Thomas's false front, Francis's falseness is only revealed gradually. Egoyan is suggesting that the outsider is not as successful at hiding as is the insider. The faux lush interior of the Exotica strip club and the architectural elegance of the opera house simply mask the traumas and unorthodox uses they are put to by those who frequent them. Behind the walls of these buildings are hidden inner selves crying out for redemption from within an emotionally anguished universe.

By the time *Exotica* was made, Toronto had become the most multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial city in Canada. This is its postmodern face. That Francis is shown to have had a mixed-race marriage is an aspect of that demographic reality. Another is the range of nonwhite sexual partners that Thomas meets at the opera, including blacks and Aboriginals. While the main characters are white, they vary in terms of their "whiteness": characters like Thomas and Zoe are presented as "off-centre" culturally, either through appearance or accent. They are "ethnicized" in contrast with the WASP personas of Francis and Christina, who have a common history in white middle-class Anglo society. In fact, the schoolgirl uniform that Christina wears for her striptease signifies elite private schooling associated with Anglo

dominance. Thomas and Zoe's otherness puts them outside the circles of real power, whether private or state. Ethnicity keeps them at the level of small-business owners, immigrant entrepreneurs comparable to the Egoyan family in Victoria. However, the tensions, issues, and conflicts that are prominent in the film are centred not on the racialized minorities of Toronto but on the ethnicized ones. For example, in the opening airport scene, when the arriving Thomas is being watched through a one-way mirror, the white supervisor from Canada Customs is lecturing an African Canadian subordinate on how to spot smugglers. The ethnic smuggler—in this case, Thomas—goes undetected, which serves as a commentary on the false sense of knowledge that the supposed powers have and the dominant culture's distrust of immigration and the entrance of "foreigners." This foreign element evolves into an ethnic identity encoded with distrust and insecurity.

Sight is the dominant metaphor in the film. The film's "scopic regime," as Emma Wilson calls it, is linked to the role of mirrors through which the patrons of both the airport and the club are monitored and scrutinized.[31] On the one hand, mirrors serve as a commentary on the voyeuristic nature of cinematic storytelling; on the other hand, they also suggest how the outsider feels in relationship to the wider society—under surveillance. Am I dressed correctly? Am I saying the right thing? How do I fit in? How do I stand out? A whole series of self-questioning attitudes come with being "accented." The sense of being constantly on view and dealing with one's desires to fit in are part of ethnic identity in Canada. The construction of the visualized social self is always problematic. But the visual is not the only signifier of foreignness.

Even before this opening scene, the soundtrack accompanying the opening credits signifies the Other as "exotic." The score immediately establishes difference and distance by evoking the sounds of what was once called "the Near East" or "the Levant." The music then blends with the exotic interiors of the club and even with the strange pet store containing empty fish tanks. The facades that are the "fronts" of the store and the club (the back rooms of both establishments is where the real power lies) represent the public faces of private lives. Egoyan, whose family owned a small business in Victoria, makes the owner of the Exotica a woman with an accent (Egoyan's wife, also of Armenian descent, plays the role). The power of surveillance that the dominant society has is reciprocated by the ethnic in the small-business venue of the club, where the

patrons are being watched. While the term *transnational* offers the suggestion of equality by moving identity out of the national context, the term *ethnic* suggests the subordination that the immigrant has traditionally experienced within the Canadian social hierarchy. I would argue that Egoyan expresses more of an ethnic sensibility in this film than the transnational sensibility of someone like Deepa Mehta. Thomas, the owner of a pet store filled with exotic species, represents the attractively foreign, something unusual, desired, and expensive.

When Francis, after being kicked out of the strip club, forces Thomas to become a player in his revenge plot, one gets a sense of how the ethnic views himself. Thomas is pulled into the machinations of the dominant society against his will. He knows that he does not belong and that this involvement will not go well for him. This message makes *Exotica* "a really postmodern" film, as critic William Beard observes, because it insists on "multiple and divergent views . . . de-verifying identity and memory, and dissolution of the ground of any possible stable 'truth.'"[32] Ethnic truth, in this case, is the truth of the outsider, who has adopted a diasporic identity.[33] Doing so means surrendering an original identity and assuming another, an act that turns the former identity into a recessive gene, a memory. In Egoyan's case, his upbringing was so totally Canadian that only occasionally was he reminded of his roots. The family even changed their name from Yehogyan to Egoyan for ease of pronunciation in the new society. The ethnic impulse is to delete what would be interpreted as exotic.

In an interview with film scholar Cynthia Fuchs, Atom Egoyan described the exotic as "something outside our immediate experience . . . the exoticism of race, the exoticism of music . . . the exoticism of sexual icons."[34] Ultimately, the exoticism he finds associated with himself in Canada simply adds to his own sense of otherness and of not fully belonging.[35] Exoticization can turn into self-alienation if the ethnic mentality adopts the dominant cultural mores with their colonizing or racist history. In contrast, the alienation that Lepage explores in *Le Confessionnal* is not a form of self-alienation. Pierre, who is the counterpart to Egoyan's Thomas and represents the author, is a coherent, centred individual who has the psychological strength to explore an unhealthy family secret and work his way through the issue without being destroyed. Egoyan's fictional universe is one of perverse psychological entrapment from which there seems to be no escape because of the inability of the characters to

confront their neuroses and game playing. While Pierre offers a hopeful resolution in the narrative closure of *Le Confessionnal,* the truth having made him free, Francis's sick universe continues. Egoyan makes it clear that the "hiding" that Thomas engages in as a smuggler of "exotic" eggs is petty compared to the hiding engaged in by Francis, which is profoundly imprisoning.

Exotica is filled with interiority that is in one way or another a place of fantasy, suggesting that the places we inhabit are indeed more fantasy than reality. Thomas's pet store is filled with walls of fish tanks bathed in a greenish-purple light: they appear to be covered with a dirty film. It is unlike any real pet store because it is only a metaphor for the exotic—the nontransparency of otherness, which is constructed to obscure rather than reveal. Members of the dominant society view ethnicity as the realm of the opaque, the invisible, and the incomprehensible on which they can project their repressed, primarily sexual, fantasies. Egoyan's characters are all involved with falseness that obscures, suggesting strongly that everyone in a society is nontransparent and infected with secret lives that are concealed only through hard work. Francis—the father who failed to protect his daughter from kidnapping, rape, and death—claims that he is protective of the dancer Christina, who is eventually revealed to have been his daughter's babysitter before her abduction, but he is actually exploitive of her and her profession. He is living an obsessive fantasy in which Christina the dancer performs in a school uniform, which is what his daughter was wearing when she was discovered; this suggests an incestuous attitude. A younger version of Christina is the character of Tracey, the deceased daughter's current "babysitter," who performs a faux babysitting role when Francis goes to the strip club where Christina performs. The Exotica club represents indulgence in fantasy, and everyone is caught up in it. Christina deludes herself by claiming that she is providing the distraught and confused Francis with "therapy," when in fact she is colluding in his psychological state. Everyone, ethnic and nonethnic, is corrupted in this story, and everyone plays false roles and mixed-up identities with alibis for their actions.

Eric, the emcee whose job it is to provide the fantasy voice-over commentary on the dancers for patrons of the club, sets up Francis for a fall because of the club's "no touch" rule. The rule serves as a metaphor for film itself: touch the skin of the film, which is the theatre screen or the television screen, and the illusion that is being created disappears. The people projected onto it become

instantly unreal because tactility overcomes visuality and the suspension of disbelief. The audience's normal engagement with the film is challenged by Egoyan's directorial insistence that the artificiality of acting be highlighted, that the performances by the characters be presented as suspect, as not representing a real person or one's true self. The acting style he created for the actors is intended to make the audience aware of their own acting and their own immersion in and creation of illusion.

Every site in *Exotica*—pet store, opera house, and strip club—comes with a socially constructed meaning that Egoyan deconstructs because these sites are social masks that ethnic individuals experience as alien social constructs. In Egoyan's hands, opera, the home of high art and civility, becomes a site of sexual transgression. The pet store, the site of childhood desires for animal companionship, becomes a place of intrigue, illegality, and blackmail. The strip club, constructed as a socially negative environment associated with exploitation, becomes a place of truth seeking, revelation, and therapeutic reconciliation. Every stereotype is turned upside down. Insight, Egoyan tells us, comes by uncovering the fantasies we have about places, either constructed by those sites themselves or imposed on them by social discourse. The public dialogue about them is radically different from their private meanings and uses. These two worlds, the public and the private, do not blend but live beside each other like two solitudes. They are strangers to each other. When Francis is thrown out on the street after touching Christina (the breaking of illusion), he is like Adam thrown out of the Garden of Eden or the citizen of an ancient Greek city-state who is exiled and so forfeits his identity. Eric, the biblical snake who misled him to do this misdeed, becomes the target of Francis's hatred and desire for revenge. But there is no killing of Eric. The evil that resides within him has to be embraced and forgiven. Eric is just another side of Francis, whose life has been changed by the rape and murder of his daughter, because Eric, together with Christina, found the body. Now they work in the realm of pure illusion, projected by the patrons of the club.

One of the fascinating parallels between *Le Confessionnal* and *Exotica* is how sexuality is desexualized in both films.[36] In *Le Confessionnal,* the prodigal son is a sex worker who is presented as being exploited by wealth, power, and age. The relationship he has with the former priest is troubling and demoralizing for him because it does not empower him. It contributes to his eventual

suicide. The sexuality surrounding Marc's son's mother is also presented as demoralizing and degrading. There is nothing titillating about sexuality in the film. Likewise, the sexuality in *Exotica* is not highlighted in any sensual or romantic way. The gay sex in *Exotica* is presented as simple pleasure without any emotional entanglement. In contrast, heterosexual eroticism is shown to be troubled, confused, even malicious and psychotic. *Le Confessionnal* suggests that personal wounds can be healed once the "sin" is revealed, but in *Exotica*, the wounds continue to fester because the religious component is lacking. The lack of salvation suggests an entrapment that is inescapable. While the relations between the gay and straight worlds of *Le Confessionnal* are strong, in *Exotica*, they are highly charged, opaque, and tormented. Lepage's representation of gay men as living within a professional continuum (celibate priest to gay government official) and as residing within the heterosexual family (as sons and as fathers of sons) makes the two sexualities complementary and integrative. They are a familial whole. But Egoyan's gay character is a permanent outsider who is pulled into the morass of heterosexual relations and its familial dysfunctions under duress. This is why Thomas's otherness is more illuminating of Egoyan's own concerns about ethnic identity than it is about gay identity.

This major difference flows from the historicity that informs Lepage's sensibility and the ahistoricity of Egoyan's film. For Lepage, Québec City is a multigenerational and extended family for which time is of the essence, while for Egoyan, Toronto is a nuclear family traumatized by specific recent events that are timeless in their impact. Egoyan's history in Toronto, in which he had lived for about fifteen years since coming to study at the University of Toronto, was wrapped up in becoming a recognized filmmaker. (This was his fourth auteur feature.) When he made *Exotica*, he was in his early thirties, a precocious young man far from his familial roots for whom the present overshadowed his past. While Lepage's film creates an intertextual reference point with Hitchcock's *I Confess* and so connects with an earlier era in Québec history and filmmaking, Egoyan stands outside Toronto's historic identity, both as a stranger and a critic. He views the city as a conglomerate of personal presents, nothing more. All of these personal moments are presented as false ways of being in the world in the same way that cinema is "false." What we experience in watching a film is not the reality of how it was made and its meaning to those who took part in making it, but the narrative mask that it is—its image.

The importance of role playing in *Exotica,* which is the essence of film acting itself, is discussed extensively by Catherine Russell in her gender-related article "Role Playing and the White Male Imaginary in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica.*" Both Lepage and Egoyan fit into the "white male imaginary" category but in different ways, and they expand that category in terms of the cultural formations associated with sexuality, language, and nationality/ethnicity. The "emotional landscape of the city" is well portrayed by Egoyan, Russell concludes, because in his film, "ethnicity and race . . . become familiar features of urban Canadian life."[37] But although this is valid for Toronto, it is not characteristic of Québec City. In *Exotica,* the darkness and interiority that pervades the film is suddenly lifted in a flashback to a beautiful, sunlit, green field that is obviously rural or park-like and where Francis's daughter's body is discovered. As a visual and oral (speechless) site, it is the opposite of everything so far in the film; it is symbolic of an earlier, happier, more idyllic life for most of the characters, who are now trapped in the consequences of what was discovered that day. It was on that day that they (Eric, Christina, and Francis) were driven from their Edenic paradise.

A parallel scene in *Le Confessionnal* is the concluding scene, in which Pierre and his nephew, whom he has liberated from his addict mother, walk across the bridge with trees and nature in the background. They are walking to a new life, to a world beyond their past. They have a future together. In *Exotica,* the rural, idyllic scene is meant to represent a pivotal moment in time, now perverted by memory through Francis's eroticized parody of his daughter brought to life through the costumed body of Christina, her former babysitter. There is no new life here, as is suggested at the end of *Le Confessional,* but only the reference to a constant replaying of the past, which is why the sun-drenched rural scene is so ironic. It signifies the new reality as being one of death and the past. Because the sunlit scene from the past leads us right back into the hopelessness of Francis's mind, Peter Harcourt concludes that this "natural" scene subverts the meaning of the word *natural*: nature becomes unnatural in comparison to the psychological naturalness of urban life.[38] The equation of psychological squalor with urban life is very powerful.

One can argue that the male-female relations in *Exotica* follow the pattern of heterosexual patriarchy: the film portrays the exploitive nature of sexually charged entertainment practices and alludes to incest, sexual abuse,

and infidelity within the heterosexual family. The performance scenes in the biker tavern in *Le Confessionnal* are not romanticized or exoticized the way the dancing is in *Exotica* (the perfect bodies, the lush decor, the sense of being an expensive place); rather, they are made crude, vulgar, and destructive. The Exotica club is not so much a site of degrading employment, as the tavern is, but a falsely constructed fantasy where no-touch rules are a fig leaf covering the eroticism and class-based fantasy that the place encourages. While men in suits inhabit the Exotica, it is bikers who frequent the tavern, and they have no illusions about what they see.

William Beard claims, with some justification, that *Exotica*'s "negotiation of its seductive maze of themes, tropes and situations" is a "virtuosic performance."[39] That performance is intricately tied to Egoyan's own exploitation of the symbolic and the iconic. In *Le Confessionnal,* male-female relations are portrayed in the context of family history, without much character development compared to *Exotica*. Lepage portrays the social construction of roles in 1952 as quite different from the roles of 1989, but they are not ideal in either era. Likewise, 1952 has no overt gay aspects because everything is "closeted," while gay characters are played as normal in the contemporary period. The film thus recognizes the historical evolution of gay liberation in the latter half of the twentieth century in North America in general. Toronto has the largest gay community in Canada, and having a gay character fits this specific Canadian urban scene. However, Egoyan's use of the gay character as a metaphor for ethnic otherness is very different from Lepage's use of gayness.

When we compare *Exotica* with *Le Confessionnal,* we can see that the categories of memory and the past intersect in the two films by having different kinds of otherness central to their narrative. The otherness of *Le Confessionnal* concerns a search for inclusiveness and reconciliation within the dynamics of family, while the otherness of *Exotica* is an exploration of an unbridgeable difference within the family structure. The characters' power to integrate in *Exotica* is very limited: their urban sensibility is dark and wounded. It is a film about being in the closet rather than about coming out. The prime currency in *Le Confessionnal* is emotion, caring, and concern, while the prime currency in *Exotica* is either money or fantasy, both of which are expressions of alienation. Both filmmakers use their films to question dominant identities, but Egoyan goes further by suggesting that the way that identities are created, recreated,

and masked is fundamental to human beings. Identity is a construct that is always in play, constantly being modified within both individual consciousness and public perception.

For Canadian audiences viewing *Exotica,* there is a strong sense that Toronto is the urban centre in the film, but for non-Canadian audiences, it could be any major North American city. In this way, Egoyan can simultaneously reveal and hide his adopted city. One cannot say the same about Québec City, whose specificity is crucial to the unfolding of *Le Confessionnal*: the story makes the most sense in relationship to that city and its history, while Egoyan's story could have been set in any major North American city.

EMBODYING OTHERNESS IN THE CITY

The embodiment of otherness in certain characters in each film creates radically different urban worlds. In Egoyan's case, his exploration of "ethnicity, exile, and diaspora" results in an embodiment of "substitution," "displacement," and "translation or transference" in a recurring ritual of addiction that cannot be overcome—a cycle of eternal return filled with alienation and distress.[40] Lepage's film involves a fundamental reaching out to others that integrates both the characters and the audience into a common vision of the human community. While Francis fails to fill his inner void with the performed parody danced by Christina, Pierre wants to embrace his brother and heal the family sins, which he does. Thomas seems to meander through his life with small acts of self-interest and a sense of others' needs, but he is always pulled by stronger forces emanating from the dominant norms of his adopted world. Compared to Pierre, he is not self-determining because he does not come from the dominant demographic. But this lack of self-determination and progress suffuses all of Egoyan's ethnic characters in the film. Their fundamental lack of self-understanding leads to negative results. Nellie Hogikyan's study of the "post-exilic imaginary" in Egoyan's work emphasizes how his creation of "detachment" is a way of transcending "the paradigm of exile."[41] The filmmaker is "detached" from the narrative he has created, as well as from the film itself. Although he puts himself into the story, he also remains aloof from it. Hogikyan considers this the basic stance of a "post-national, post-nostalgic,

and post-ethnic positionality."[42] Hogikyan sees in Egoyan's art a strategy for dealing with outsider status. Distancing oneself from a particular situation suggests that the otherness that anyone feels is embodied in a self-image or self-constructed identity (a fantasy) that results from the self's constant and fundamental reading of itself only in relationship to others who have more power. When Egoyan reads strangeness as a fantasy created by the dominant elements in society, he is able to deconstruct its power. The Other is always a fantasy. This postmodernist strategy is also present in *Le Confessionnal* when Lepage highlights and normalizes the gay presence as integral to Québec society. The gay identity of each character is not exoticized in any way. They are all part of the Québec family as equal members. The only event exoticized in *Le Confessionnal* is Hitchcock's filmmaking: that is, the otherness of Hollywood and its "outsider" status in Québec.

In his essay "Sur la représentation de la communauté gaie dans la publicité du magazine Têtu," Luc Dupont writes:

> Sous l'apparence d'une structure anatomique quasi identique, le corps humaine est le véhicule et l'illustration privilégiés de la dynamique culturelle de la communauté gaie, de ses désirs et de ses rêves. En conséquence, le corps est signe et trouve chargé de significations multiples.

> [Under the guise of a more or less identical anatomical structure, the human body is the vehicle for, and the privileged illustration of, the cultural dynamic of the gay community, of its desires and dreams. As a result, the body is a symbol charged with multiple meanings.][43]

The embodiment of gay otherness in filmic representation involves body types, modes of speech, clothing, and gestures, among other signifiers. Marc is represented as a stud, a man of virile masculinity, while Thomas is quieter and more effeminate. Egoyan has embodied ethnicity in a more stereotypically gay body, while Lepage has not, although one could argue that Pierre's body type is androgynous. There are also a variety of embodiments that relate to otherness: for instance, the Other and the body politic, the Other as an exoticized Other, and the sense of the Other's body as a threat. This latter point appears in the customs agent's comments about Thomas and in Thomas's bringing the illegal

matter into the country strapped to his body. The body is viewed and judged superficially by outsiders, while those whose body it is experience it totally.

In an essay about one of his earlier films (*Speaking Parts*), Egoyan writes that "the concept of surface proves to be the most complex and intriguing aspect of any rendering of personality."[44] The embodiment of identity as one's surface renders it skin deep. It is the persona of role playing and acting. Egoyan's characters move slowly and inexorably, while being bound up in dialogues where miscommunication is the norm. Lepage's embodiments are less radical and less troubling. They have a naturalism to them, which he gladly plays off the theatrical and technical special effects that he uses to remind us of the artificiality of the cinematic mode. The unnaturalism of Egoyan's characters is used to remind us of the artificiality of our social roles. If the recognition of otherness is a key element of postmodernist cinema and its re-creation of marginalized figures is central to its narratives, then the embodiments of that otherness in these two films indicate how broad a range of representation is possible. The contrast between Lepage's naturalism and Egoyan's unnaturalistic style illustrates how postmodern otherness can be played in diverse ways.

The issue of distinct bodies and how they appear to and impact the views of others has an autobiographical connection to Lepage. Peter Dickinson writes: "Lepage's feelings of difference and doubleness were compounded by a growing awareness of his homosexuality and by the psychological alienation from his own body that accompanied his physical diagnosis with alopecia, a skin condition that can result in a complete loss of body hair."[45] Lepage's body removed him from physical norms, creating a sense of being a double. This means that one knows oneself as similar to others but also knows that others identify one as non-normative. One feels there are two of me: one that I know, and one that others identify. Reconciling the two is not easy. In *Le Confessionnal,* this is captured in the use of the "doubled screen" of two time periods and two films, which connect the characters in the film. Lepage uses a television screening of *I Confess* in 1989 as a reference to this seamless duality. Of course, Egoyan is famous for his use of video screens as signifiers of representation and surface in his films. We are our own body doubles, acting out (performing) not what we are but what we are attracted to and determined by.

The cultural factors that play vital roles in these two films are mirrors of each other, with Egoyan's ethnicity mirroring Lepage's nationality, accented

English mirroring Québec French, and Egoyan's generational issues parallel-ing the exploitation associated with powerful class structures. As for gender, the focus on the failures of the traditional heterosexual family and the promi-nence of gay characters in both films gives masculinity a broader construction and social diversity. While Lepage's construction of gayness is more open and inclusive, Egoyan's construction is symbolic and a metaphor for all forms of otherness. Egoyan adds a further dimension to his narrative by includ-ing a racialized community that reflects Toronto's 1990s demographics, while Québec City between 1952 and 1989 remains Eurocentric and white, certainly a valid sociological representation. Lepage plays with colour in his film, making the spectator aware of various meanings associated with different colours, but Egoyan tends toward darkness; even where there is light, it is not transparent or illuminating.

Spatiality (the cultural and psychological construction of space) is presented differently in each city. While the rooms of *Le Confessionnal* are realistically constructed to be faithful to the historic period portrayed (other than the maze in the bath house), those of *Exotica* are phantasmagorical con-structs tending toward the claustrophobic. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur claims that "the dialectic of lived space, geometrical space and inhabited space" has its equivalencies in "lived time, cosmic time and historical time."[46] *Le Confessionnal* gravitates toward lived space and time and inhabited space and historical time. History and memory are its playing fields. Egoyan reaches out for a space that reflects cosmic time because it is inhabited by the deepest recesses of the psyche, where time is a minor player.

The oralities in each film also differ, with Lepage focusing on the English-French linguistic divide being more prominent in 1952 and less so in 1989. The historical continuum of this city's life betrays its evolution. The orality of Toronto in *Exotica* fits with the ethnic and racial class divisions in the film but is generally subsumed by the flat and monotonal presentations that Egoyan insisted that his actors give. Toronto is presented as a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multiracial site of diasporic identities and transnationality, a city of outsiders who are strangers, while Québec City is constructed as a city of insid-ers who are strangers to each other.

As male auteurs who foreground male characters, Lepage and Egoyan follow a similar pattern to that of the female auteurs in the previous chapter,

who foreground female characters. While Pool's and Rozema's protagonists fit ideologically into feminist characterizations of the female persona, the gay characterization created by a straight director like Egoyan is more akin to Villeneuve's fictional female, Bibiane. Lepage creates a film whose view of sexuality as a continuum rather than binary opposites is close to queer cinema, which seeks to downplay sexual differences. What is most telling, however, is that in the end, Lepage's narrative closure suggests a departure from the city, a sense of a new life emerging, as was occurring for Lepage in his professional life at the time of the film's creation. Only by going to the world of "the Other"—that is, the broader world represented by Hitchcock—can there be a new beginning and a new statement. In contrast, Egoyan's sense of human entrapment may very well be linked to Toronto as a metropolitan reality with millions of inhabitants. It is a big, demographically diverse city, while Québec City is a small, mostly monolingual city and the capital of an aspiring but unrealized nationality. Québec City, for artists of Lepage's global ambitions, is a city of centrifugal power, which has spun him away into an international career and sensibility. It is not a diasporic city like Toronto. The power of diasporic, transnational identities in a city like Toronto is more evident in Clement Virgo's *Rude* (1995) and Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2001), discussed in the next chapter. Whereas Egoyan grew up in Victoria, Virgo's childhood was spent in Jamaica, and Mehta was in her early twenties when she arrived in Canada. In these two directors we thus find a more enhanced sense of diaspora and transnationality than we do in Egoyan.

THE DIASPORIC CITY

Postcolonialism, Hybridity, and Transnationality in Virgo's Rude
(1995) and Mehta's Bollywood/Hollywood *(2001)*

Toronto as a Tower of Babel is a valid metaphor for Canada's most diasporic
city. Its twenty-first-century high streets are filled with humanity from every
corner of the globe, and its sprawling ethnocultural communities co-exist
with each other as well as with the dominant Anglo-Canadian tradition. These
communities are extremely diverse in their national backgrounds, in their his-
tories, in how they have been racialized in Canada, and in the trajectory of their
socioeconomic status in Toronto. Each group carries a different sense of its dis-
tinctiveness, of the importance of its cultural and religious heritage, and of its
aspirations for assimilation, acceptance, and success.

    The dominant African Canadian community in Toronto is a post–World
War II diaspora, originating in the Caribbean, that continues to attract a
steady flow of immigrants but that has been augmented by immigration from

African countries since the late twentieth century.[1] The Caribbean community has achieved recognition as a contributor to Canadian culture because of its accomplished writers, musicians, and dramatists, many of whom are based in Toronto. These artists are the sources of counternarratives for Canadian identity that have shifted Toronto's national identity from being an expression of Anglo-Canadianism to being highly inclusive of diversity. When iconic films about Toronto, such as *Goin' Down the Road* (1970), were made, Toronto's multiracial identity was only in its infancy. Several decades and more than a million immigrants later, films like *Rude* (1995) by Clement Virgo, *Masala* (1992) by Srinivas Krishna, and *Sam and Me* (1991), directed by Deepa Mehta, came to represent the non-European immigrant experience.

John Berger, in his highly influential *Ways of Seeing* (1972), argues that the visual images of contemporary society are so numerous and omnipresent that their density and concentration have created a whole new sense of visual exchange between audiences and images, especially in urban environments. The stimulation of "either memory or expectations" in the viewer has been the major factor at play.[2] If we consider the two films discussed in this chapter, *Rude* and *Bollywood/Hollywood,* as representing the visualization of Toronto's nonwhite cityscape, then the interaction between their imaginaries and a diverse audience results in a broad range of possible reactions. For the viewer who identifies with the characters because they represent his or her community, there is both memory and expectation, while for the viewer from outside the community, there is a struggle with internalized roles and identities that may be driven by media discourse or negative forces such as racism, whether conscious or unconscious. Because the films are meant to represent the city's postmodern identity, the viewer's general perception of that city also comes into play. It can be negative or positive or neutral. Since neither Virgo nor Mehta are Euro-Canadian and both are immigrants to Toronto, their insights are generated by their diasporic experiences in Canada and their perceptions of the racialization of nonwhite minorities in Toronto. These experiences and perceptions include the continued socioeconomic dominance of the Eurocentric Anglo society, their perceived limits on personal and community social and economic empowerment, and a heightened gaze on themselves and the world around them through their understanding of minority dynamics. The filmmakers offer these perceptions to audiences who may comprehend

marginalization intimately or, conversely, who may only know it through the film's fictive narrative—that is, through an absence of experience.

When a filmmaker from a specific ethnic, national, or racialized group creates a cinematic narrative situated within that filmmaker's community, the usual demands of cinematic practice are mixed with the cultural mores of that specific community. The result is a text influenced by diasporic concerns and conflicts. Such films can break new ground in their representation of the community and the wider society if they feature a previously unrepresented, underrepresented, or misrepresented reality. This lack of previous representation constitutes the film's "novelty" for the audience, which can generate a confrontation with stereotypes established by earlier films that feature similar characters. Breaking with conventional imagery about Toronto by making a racialized minority central to characterization and plot allows a filmmaker the opportunity to redefine and reidentify a community. In some cases, this may go as far as "putting a face" on a minority that was formerly ill-defined or misidentified. This is certainly the case in *Rude*. Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood,* however, is a later addition and builds on models from a decade earlier. Because of the pre-existence of a diasporic film tradition, Mehta had to inaugurate themes and issues to make *Bollywood/Hollywood* more contemporary than its precursors, *Masala* and *Sam and Me*.

The creation of a new postcolonial urban imaginary for Toronto began in the early 1990s, and its importance has continued. *Sam and Me* was written by Ranjit Chowdhry but directed and produced by Deepa Mehta, whose career was then in its early stages. Later, she returned to the theme of diasporic Toronto in *Bollywood/Hollywood,* which was an auteur work, followed in 2008 by a third film about the Indo-Canadian community in Toronto, *Heaven on Earth*. Since Toronto has been her home for almost three decades, her depictions of Indo-Canadian society are intimately linked to that city and constitute a significant element in her transnational filmmaking identity.[3] Mehta's examination of the Indo-Canadian (or South Asian) community in Toronto shows how the relationship between a minority and the city it inhabits evolves over a relatively short span of time and how it is "constantly renegotiated."[4]

The minority gaze is substantially different from the majority national gaze presented in the films by Arcand, Lauzon, and Lepage. Their films speak from the issues and attitudes of those who participate in the power of an

ethno-linguistic majority, while the films discussed in this chapter, although all in English, represent the universe of ethnic minorities whose homes were former colonies of Great Britain. Egoyan's Toronto in *Exotica* in the mid-1990s, the same period as *Rude,* lacks the perspective of a racialized minority. Its gaze is different. Lacan has theorized that in every gaze, there is a connection between that gaze's reading of experienced reality and the filters associated with culturally determined symbolic meanings that interpret that reality; this connection results in every image being imagined or imaginary, thereby creating a closed loop that feeds on itself. The interjection of a postcolonial consciousness and imagery into a Canadian film narrative creates a cinematic urban imaginary that frames otherness through its own diasporic experiences. The characters in the film, the unfolding of the plot, the nature of the dialogue, and the sites of conflict and drama are all dependent on the filmmaker's relationship to the community that is being represented. In the case of the auteur filmmaker, these positions may be drawn from life experience, from personal background and family narratives, and from ideological frameworks, perceptions, and meanings cultivated within a community or communities for whom social dominance is missing.

The discourse developed by a minority informs its minority auteur filmmaker, who has to sell the project/vision/screenplay to nonminority funders and producers. Those funders and producers can have influence on the final result—that is, the final film may be informed by their perspective. Both films discussed in this chapter contribute to the deconstruction of dominant narratives about Canadian urban life through their subversive discourses grounded in a postcolonial mentality. Nonminority Canadian viewers, who are part of what Charles Acland calls the "absent audience" for Canadian cinema (that is, they lack connection to Canadian cinema in general and to minority-themed narrative film in particular), may experience a heightened sense of strangeness, otherness, and alienation when attempting to engage with these films. From the perspective of the dominant culture in English Canada, these films carry a quality of foreignness. By this, I mean that the culture-specific iconography and codes used in the films cannot be fully understood or easily read by audiences who are outsiders to the communities depicted. This outsider audience engages with the narrative differently from those who see themselves portrayed on screen. Filtering the film's devices through an unfamiliar gaze produces tension, even conflict, for the spectator.

Rude, written and directed by Clement Virgo, is the first African Canadian feature film to be made by a Caribbean immigrant. Virgo was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 1966. He came to Toronto at the age of eleven and was twenty-nine years old when the film was released. He went on to make four more films: *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1997), *Love Come Down* (2000), *Lie with Me* (2005), and *Poor Boy's Game* (2007). *The Planet of Junior Brown* won the award for Best Feature Film at the Urban World Film Festival in New York, which is indicative of Virgo's appeal to the wider black community in North America. Virgo is part of the Caribbean community in Toronto, which was the city's dominant black community twenty years ago but has since come to share that platform with other nationalities, including immigrants from Somali and other African countries.

When Virgo made *Rude,* he was aware of the systemic racism that black Caribbean Torontonians, immigrant and native-born alike, experienced when it came to employment and the justice system. Distinguished from the mainstream by race, accent, and socioeconomic status, the black Caribbean community developed a counternarrative of resentment, anger, and rebellion. Rinaldo Walcott, a Canadian academic and writer, acknowledges the importance of *Rude,* which "opened up the space for thinking differently about Canada as a racialized space, and more specifically as Black space."[5] According to Walcott, the film began the process of "imagining Blackness as a constituent part of Canadianness, which had been excluded or erased from official narratives." This imagining was particularly important because it arose from a black Canadian's own agency. Walcott accorded the film a high status by naming his book *Rude*. The term is Caribbean slang for "hip" or "cool," but it has an anti-establishment connotation. As a postcolonial appropriation of an English term meaning "offensive" or "confrontational," it inverts the meaning of the term into something positive while retaining its conventional meaning for non-Caribbean audiences. The film's title reflects how the film itself and the community it represents operate in Canadian society.

In the film, "Rude" is the name of a female announcer who works at an underground radio station. Her voice serves as an oracular device that questions, suggests, interprets, and tantalizes the characters in the film as they live

out their fictive lives. She serves as a deity that stands in for the filmmaker's gaze as it engages with the drama of the community. As a radio announcer, she remains faceless: she stands in the shadow, as befits the issue of blackness in Canadian society. Her disembodied voice becomes a terrain of a powerful, accented orality. Like a talk-show host, she is more provocateur than healer. The daily vicissitudes of those with black skin living in Toronto serve as grist for her mill. Her authorial voice with its god-like power hovers over the community; people's stories become confessions to an unseen but all-seeing and all-knowing deity. Since she is not presented as a "real" embodied woman but as a symbolic force, Virgo's representation of her gender does not run into the issues faced by Villeneuve in *Maelström*.

Skin-colour consciousness is represented in the film's main male characters, who congregate outside in a park, suggesting unemployment and underemployment, potential criminality, and the conflicts inherent in male bonding. These characters range in skin tone from black to white, but they all identify with the Caribbean community, which accepts this range of colour as its own in much the same way that the Aboriginal community accepts its full range of skin tones after centuries of intermarriage. These men represent the Caribbean diaspora in all its diversity, with the singular female voice-over uniting them into a narrative whole. Their intramural and extramural conflicts, in particular over criminality, highlight what Walcott calls "the ambivalent, contradictory and discontinuous moments of diasporic experience."[6] What are these moments? There is the dream of migration to a better life, which is then contradicted by the reality of a ghetto-like existence; there is the exchange of majority status in the Caribbean for minority status in Canada; and there is the scramble for existence in an unfamiliar and hostile environment characterized by an ever-present racism. These moments of ambivalence, contradiction, and discontinuity are highlighted in the film for those who have never experienced them. The fact that "Blackness . . . unsettles Canadianness" is clear in the film.[7] And yet the prevalence of racialized minorities in Toronto makes it evident that Canadianness now includes their identities.

Because many immigrant communities are refreshed with waves of new immigrants, which, in the case of the Caribbean, involves almost half a century of migration, hybridity is a significant factor in that community's cultural expression. The Caribbean world evolves just as the Canadian one does, and

so the migrant brings new elements to the diaspora in an ongoing cross-fertil-ization of identities based on the time of migration and the island nationality from which migration occurs. This means there is a "plurivocality" associated with the community.[8] A hybrid form of speech emerges that is reconstituted with each new generation from the same part of the world. This speech carries within itself a sense of not belonging fully to Canada while at the same time no longer belonging to the former Caribbean nationality. Initially internal to the community, this hybridity eventually comes to define the city as a whole, especially when diasporic communities become numerous enough to step out-side marginalization. "In a place such as this [Toronto] so full of immigrants, everyone is deeply interested in belonging," writes Dionne Brand, a Caribbean-Canadian poet, novelist, critic, and Torontonian.[9] When a city becomes hybridized, it creates a space for diasporic communities to become key players in cultural expression, to feel that they belong. Sheila Petty, in a detailed study of *Rude,* refers to Toronto Caribbean writers and intellectuals as providing a way to negotiate identity in North America.[10] Because there are now numerous black cultures in Toronto, however, it must be noted that *Rude* speaks out of only one of them. Renuka Sooknanan points out that the concept of Toronto's black community as a "homogenous, transparent identity category" is too essentialist and misleading, considering the diversity in the community, and it plays into a monolithic racial construct that supports the implications of sys-temic racism in which colour is front and centre.[11] In stressing the distinctive features of the Jamaican community, *Rude* belies that single racialized cat-egory. Yet that element of difference does not negate commonalities—the fact that numerous diasporic communities (especially those who share the same skin colour) experience the dominant society in much the same way.

Rude exposes the artificiality that is part of any Canadian minority's identity structure because so much of that identity reflects the attitudes and perceptions of the majority culture. It is the majority that defines the minor-ity, and thus the minority is always assigned a subordinate status of one kind or another. It is difficult to be self-determining if the attitudes of the major-ity are negative or hostile. The sense of difference imposed on the minority culture becomes problematic and demoralizing for that culture. Dionne Brand describes how in Canada, "the Black body is culturally encoded as physi-cal prowess, sexual fantasy, moral transgression, violence, magical musical

artistry."[12] Any representation of the black community from within by its artists addresses these codes and how they impact the community, yet these artists approach these codes based on their gender, the generation that formed them, their sexual orientation, their religious upbringing, and the culture of the Caribbean nationality from which they came, to name a few factors.[13] No response is identical to any other. So not only must we be sensitive to the specificity of the Caribbean identity portrayed in *Rude,* but we must also be conscious of the fact that the author is a heterosexual Jamaican-born male, and of how this affects his discussion of blackness and race and his representation of females and males. When Dionne Brand was interviewed by Beverley Daurio about her response to cultural colleagues like the poet Derek Walcott, she stated, "Walcott and I come from different generations and different genders," alluding to the importance of these distinctions.[14] Brand belongs more to Virgo's generation, but she is from Trinidad and Tobago in the southern Caribbean, having emigrated to Toronto in 1970 at the age of seventeen. Virgo's Jamaican culture is quite different from that of a Trinidadian, if for no other reason than the prevalence of Rastafarianism in Jamaica and the global impact of Jamaican pop music.

Rude is very much focused on the relationship of males with other males and with females. These relationships are forged within the concrete jungle rather than the "water, sea, sand, earth, trees, rain and sun" of a Caribbean island.[15] The very core of the diasporic narrative is urban life and the diaspora's experiences in the city. Toronto writer Silvera Makeda, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1955 and immigrated to Canada at the age of twelve, says, "I live in Canada but I feel that I live in a Third World section of Canada."[16] In other words, economic dislocation and disadvantage mean that Caribbean Canadians, especially those who are black, have more in common with First Nations people living on reserves than with a privileged white enclave like Toronto's Rosedale neighbourhood.

Cecil Foster, a Toronto writer and radio talk-show host, published a book that came out about the same time as *Rude* in which he describes the sense of criminalization he felt by simply being a black man. He called the condition DWBB (Driving While Being Black).[17] If he drove a jalopy, he would be stopped because of the poverty-induced criminality it implied to the police, and if he drove an expensive car, he would be associated, as a black man, with

the spoils of criminal activity. Either way, he was a target of police harassment because black means criminal. That Virgo has one of his Caribbean characters be a female cop is part of the irony of the film. Foster notes that, in Caribbean countries, males hold positions of power, while, in Canada, women from these countries tend to have better positions than their male counterparts. This reversal has devastating results in *Rude*.

Film scholar John McCullough summarizes *Rude* as an "exciting hybridization of commercial entertainment forms, intentional urban style, and postcolonial sensibility."[18] The commercial aspect of the film refers to its intended general audience; the urban style, to the hip hop and rap music scene that originated in African American urban ghettos in the 1980s and coincided with the rise of postmodernism; and the postcolonialism sensibility, to the film's black subjectivity and how that subjectivity writes its own narrative. A crucial factor in this subjectivity is the issue of class and how it relates to race and gender. Socioeconomic determinants of the Caribbean community's historical experience in Canada flow into a broader African American experience. The genre on which *Rude* draws is the "hood film" (with "hood" meaning neighbourhood but also being a play on hoodlum) of the 1990s, pioneered in the United States. This genre deals specifically with issues of racialized masculinity and its criminalization through drug dealing and prostitution. At one point, American pop music culture even had a bout of "gangsta rap" that flowed from the hood film. The genre promoted the underclass nonwhite hero. Paula Massood's seminal 1996 article on the subject of the hood film focuses on two films: *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993), the first set in south-central Los Angeles and the second in Watts, an area that had experienced an urban uprising in the mid-1980s.[19] According to Massood, in these coming-of-age narratives about young African American men in the inner city, urban space is characterized as beset with extreme poverty, massive unemployment, and violence generated by the ghetto's main economic enterprise—drugs. This urban space is a mindscape of utopian hopes and dystopian reality where power relations are brutal and self-destructive.

Rude represents a different urban space, a different historical context and community, and the film operates outside the parameters of American filmmaking and its tropes. It remains true to a Torontonian milieu that is not sociologically associated with firearms to the extent that American culture is.

Nevertheless, *Rude*'s significance in film history is framed first by the popularity of the hood film and then by its deviation from it.

In *Weird Sex and Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena*, Katherine Monk describes how Canadian and American cultures intersected in Virgo's experience, noting that while watching the film *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) by notable black filmmaker Spike Lee, "Virgo experienced something of an epiphany. . . . If a young black man in the United States could make movies, then why not him?"[20] Of course, the Canadian hood has its own distinct features, which Virgo expresses so well. For him, Toronto is a city defined through Jamaican diasporic culture.[21] But the images that represent that reality, however distinct they may be, have their origins in earlier practices, such as Spike Lee's films and the whole American Blaxploitation film tradition beginning in the 1970s, which Virgo filtered through a Canadian consciousness. "I knew that to get this film made in Canada," Virgo said, "it would have to have elements that were easily recognizable. . . . That meant the 'hood, guns, a little bit of drugs. I consciously drew on those things, but . . . I knew I couldn't imitate *Menace II Society* or *Boyz N the Hood*; I don't know anything about that world."[22] In portraying ghetto life in areas such as Toronto's Regent Park, Virgo approaches masculinity through the emasculation engendered by racism and poverty, but he does so in a dramatically different way than do his American colleagues, whose world he hasn't experienced or known. One difference revolves around the issue of diaspora itself. African Americans—whose roots in the United States go back hundreds of years and who did not, after the abolition of slavery, receive fresh waves of immigration—express a cultural reality that is not immigrant sensitive. For Jamaican Canadians, whose roots are in the recent Caribbean, diasporic identity remains a crucial factor. When Virgo uses a reggae song like Jimmy Cliff's "Many Rivers to Cross" in his film, its Jamaican association defines the film, even though it is set in Toronto. *Rude* bespeaks a cultural connectivity that is fresh and strong. It is not nostalgia, nor does it address the demographics of an American ghetto scene.

John McCullough claims that Virgo's film reproduces "a [Canadian] cultural bias against understanding women, money, and class relations."[23] This is painting with a rather broad brush, but it reflects McCullough's view that the negativity of life in the hood is subsumed in *Rude* under the filmmaker's artistic interests and storytelling technique. This critique is echoed by Christopher

Gittings, who calls the film "highly aestheticized." As a contrast to Virgo's fictional treatment, Gittings provides a list of documentaries about the African Canadian experience.[24] When the sometimes disembodied narrator, Rude, characterizes the stories she is hearing/seeing as "Zulu Nation meets Mohawk Nation," she mixes postcolonial references with street humour.[25] Since the stories do not contain any Zulus or Mohawks (although there are murals in the film of North American colonization), the terms are signifiers of the diasporic universe of Caribbean culture in Canada, a universe of loss and of not belonging. In that world, the Caribbean community is viewed as "Zulu" or African, and "Mohawk" or poor—disenfranchised and threatening, all at the same time.

Jamaica is associated with the Rastafarian religio-political movement (famous for the dreadlock hair style) and is reproduced in the film with the theatrical appearance of a "Conquering Lion of Judah" figure, who represents the emperor of Ethiopia, the ruler of the country that is the Rastafarian "homeland." The figure is presented as Rude's alter ego and as a symbol of the community as a whole.[26] This symbolized, aesthetic gloss to the film does not mean that the film is depoliticized. It simply means that the political is allegorized in an artistic manner. The use of the Easter Sunday Resurrection theme in the film is another religious component, this time reflecting the community's Christian roots. When Rude's face and body is finally revealed as a single whole rather than a series of shadowy, partial images, the scene is coded as a "resurrection." Rude is reassembled into a wholeness that represents the community's coming together. The scene also balances out what Gittings calls the "surreal and abstract visual landscape of the film" that has prevailed throughout.[27] The resurrection theme involves the body, and in *Rude,* the black Canadian body, although presented as crushed and entombed by racism, does rise in the end, overcoming the barriers that have kept it in place. It triumphs over the Babylon of its exile.

This approach in the film is commensurate with a postcolonial aesthetic that seeks to create a fictive counternarrative to the lacunas of the colonizers' narrative that seek to erase the presence of the Other. Virgo's postcolonialism embraces the history of African slavery in the Caribbean, the cultural manifestations that flow from that history, and the ways in which Canadian society is implicated in that past through its current stance toward Caribbean Canadians living in what Gittings calls "the white Canadian state . . . whose immigration

policies continue a colonial practice of privileging white immigration above Black immigration."[28] The main figure representing the white state is the disembodied anti-voice of Officer Milliard, who is trying to close down the illegal radio station and so suppress the free expression of the Caribbean voice that Rude represents. The presence of a black female police officer with an ex-con former husband is framed as a partial counterpoint in which expression (the Caribbean) and repression (Canada) meet in a symbolic hybridity. Milliard's name and other names in the film are indicative of their symbolic roles. A white drug dealer from the United States who represents the white power structure is named "Yankee," while black characters like Luke and Reece become his tools and internalize his racist construction of them. Because of their lack of power in the society, they are forced to listen to and eventually internalize this derogatory construction. The male power vacuum in the repressed community is filled by women, who are shown to hold jobs while the men drift and fall prey to the traps of criminalization.

Rude is subtitled *Cock the Hammer,* a reference to the firing of a handgun. A phallic construct used by various characters, both men and women, in the film, a gun is a statement of immediate power and a symbol of death. As the film proceeds, it becomes a figurative element that signals liberation from various oppressive situations. In contrast to the handgun, there is the Lion of Judah, a real lion (Bongo) who appears in cameo throughout the film whenever Rude informs the audience that the lion (the black community) is on the loose. The lion signifies the power of the community that has been caged but on this Easter weekend is free. The film makes reference to the stereotypical roles assigned to black males in white-speak—the athlete, represented by Jordan, the gay amateur boxer; the rapist, represented by Reece, who is the Cain figure in the film; and the drug dealer, represented by Reece's brother Luke, also known as "the General." In contrast, the three black female characters are free of stereotypes. Rude is the radio DJ, Jessica is a cop, and Maxine is a window dresser who lives in a room filled with mannequins. These women have positions in society outside of the identity prisons constructed for their male brothers.

Three powerful aspects of *Rude* distinguish its cinematic expression as belonging to the black community. The first is its directed use of music, especially song, to establish the cultural blackness of the film; much of that blackness

is intoned by female voices singing either American black spirituals or reggae. As a signifier of a creative identity, the film's music crosses the normal boundary between dialogic and diegetic exegesis, creating an integrative environment that makes parts of the film seem like a musical. The second is the language of the film, which is filled with the oral vulgarity of street-talk: fuck you, motherfucker, cocksucker, and so on. It is a language of the underclass, a form of English that is used only by the marginalized and that suggests their powerlessness. Rude calls it the "disenfranchised diasporic voice," and its *joual* nature indicates how language expresses class identity. The black women in this film—who have valid social and economic roles—do not speak in this self-denigrating manner: their language approximates "standard" English, the language of the dominant culture. The third distinctive characteristic of *Rude* is Virgo's specific cinematographic method—the signature panning shot that he uses frequently to move from scene to scene as he changes from one of the three stories to another, reminiscent of Lepage's track shots in *Le Confessionnal*. A less obvious element in Virgo's directorial repertoire is the deliberately staged quality of certain scenes, such as that of the four naked men in the shower. Such scenes are purposefully theatrical. No attempt is made to mask their constructed positioning for the audience. They are not meant to be "natural."

But these artistic techniques, while a sign of creativity and thoughtfulness, are not the main thrust of the film. Instead, it is the symbolic role of each character that is the driver. First, there is Luke (Maurice Dean Wint), the hero of the film and Virgo's alter ego. An artist who has just been released from prison for a drug-related crime, Luke is penniless but talented: on a basketball court in the ghetto, he has created a massive wall mural filled with figures crushed by violence, pain, and suffering. But his art cannot earn him a living, so he is tempted by his former criminal profession. Second, there is his brother Reece (Clark Johnson), a street-level drug dealer working for Yankee (Stephen Shelley), a white drug boss. Reece is envious of his brother's stature and has a bad habit of pulling out a pistol to intimidate. He is the Cain figure, ruled by emotion rather than reason, and he is under the aegis of white society, having internalized its racist attitudes through the tactics of Yankee: this has made him a dysfunctional and conflicted character. He is the exploited and oppressed one. Third, there is Yankee, who is the white gaze personified. This gaze is the ruling power that defines the black community and creates it in the

Rude (Clement Virgo, 1994). Courtesy of The Feature Film Project.

image that serves white interests. Yankee is the target of the black community's resentment. Fourth, we have Jordan (Richard Chevolleau), the amateur boxer who is struggling with his gay identity and who represents the diversity as well as the homophobia of the mainstream black community. As a boxer, he symbolizes the powerful black athlete, but that identity is subverted by his gay identity. Virgo is clear that the identities with which black males must live are constructed outside the community, which then internalizes its oppression through stereotyping. Jordan has to face the homophobic taunts of other black men, who use their putdowns as a way of enhancing their own already wounded masculinity.

The female characters are not as well developed. Jessica (Melanie Nicholls-King)—a police officer as well as Luke's partner and the mother of his son, Johnny (Ashley Brown)—represents a working-class level of success. She is an authority figure and the person from the community who is integrated into society, but as a junior partner. For example, when she is in the squad car, she is not in the driver's seat—a white male officer is—much like Luke's situation in Yankee's car, with Yankee in the driver's seat. Maxine (Rachael Crawford), a window dresser who lives in a shabby room filled with mostly white mannequins, is exploited by her videotaping boyfriend. Eventually, both she and Luke free themselves from their tormentors. The commentary by Rude (Sharon M. Lewis) on these various struggles is the glue that provides an interpretive gloss to the film. Her verbal jabs to Milliard, the "we'll get you and close you down" police officer, symbolize the struggle between the community and the criminalizing power of the dominant society. If the fate of African Canadian masculinity in *Rude* is one of hopelessness and criminality, Virgo's representation of the Rude character suggests her deity-like status lifts her to the realm of the all-knowing, watchful mother. That the Caribbean female voice is given such authority in the film implies that the diasporic Caribbean masculinity in the context of Toronto and Canada requires a female equivalent to overcome servitude.

The spatiality of the film creates a sense of enclosure, of imprisonment within the brick walls of a ghetto, where almost everyone is from the black minority. This sense of entrapment is further highlighted by the visuality of the film. Most of the external public spaces in the film are shot at night, with artificial street lighting, suggestive of the "white" light that illuminates the night

of the males. This makes even open spaces like parks seem threatening, with the street lighting being similar to a prison's probing search lights. Sheila Petty concludes that the cityscapes in the film are coded as "the collective powers of white Eurocentric oppression."[29] This suggests that the spaces inhabited by its characters are all ghettoized and that they are entrapped. The theme of attempted escape from the ghetto is foregrounded. That Luke is released from prison only to enter the prison of the ghetto and its restrictions is a statement about the nature of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto. The orality of the film reflects the class division in the Caribbean community between those who speak in street slang (and are associated with criminal activity) and those who speak reasonably standard English (and are relatively well-integrated, law-abiding citizens). And then there is Rude, who speaks from what she calls "my brown voice," in a manner reminiscent of dub poetry, or what *New York Times* reviewer Stephen Holden calls "quasi-poetic rapping."[30] This oral form, which Rude has adopted as a cryptic "speaking in tongues," is filled with prophecy of revolt and justice. At one point, Rude—as a Cassandra-like oracle—declares that "Armageddon has begun."

Perhaps the most provocative feature of *Rude* is its use of religious imagery and associations. First, the film turns Toronto into Babylon, reflecting the Rastafarian claim that life in Jamaica is akin to the Jewish biblical exile. Africa is the New Jerusalem, and exile and enslavement are central themes of Rastafarianism. Implicit in the film's characterization of Toronto as Mohawk territory (its precolonial identity) is a critique of settler society that also carries religious connotations. The whole history of European religious conversion as part of the settlement process is suggested by this reminder that the urban space of Toronto was once land that belonged to the Other. The film's deployment of religion is also highly hybridized: Christian imagery (the equation of black suffering with martyrdom in the film's wall art), African American religious music and song, and Rude's references to Easter, the Passion, and the Resurrection are blended with Jamaican Rastafarianism and the figure of the Lion of Judah and its African connotation.

Class divisions exist not only between the community and the dominant society but also within the community itself. These divisions are manifested through gender and the leadership role of women in the community. In *Rude,* Virgo has created a diasporic Toronto in which a minority feels imprisoned,

subverting the dominant discourse of the city as a metropolis of economic opportunity and cultural achievement. At the same time, the film makes Toronto a city-state unto itself. Toronto is what Canada is: it exists for itself and not in relationship to some other "hegemonic centre."[31] Jenny Burman reports that when Virgo attended the launch of *Rude* at Cannes, he claimed that he did not recognize himself as a "Canadian" filmmaker but more as a Torontonian.[32] For him, Canadian identity was an ideological construct that had no relevance to his urbancentric art.

The response of another community to Toronto life is explored in Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood*. That community's Toronto stands in sharp contrast to the Toronto of the Caribbean diaspora. Mehta describes diaspora as a multigenerational entity in which tradition and assimilation are constantly at odds—an entity that is always looking both ways, thereby creating its own specific hybridity that is quite distinct from the one represented in *Rude*. That *Bollywood/Hollywood* is a comedy rather than a drama only heightens the difference.

DEEPA MEHTA'S PLAY ON IDENTITY IN *BOLLYWOOD/HOLLYWOOD*

By the time *Bollywood/Hollywood* appeared in 2001, the era of "identity politics" in Canada's cultural communities had abated significantly, and along with it, the earlier reactive passion that had infused *Rude*. Diasporic creativity could now move on toward a sense of ambiguity and self-deprecation. For instance, *Sam and Me,* Deepa Mehta's 1991 film about South Asian immigrants struggling to survive in Toronto, mixed light-heartedness with poignancy—the film might be classified as tragi-comedy. But a decade later, her *Bollywood/Hollywood* espoused the comedic impulse. In the language of the new film, Mehta eschewed the references to racism and prejudice that had defined relations between the dominant white society and the nonwhite minorities in the early 1990s, instead concentrating on conflicts internal to the community.

Bollywood/Hollywood's roots are closer to the comic spirit of Torontonian Srivinas Krishna's *Masala* (1992) than to Mehta's *Sam and Me*. The term *masala* refers to a mixture, a potpourri of elements, that is, to hybridity. Lysandra Woods describes the film *Masala* as a "concoction of postmodern

pastiche—high camp, musical numbers, otherworldly communication, historical incidents and caricature."[33] There is certainly an element of masala in *Bollywood/Hollywood.*

Bollywood/Hollywood is set in Toronto and tells the story of a wealthy Indo-Canadian family via Bollywood filmmaking clichés. The film opened in Canada on mainstream film screens. Although it enjoyed commercial success and international sales, it was met with a general lack of attention from academic critics, who were much more interested in Mehta's dramatic Indian trilogy.[34] The film was viewed as lacking in gravitas. This could be a matter of its genre, but it could also be a matter of an unconscious orientalism that finds films set in India more appealing than those set at home. But most likely, it is simply an issue of feminist interest in films that portray female subjectivity in a provocative and affirming manner. While this is present to a degree in *Bollywood/Hollywood,* it is subsumed by culture clash, heterosexual marriage, and farcical elements associated with Bollywood codes. Marrying Indian popular culture—as expressed by Bollywood film's formulaic song-and-dance, lovesick narratives—to a North American production suggested to academic critics a lack of substantive material for serious analysis. An exception is Amy Fung, who took a serious look at hybridity in the film. She argues that because Bollywood films had become "a generator of 'Indianness'" or an essentialized national identity for both Indians and non-Indians, they simply perpetuated "a fictional and idealized world of India"; Mehta, says Fung, was playing with this in order to make other points.[35] Regarding the matter of urbanity, the film has a great deal to offer: it is certainly on par with *Rude* because it exposes another community's approach to its metropolitan diasporic experience. But Fung argues that Toronto is nothing but a "backdrop" to identity issues.[36] I'm not so sure.

Deepa Mehta was twenty-three when she arrived in Toronto in 1973, after having married a Canadian. By the time *Bollywood/Hollywood* was released, in 2001, she had spent almost as much of her life in Toronto as she had growing up in India. The film represents this duality, but more importantly, it expresses the hybridity that her art assumed in Canada. The clash of generations whose respective experiences are so different, the struggle between tradition and new ways of being, the vagaries of inter- and intra-ethnic relations, and the issues of integrating a diasporic identity into the mainstream are framed by conflicted gender roles, different languages, and class divides. The imperatives of Indian

culture—in particular, the Bollywood formula result in the representation of quite distinct Torontos in *Rude* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*. Mehta's Toronto is a satirized urban universe in which misunderstanding, linguistic hybridity, and familial traumas are played to full comedic effect. The Indo-Canadian community continues to entertain itself with Bollywood products, so it can read this film in a way that a non-Indo-Canadian audience cannot.

Bollywood/Hollywood owes a great deal to its predecessor, *Masala*. The fantastical song-and-dance routines that are the bedrock of Bollywood film-making, themes of generational and gender conflict, linguistic hybridity in diasporic communities, and the blend of humour and tragedy that governs the inner workings of minority communities were introduced by *Masala* a decade earlier. The Indian deity Krishna appears in *Masala* wearing a Toronto Maple Leafs hockey sweater and intervenes provocatively in the life of the community. He is presented as a campy, egomaniacal trickster figure. The film makes direct references to the Air India tragedy of the mid-1980s, when an airliner flying from Toronto to India was blown up by Sikh extremists. At one point, the film has a Bollywood dance number in which the dancers are dressed in country-and-western costumes, emphasizing the blending of Indian and North American cultures. But a 1990s edge enters the film when some white punks kill the Indo-Canadian anti-hero in a racist incident, providing a sombre narrative closure. The death symbolizes the inevitable death of the old culture in that the anti-hero's name is also Krishna. *Masala*'s auteur filmmaker, Srinivas Krishna, takes great pleasure in contrasting the South Asian community, both Hindu and Sikh, with its foil, the Mounties, in their dress-parade red tunics. The ethnoracial divide is similar to that of the Caribbean community and its engagement with Euro-Canadian-dominated police power, but the story is told in a comic, slapstick way, which takes the edge off the issue.

At the same time that Krishna was making *Masala,* Mehta was producing and directing *Sam and Me,* working with a script written by Ranjit Chowdhry, a recent Indo-Canadian immigrant to Canada who stars in the film as Nikhil, the just-off-the-plane newcomer who has yet to learn the ropes. He is "helped" by his Uncle Chetan (Om Puri), who seeks to benefit economically from his quick integration into Canadian society. Chowdhry's script frequently plays with naming. Nikhil becomes "Nick" in Canada, suggesting transformation, while his elderly charge, Zeyda, becomes Sam. Both of these involve naming

that belongs within family and community and naming that functions only in the external society. The immigrant experience is presented as one of exploitation and denigration by both earlier immigrants from the community and outsiders, and the film contains references to instances of racism that fit the early 1990s sense of alienation. Journalist Cathy Dunphy, writing in the *Toronto Star,* quotes Mehta as making the following assessment in the early 1990s of minority-themed films: "In the United States there's overt anger and you get Spike Lee's movies; in England there's anger and *Sammy and Rose Get Laid* gets made. In Toronto there is a passivity and very little interconnection between the white mainstream and the so-called visible minorities."[37] In *Sam and Me,* Mehta tried to overcome that void of interconnection by having Nikhil and his uncle work for a Jewish family business. When Nikhil rebels against his uncle's scheming and embraces old Sam, he exhibits the ability to "straddle both worlds and not be intimated."[38] Mehta claims the same attitude for herself, making her a consciously constructed transnational filmmaker whose art is a cultural hybrid. Jacqueline Levitin argues that a transnational filmmaker's narrative source is "memory filtered through nostalgia."[39] In her Indo-Canadian films, Mehta is filtering the present through direct experience. The emphasis on standing in two worlds and not being afraid of either may be a subjective stance for her as a filmmaker, but it also represents a complicated objective reality. *Sam and Me* did not receive Telefilm Canada funding, because it didn't get enough points to be considered a Canadian film. Mehta was happy to use Indian actors, including Chowdhry, who plays Nikhil and had only arrived in Canada a few years earlier. "There is a lot of me in Nikhil," Mehta confessed, indicating that the immigrant experience is fundamental to her identity and was critical to her understanding of the constraints of Canadian society at the time *Sam and Me* was made.[40] The result is "a bleak picture of Canadian-style pluralism," according to one film reviewer.[41] The film, however, became a calling card for Mehta, who won an honourable mention for *Sam and Me* in the Cannes Caméra d'Or competition (Best First Film).

The urban setting in *Sam and Me* includes a men's rooming house, where the new immigrants carry on a convivial camaraderie while toiling separately at menial jobs and the posh digs of the owners of the businesses. The class divisions are a clear focus of the film, as they were in *Masala,* except that in *Masala,* the class divisions were within the community itself, between the

sari merchant and the postal employee, both Indo-Canadians. Exploitation occurs within the community's own class structure rather than in relationship to the external mainstream as in *Sam and Me*. In his article "Am I a Canadian Writer?" M. G. Vassanji, a prominent Canadian novelist of Indian descent, raises important issues of hybridity and identity that apply to the work of Deepa Mehta. He contends that the characters that an immigrant writer invents can only resonate with the audience if those characters are "rooted deep in something, in a history, a culture, a psychological makeup."[42] In other words, they require both a sociological authenticity and a mythological dimension that gives them certain universal human characteristics. Out of this mix, Vassanji sees his work and that of others like him as belonging to a category that could be called "Canadian Postcolonial."[43] In film, Mehta is the prime practitioner of the Canadian Postcolonial.

Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood* continued her postcolonial sensibility because it highlights the diasporic reality in conflict with the mainstream and also within its own porous boundaries. Just as *Sam and Me* contains a microcosm of multiracial and multicultural Toronto (Asian, African, South Asian) in the various nationalities inhabiting the crowded rooming house, so too *Bollywood/Hollywood* plays on the diversity and interchangeability of non-white identities in highlighting hybridity as the urban norm. Vassanji believes that the new urbanity that characterizes Toronto, Vancouver, and, to a lesser extent, Montréal needs artistic and political recognition. "If ten percent of a nation resides in one city," he writes, presumably referring to Toronto, "then a cityscape deserves to be recognized as being essential, as essential as the Rockies, as the Prairies, the Atlantic."[44] Creating equivalence between the pluralistic urban world and its hybrid cultures, on the one hand, and the typical geographic determinants of identity found in an older sense of Canada, on the other, is what the postcolonial narrative is all about. This deconstruction of national identity promoted by Vassanji is precisely what Mehta achieves in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. The syncretism implied in her work is meant to construct an urban imaginary that erases national boundaries in favour of a transnationality and an integrative urbanity. The remnants of national identity are precisely that—remnants. They are the ashes or traces of a world that is only vaguely reconstructed in the new environment. While Mehta's Indian-themed films like *Fire* and *Water* unflinchingly tackle social issues

within Indian society and history, *Sam and Me* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* face Canadian issues in the context of a conflicted, diasporic Toronto.

There are certain issues of cultural politics at work in films like *Bollywood/Hollywood* that are addressed to diverse theatrical audiences: Indo-Canadians seeking a cinematic self-image, diasporic Indians in countries outside of Canada who can relate to the narrative and characters, and non-Indo-Canadians with their own ideas of the South Asian community. A final audience is the industry itself, which in the late 1990s witnessed a growing interest in what might be called "crossover films" in which diasporic South Asians interacted with their home culture at some level and in various locales, but did so with clearly Westernized contexts and subcultures.[45] The term *crossover* suggests the transnationality that lies at the heart of diasporic identity, but it also refers to the interaction between Indian themes and Hollywood subjects. The key film in this genre is Mira Nair's comedy *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which received the Golden Lion (Il Leone d'Oro) award at the 2001 Venice Film Festival and had a wide release in North America. The culmination of the crossover genre's legitimacy came when *Slumdog Millionaire* received the Oscar for Best Picture in 2009. Here was a film and story set in contemporary India, directed and co-written by a British filmmaker using primarily English as the language of the film, and based on a novel written by an Indian living in the UK diaspora. *Bollywood/Hollywood* fit seamlessly into this global cultural phenomenon, but its Canadian roots gave it an extra dimension and a certain burden. For example, a review of the film in the Hollywood-based industry journal *Variety* described it as being "constructed in the vein of a corny Bollywood movie."[46] For the reviewer, the reference point for the film was India rather than Canada, and the use of the term *corny* implies a certain lack of understanding of this foreign genre. But these references are only part of the narrative structure and dialogue. The film bespeaks Toronto, and its Canadian references are evident to Canadian audiences.

The Canadian aspects of the film weave a common thread of diasporic South Indian culture from *Masala* and *Sam and Me* in the early 1990s right through to *Cooking with Stella* (2009), which is set in New Delhi, stars Canadian actor and filmmaker Don McKellar, and is directed and co-written by Deepa Mehta's brother, Dilip Mehta. The Canadian media's response to *Bollywood/Hollywood* was celebratory because of the comedic genre and the

use of light-hearted satire to represent life in the Canadian diaspora. While scholar Jigna Desai claims that "diaspora functions as a postnational critique," film journalists eschewed this focus in favour of a promotional, noncritical approach that celebrated the stars from India who appear in the film.[47] They include Canadian-born Lisa Ray, who was a high-profile model in India at the time. Film critic Geoff Pevere points to "the particular urban reality" found in the film, "where cultures . . . collide and converge in a manner that gives the city its very particular polyglot flavour."[48] The concept of conflict and convergence suggests the tension that exists in any multiethnic environment, while the concept of the polyglot city is a direct reference to the new multiracial urbanity of Toronto. How Mehta translates that diversity into a Bollywood-style Canadian film is of particular interest in this study.

As a transnational film, *Bollywood/Hollywood* is highly Torontocentric. The film is about neither Mumbai nor Los Angeles, which are the two cities referenced in the title; rather, it is about an interstitial space that is particular to diasporic urban communities who are in North America but not of it. Trapped between nostalgia and integration, their evolving identities are framed by a tension between fantasy and reality. The diaspora is not so much hyphenated in a dualistic way as it is sliced diagonally into an uneasy unity, as the title suggests. That the identity of a community can be conveyed through a campy romantic comedy that is, as non-Indian Torontonian Geoff Pevere calls it, an "accurate portrayal of Toronto's distinctive cultural circumstances" is indicative of the circumscription implied in comedy.[49] The film includes a cross-dressing chauffeur named Rocky (Ranjit Chowdhry) and a Shakespeare-spouting grandma-ji (Dina Pathak), as well as the trope of the successful and handsome young South Asian businessman (Rahul Khanna) and the wily beauty of Sue Singh (Lisa Ray). Mehta herself called her film "my love song to Toronto."[50] Described by the Indian star of the film, Rahul Khanna, as a film "about displaced Indians who are torn between the culture they are in and the culture they've left behind," *Bollywood/Hollywood* aims for and achieves a high state of hybridity.[51]

The urban culture represented in the film is one that deconstructs Toronto's formerly staid Euro-Canadian identity. When Mehta locates a Bollywood-style dance number with a multiracial cast against Toronto's greyish-white downtown skyline, she is playing with urban iconography, making

the dance number symbolize multiple worlds and identities that now define Toronto. The film gathers its energy from the tension between an exclusive universe of ethnic monoculturalism, represented by the Indo-Canadian family, and an inclusive, pluralistic world, symbolized by Rahul's outsider friends. While hybridity is evident from the title of the film, there is a richer vein at work here as well—what Fung calls the film's "web of cross-cultural intertexts."[52] By this, she means the richness of cultural identifiers playing off against each other, indicative of how little or how much an immigrant community and its individual members have been assimilated.

Bollywood/Hollywood has several significant markers that code it as a parody of Bollywood films. First, its visuality is dominated with the rich hues of ochre and blue in the familial home and with the white Nehru jackets worn by the male lead; all these colours carry cultural significance. Second, after the death of Rahul's white girlfriend early in the narrative, the film pointedly lacks any prominent non-Indian characters. They are simply irrelevant to the plot. The only white characters in the film appear in a private school scene (as extras), the Hollywood-style opening dance sequence, and the aforementioned dance scene at Rahul's apartment. Otherwise, the whole film is occupied by South Asians. The filmmaker therefore conveys a sense of interiority that essentially excludes other nationalities. The only "racial" conflict in the film is between Rahul's younger brother and an Asian who bullies him at their private school. This ethnocentric ethos brings the film close to the Bollywood model. Third, the film's orality is hybrid. Whether it is the grandmother who specializes in well-known quotes from Shakespeare and switches to Hindi when it suits her, or the dance sequences sung in English to imitate Hollywood musicals and in Hindi to imitate Bollywood, or the occasional use of subtitles, the film is a fluid mix of languages typical of diasporic cultures, where both the home language and the acquired language are fully at play. Finally, the class content of the film imitates the upper-class orientation of Bollywood films, in which wealth, status, and caste play significant roles.

After Rahul acquires a beautiful companion (Sue Singh, played by Lisa Ray), whom he has hired to act as an Indian substitute for his late girlfriend, the film moves toward a more positive outlook with more daytime scenes and shiny street scenes. Sue is articulate and offers a feminist reading of her persona. She also adds certain Canadian-film allusions by going to the Club

Exotica and having a poster from Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* on the wall in her room, along with a *Hiroshima Mon Amour* poster, suggesting that she is an intellectual with an art-house rather than a Bollywood sensibility. In this way, Mehta references her film in relation to Egoyan's *Exotica,* thereby suggesting a connection with his Toronto. Sue's cosmopolitanism contrasts with her father's fascination with Bollywood films, which he names and from which he performs songs. Clearly, Sue Singh is the Mehta figure. The use of Ranjit Chowdhry, the writer of *Sam and Me,* as a campy, cross-dressing chauffeur for the family limo is a reference to her own cinematic oeuvre. Since the film is a romantic comedy, it contains various stereotypical roles for males and females that follow the melodramatic, soap-opera tone of the film. The emphasis on the physical attractiveness of the two leads is simply part of the package. But with our focus on Mehta's transnational construction of Toronto and the cultural elements that dominate this particular film, we can see two major poles: one is the interiority of Indian life, described in the film by Rahul as the "time-wrap" of traditional practices, and the other is the streetscapes and urbanity of a familiar Toronto core of skyscrapers, identifiable to the film's Canadian audience. These exterior shots establish Toronto as a place of intense urban structure, of high-rise downtown lifestyles contrasting with suburban wealth and opulence. Obviously, the latter is viewed negatively because it rejects hybridity in favour of monoculture. The urban imaginary in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is torn between the concrete freeways, expensive cars, and penthouse pleasures of the son and the staid, protected home of his matriarchal mother. While the film contains class and religious elements, these are presented as issues internal to the community that do not distract from the mythological engagement with Indian film stereotypes. Every Bollywood film is a ritualized performance of fantasy so unreal as to create a universe of its own with reference only to itself.

Besides the comic gender roles highlighted in the film, the clash of acculturated youth with their traditional parents and grandparents is one that resonates in every diasporic community. The dominance of female personas in numerous scenes and in all the dance sequences is indicative of female authorship. Seeking to make both Indian and Western audiences comfortable with the milieu that the film represents, Mehta skilfully blended a Hollywood Cinderella story of a poor, beautiful girl marrying a rich and handsome Prince

Charming with a Bollywood story of wealth and caste, of Indian cultural values in conflict with Western values. Although Western audiences may not be familiar with the conventions of Bollywood films and the roots of its stock personae and plots in traditional Indian mythology, Mehta's comfort with both Hollywood and Bollywood codes means that she is able to adopt both formulas, while establishing a gentle postcolonial critique using the film's general silliness as a form of satire and parody.

One example of *Bollywood/Hollywood*'s hybridity is the use of romantic kissing between the two leads in a way favoured by Hollywood in expressing a love story juxtaposed with the avoidance of kissing in public in the Indian family sequences in harmony with Bollywood standards. This blend is easy to achieve in a comedy that emphasizes the kitschy and the playful. The urban imaginary in Mehta's film creates a sense of the diaspora as an island in an ocean of concrete urbanity, where life is formulated as true escapism, as it is in both Hollywood and Bollywood musicals. While this escapism has a distinct cultural value compared to the unrelenting magic realism of *Rude,* it also reflects both the historical evolution of minority discourse during one decade in the life of Toronto and Canada and the self-image of hybridity held by one diasporic community.

Jigna Desai, in her important 2004 study of South Asian diasporic film, offers insight into the industry context in which Mehta made the film. She considers Hollywood cinema as "hegemonic" in relationship to Canadian cinema and so views "migrant filmmakers" like Mehta as crucial to the development of Canadian cinema through their connections with other cinematic traditions.[53] She links Mehta with Atom Egoyan, the Egyptian-born, Armenian Canadian film director, whose signature film *Exotica* is referenced in Mehta's film. While Egoyan's film represents an ethnicity framed as alien, Mehta's transnationality shows a diasporic community that seems integrated and economically secure.

When a film has a diverse spectatorship, the author seeks to navigate a body of disparate cultural knowledge that may be in conflict internally. While *Rude* clearly represents an oppositional mode to all of its audiences, *Bollywood/Hollywood* does not. *Rude'*s territoriality is a localized Toronto reality circumscribed by racism, poverty, criminality, and oppression, while *Bollywood/Hollywood*'s territoriality is highly mobile as the film transitions

from wealthy suburbs to downtown penthouse apartments through streets filled with South Asian retailers. For the South Asian community, Toronto becomes a landscape of success. Stuart Hall's explanation of this stance as a "negotiated mode" that does not challenge the dominant culture's texts fits *Bollywood/Hollywood*.[54] In fact, the equation between the genres of Hollywood and Bollywood that the film espouses is one that seeks to blur racial, class, and gender lines in favour of a globalized universality. The national gaze embodied in the Bollywood film meets the national gaze embodied in the Hollywood film to create a transnational sensibility that Mehta's film celebrates. *Bollywood/ Hollywood* satirically identifies a universe of material success, which validates the South Asian diasporic experience. The lack of class or racial oppression in the world of wealthy South Asian Canadians fits the idea of a Bollywood casting, and it stands in stark contrast to the gritty universe of the African Canadian diaspora in the same city.

The overall ideological slant of the film focuses on the hetero-normativity crucial to the South Asian diasporic community. Whereas the theme of homosexuality is visualized in *Rude,* it is made comic in the character of the ever-watchful drag queen Rocky in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. While Mehta provides "an anti-colonial and postcolonial critique of . . . masculinity and male sexuality" in her Indian films such as *Fire,* this critique is renegotiated in *Bollywood/Hollywood* toward the power of the *mater familias* figures who rule the family as all-powerful widows.[55] In their role of maintaining social status and traditional values in the domestic sphere, they are overseen by the patriarchal portrait of the late father figure, whose contribution to the film is primarily a series of Canadian sports-related metaphors by which he tries to guide his son's life. The feminism of the film comes up against the requirements of the Bollywood genre, which makes the film a real blending. Desai argues that Mehta, as a transnational filmmaker, is always working in a Westernized cultural mode, whether in her Indian trilogy or her Indo-Canadian films. In both cases, there is a "contested field of the nation," whether that nation is Canada or India.[56] Yet there is little contestation between the Indo-Canadian community and the rest of Canada in this particular film. The national identity question and the negative consequences for women who are oppressed by traditional beliefs and roles is played out more fully in the Indian trilogy, where Mehta's feminist critique is more evident.

What she is contesting in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is the nationalist-realist tradition in Canadian identity, which she aims to subvert with her South Asian Canadian urbanity. It is a tradition that makes no sense and carries no meaning for the immigrant community who cannot identify with it. Canada's diasporic communities are situated in the urban world. Her rejection of the nationalist-realist geographic narrative makes the urban imaginary representative of diversity both as a demographic reality and as a culturally integrative fantasy. The Bollywood musical form is well adapted to conveying this sense of multicultural and transnational identity because it appeals to a universal entertainment factor in its song and dance. It does not seek to challenge in the way that a drama like *Rude* challenges. In painting the South Asian diaspora in a comic mode, she has removed intergroup tensions from her film. Canadian urbanity as a site of liberation from traditional communalism and as a wondrous melting pot of races and cultures is something that is only alluded to. While *Rude* brings its critique of an oppressive urban environment to the forefront through the film's authorial voice-over, *Bollywood/Hollywood* is much more subtle in its message. The source of that comedic discourse is a postcolonial Torontonian space that differs from that of Caribbean Canadians. The differing urbanities in the two films are signifiers of Toronto's diverse realities and the differing postcolonial discourses from which they originate. The issue of racialized power relations that is highlighted in *Rude* is missing in Mehta's film, although it was present in *Sam and Me*. *Rude* radiates a powerful spirit of uprising and resistance, while *Bollywood/Hollywood* contains no suggestion of an oppressive power other than tradition. Even though both films deal with nonwhite diasporic communities, their discourses are radically different. This suggests that the diversity of Toronto society is sufficiently powerful to generate a diverse cultural expression in film.

While Toronto is a fully multicultural and multiracial society, other Canadian cities are less so and thus represent a different kind of urbanity. This is especially true of Prairie cities such as Winnipeg. Winnipeg retains a strong mythology of Euro-Canadian ethnicity going back to its agrarian past, when the region was settled over a century ago. Winnipeg's Guy Maddin, who comes from Icelandic immigrant roots, has created a series of anachronistic, black-and-white tributes to an earlier filmmaking that reflect the city's orientation to the past. While Toronto is the major destination for all immigrants to Canada,

Winnipeg is a minor one. This has allowed an indigenous cinematic expression to evolve that is far from the media-hyped atmosphere of Toronto. Whereas Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver have viable film industries located in their cores, Winnipeg is a marginalized film world. This void contributes to representations of archaic film forms by Maddin, a maker of idiosyncratic films. The result is a city like no other.

6

THE CITY OF TRANSGRESSIVE DESIRES

Melodramatic Absurdity in Maddin's The Saddest Music in the World *(2003) and* My Winnipeg *(2007)*

While Montréal and Toronto have attracted a plurality of cinematic interpretations, smaller Canadian cities generally lack the critical mass of filmmakers to do the same. Winnipeg stands at the same level as Québec City: it has only one prominent narrative filmmaker, Guy Maddin. Jason Woloski, writing in 2003, described Maddin's importance in the province and the country: "In the pond of the Manitoba film industry, he is easily the biggest fish there is. . . . Within the pond that is the Canadian film industry, Maddin as fish becomes a bit smaller."[1] Since 2003, Maddin's rise in the film world has accelerated. The two films discussed in this chapter, *The Saddest Music in the World* and *My Winnipeg,* have made major contributions to his growing stature both nationally and internationally. Maddin has gained this reputation by reimagining contemporary cinema in a style that so far has defied emulation. His creative

play on archaic film styles from the late silent and early talkie period (circa 1930) is unique in cinema. When *The Artist,* a silent film, won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2012, Maddin's vision received a small measure of validation as a postmodernist conceit.

In comparison to the diverse films about Toronto or Montréal discussed earlier, the imaginings of this solo author formulate a singular cinematic Winnipeg.[2] Maddin's construction of Winnipeg is tied to an idiosyncratic artistic expression that makes its urban imaginary difficult to dissect. Maddin confirmed this difficulty when he explained his admiration for surrealist filmmaking, for what he described as "the idea of using completely disparate or unconnected objects and combining them to create a subconscious product and to create an indecipherable effect."[3] Deciphering Maddin's Winnipeg is indeed as convoluted a task as deciphering films by the earlier surrealists.

In order to discover Maddin's Winnipeg and to evaluate whether his work speaks for a wider sense of the city, one must first be able to read his style, which is remarkably nonconformist. He is the postmodernist *par excellence*: his deliberately retro film style is a playful "cocktail of contradictions" that aligns with the pastiche approach of postmodern art in borrowing elements from the past and wedding them to the present.[4] In the two films discussed here, the use of this style to recreate Winnipeg leads the audience to see Winnipeg through an archaic lens that automatically turns the city into a historical artifact, a presence whose past is all absorbing. Winnipeg appears as a memory, a reconstructed past, a dream of what once was. While Lepage does something similar in *Le Confessionnal* through a straightforward use of flashbacks, his film always grounds its audience in the present. Maddin, in contrast, takes us immediately into the past of cinema and therefore the past of Winnipeg.

Both Robert Lepage and Guy Maddin were born in the cities featured in their films and both have created films that directly address their experience of growing up. *Le Confessionnal*'s discussion of cinematic art represented by Hitchcock's *I Confess* posits a Hollywood Other that works to define the francophone city, its inhabitants, and their cultural identity vis-à-vis an Anglo-American opposite. Maddin reaches out to the otherness of the past in cinema by overtly referencing a variety of archaic black-and-white forerunners characterized by melodramatic gestures whose communicative power has dissipated, even disappeared, after eighty years of filmic development.

Using the forgotten codes of an earlier silent-screen language, he transforms what was into what is.

During the Q&A at a screening of *My Winnipeg* in Calgary, Maddin declared, "It is my mission to mythologize the place."[5] That certainly is a heady goal because it moves beyond the platitudes and stereotypes of public discourse about a city's identity toward something resembling childhood enchantment. Non-Winnipegger Jason McBride visited Winnipeg during the shooting of Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World* in 2003 and reported that the city held little charm. But an entirely different Winnipeg existed inside the warehouse that served as the studio for *Saddest Music*. This was Maddin's version of Depression-era Winnipeg—an enchanted realm of song, dance, and libidinal intrigue. The difference between the external real (physical) world open to sight and the surreal (psychological) internal world open to the imagination highlights the enjoyment that artifice can produce. Maddin's ability to create a fantasy world as an inviting simulacrum of his superficially dull city is a reflection of both personal imaginative energy and the transformative power of cinema. The very concept of mythology used by Maddin suggests a legendary past that is always larger than life.

The impulse to mythologize also drove Lepage in *Le Confessionnal* and serves as a testimonial to the possibilities that come with creative engagement with a city on its own terms—as itself—rather than as a stand-in for some other place or historical period. This "as itself" does not refer to the documentarist's struggle to articulate the factual or the actual via some resemblance to a socio-economic urban stasis; rather, it means the discovery within the filmmaker of an inner truth that links personal experience and understanding of an urban community with an auteurist's projection of that community.[6]

Smaller Canadian cities, like Winnipeg, have their own distinct history, which means that their postmodern urban imaginary engages with the cultural remnants of national realism, as well as history. The marginalization of a specific urban experience (life in contemporary Winnipeg, for example) within the national discourse dealing with what is important, valuable, and influential in urban matters (that is, in Montréal and Toronto) offers the filmmaker from such a marginalized centre an opportunity to codify that city in a way in which those who know it or have lived in it can comprehend. Maddin enters his own urban imaginary with such force and uncompromised style that Woloski

rightly refers to him as "one of the most original, important filmmakers working today, regardless of geography or genre."[7]

Maddin's highly original urban imaginary embraces ghosts of geographic determinism and once-popular cinematic conventions to construct a carnival of contradictions. In his vision, geography and history become mythology stripped of rational substance. Silent cinema, with its melodramatic gestures of pain and suffering, is transposed into the present, resulting in modes of expression that audiences read as comedic. Because Maddin has chosen to represent the world and Winnipeg through the artifice of early 1930s black-and-white cinema technologies and the melodrama genre, he has made the city magical to a contemporary audience. This is the strength that underlies the ability of his films to speak to a wide audience who may not know Winnipeg as a socioeconomic entity. Winnipeg as a socioeconomic entity lacks any magical stature. It is an old, rundown city with a central core that, in some areas, is akin to inner-city ghettos in the United States and with a civic pride linked to nostalgia for a former greatness. Winnipeg, in the agrarian period of the early twentieth century, was the metropolis of the Prairie region, funnelling homesteaders into the rural West. When the West as an agrarian powerhouse came to an end after World War II (and the Depression) and Winnipeg went into a steady decline. The rise and fall of this city is the background for Maddin's interpretation of his home town. His backward-looking films imitate the city's own "formerness." Maddin was born in 1956, when the still-vibrant city was starting on the road of gradual demise, so his half-century of Winnipeg life parallels the city's transformation from metropolitan centre to marginality. His use of cinematic codes that were once central to the spectator but are now marginal or esoteric is a replay of the city's historical trajectory. In a sense, contemporary Winnipeg is as alien to its former glory as his audience is to silent cinema. When Maddin tries to resurrect that historical past, he does so against the background of a diminished present.

A crucial aspect of Maddin's union of geography (the real) and genre (the theatrical) is its inherent potential for visual innovation. The two opposing forces of materiality and artifice create a conflicted site where the artist is free to create whichever resolution he wishes. Because Maddin recreates archaic film styles that the contemporary audience finds alien, he can bring to his films his own creative codes drawn from three-quarters of a century of cinematic

development. He is a contemporary who gazes backward and is enthralled by what he sees and then tries to convince his audience that they should be equally enthralled, at least in the version that Maddin concocts. The audience for his films can be either entranced by his novel cinematic treatments or confused and alienated by his re-creation of generic codes that they cannot comprehend. For his fans, he is so engaged with projecting the artifice of cinema, so overt in his display of artfulness, that they find him to be the quintessential filmmaker's filmmaker. His films become a kind of museum that we walk through gawking at the displays of the unusual.

Scholar and writer Will Straw believes that Maddin's blending of the "Canadian, regional, and independent" with "the rituals of more official and monumental cinemas"—that is, the regional with the international—is the reason for his success.[8] The marriage of the local and the global through the history of forgotten cinematic forms gives Maddin's films a certain liberating scope by which he leaps over the national cinema issue of the late twentieth century. He is so far removed from the mainstream of national cinema that his *sui generis* style becomes instantly global. By going backwards and recreating the spirit of long-gone national cinemas, Maddin is actually furthering cinematic discourse and projecting it into the future. Whether it is the 1920s formalism of Russian montage or the shadowy angularity of German expressionism or the 1930s flamboyance of the Hollywood musical that he plugs into his aesthetic, they become fresh and even avant-garde because of their resurrective quality. His films are novel. He mythologizes not only the silent film and the semi-talkie but also the Winnipeg life and times of Guy Maddin. No other filmmaker in Canada is so aesthetically cerebral and emotionally visceral in his exploration of the meaning of his home city and his place in it.[9] He presents his imaginative rootedness in that city as so perplexing and unnerving to himself that his relationship to it becomes a portal to all human consciousness.

Maddin's work has been described as "retro-pastiche" and as "exhaustingly delirious."[10] These descriptors reflect his obsessive engagement with the filmmaking styles of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Single-handedly, Maddin has pulled the archaic black-and-white semi-talkie from historical obscurity to contemporary cult status through the artifice of "imitating" it. Like a magician, he has raised these forms from the dead and turned them into delightful zombies, which we should enjoy and not dread.

Maddin was first noticed in 1988 for his ultra-low-budget film, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital,* which set the absurdist tone for his later films, including *Archangel* (1990), set in World War I Russia, and *Careful* (1992), set in the 1830s in the German Alps, where everyone must speak in whispers to avoid triggering avalanches. In each film, he pursues the pain of eros, portrayed in the melodramatic exaggerations of silent film codes. "Melodrama and surrealism were put on this earth," he once said, "to tell love stories," and, in every case, the stories in his films are "love" stories of one kind or another.[11] Although he made other feature films, including *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997), it was the short film *The Heart of the World* (2000), shown at the Toronto International Film Festival, that first brought him to prominence. Critics lauded it as the best film of the whole festival, and it later won a Genie for Best Live Action Short Drama. This recognition resulted in a $3.8 million budget for *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003), starring Isabella Rossellini.[12] The film is set in Winnipeg during the Great Depression, where a local beer baroness launches a contest to discover the saddest music in the world. At the same time, Maddin also released *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003), the first of his "Me Trilogy," which was followed by *Brand upon the Brain* (2006) and finally *My Winnipeg* (2007), all of which explore the fabulist life of one Guy Maddin, their protagonist. In a 2005 email to Michael Burns of the Documentary Channel, who commissioned the film, Maddin wrote about his relationship to his city: "To me Winnipeg is a supernatural city of enchanted palimpsests, stories and memories piled on top of one another. Some of these narratives have been completely covered up by time before new histories were written over top of them; other stories bleed through and persist in being legible at all times."[13] Maddin's literary style, even in an email, expresses the convoluted and mischievous mentality that infects his films as well as the radical difference between an auteur's project of mythologizing a city and the typical civic boosterism and crude stereotyping that most cities carry as the genus of their identities.

Maddin, who identifies strongly with his Icelandic heritage, was raised in an apartment above his mother's beauty salon on the city's downtown Ellice Avenue, became immersed in hockey because his father was the general manager of the Winnipeg Maroons hockey team, suffered through the suicide of a brother, and discovered filmmaking after the age of thirty. In writing his film

scripts, he has collaborated with University of Manitoba film and drama professor George Toles.[14] In spite of the collaboration, Maddin has been able to leave an auteurist stamp on each film and on his oeuvre. Critic Geoff Pevere calls Maddin "a resolute fabulist" whose films "feel like the nocturnal fevers of some film-pickled collective unconscious."[15] The metaphor of the feverish mind losing touch with reality is taken up by Anthony Lane's review in *The New Yorker,* in which Lane compares viewing *The Saddest Music in the World* to picking up "an old copy of *National Geographic,* while running a fever of a hundred and three."[16] Everything becomes surreal, zany, and incongruous. Both *Saddest Music* and *My Winnipeg* are amazing dreamscapes where the real and the unreal, ghosts and their embodiment, self-defeating heroes and triumphant losers are enmeshed in phantasmagorical imagery and Freudian symbolism that creates a mytho-fantastic ethos.

In *Saddest Music,* one of the genres that brings the mytho-fantastic to the film is the ostentatious American musical of the 1930s. During the Depression, one could lose oneself in the fantasy world of large-cast musical numbers, beautiful people, and lavish sets, and thereby forget dreary reality. These musicals were often set in Los Angeles or New York, coded as centres of glamour, wealth, and success. Maddin has cheekily recoded unglamorous Winnipeg into this illusionary world. This reimagining of Winnipeg as a place central to humanity and on par with cities like London—the setting of *Saddest Music*'s original script by Kazuo Ishiguro, which Maddin rewrote for his film—is precisely the kind of equation in which Maddin revels. He uses cinema to mythologize or glamorize any place and any person.[17] He is able to put any subject and any locale through the wringer of his schooled anachronistic imagination and produce something fresh and attractive that is reminiscent of but not the same as past genres. Maddin's "excavation of historical styles," as theorist Will Straw calls it, leads contemporary viewers who lack a context for these styles to experience culture shock.[18] This is precisely the audience that Maddin wants to address and where he wants to plant his art. He wants viewers to enter his generic codes with the same sense of play and carnival that he has. Although the audience may not be as knowledgeable of the past as he is, they can enter it under his magician's guidance.

Winnipeg is represented in Maddin's films as a dream-like state, a polygamous marriage of geography, history, psychology, and film genre. In both

Saddest Music and *My Winnipeg,* Maddin becomes an archaeologist of the city's somewhat nebulous soul, probing into different layers of its psychic history, discovering pseudo-artifacts, which he then arranges in a museum-like setting. What he puts on display for our edification is everything from mummified remains, still-life tableaux, and preposterous observations to poignant images from his own life. Darren Wershler, in a recent monograph on Maddin, refers to the result as "differential cinema."[19] Difference works best in the context of similarity, and that is the premise on which Maddin constructs his films. Like dreams, they offer bits and pieces of reality assembled in an uncanny way. At first, we are lost in the dream; then we wake up, and if we remember it, we dismiss it as a dream, as unreal. Wershler claims that in a film like *My Winnipeg,* "the difference between the everyday and the fantastic . . . crumbles."[20] In other words, we are always conscious in his films of fantasy being fantasy, of dreams being dreams, and of fantasy's appropriation of the real to further its own goals of provocation and introspection.

Maddin's protracted investigative gaze into yesterday's film styles as the womb that gave birth to today's codes plays with his audience's disconnection with the past, forcing viewers to deal with the unfamiliar in some meaningful way. Because Maddin is so knowledgeable about these film styles and their nuances, he can offer his audience all sorts of seemingly outlandish scenarios that can be bewildering. This results in an experience of the uncanny, because we are situated by his films as strangers entering the gravitational field of an alien planet we need to explore. For those unaccustomed to melodramatic hyperbole or the archaic film genres that Maddin plays with, his films are impenetrable distractions whereby the normative desire to suspend disbelief and enter the illusion of the film is blocked. The concepts of *différence* (the endless deferral of meaning) and *aporia* (the constant gap in meaning) posited by the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida as postmodern modes of perception provide a way of entering Maddin's cinematic textuality. His archaeological methodology as a filmmaker reflects the Derridean concept of "trace"—the disembodied manifestation of "a disintegrated past, consumed by the fires of time."[21] The present is haunted by these traces of the past, of which we are insufficiently self-conscious but which Maddin, the psychic archaeologist, is happy to dredge up. The resulting reconstructions of the former self of either the individual (Maddin's mother, for example) or the collectivity (the

people of Winnipeg) are riddled with unresolved tensions. In Maddin's films, reality is nothing more than a shorthand postcard message: "Having a good time, see you soon, etc." The main message is carried by the image on the front of the card, which is invariably pleasant and appealing. Reality is just a picture that fits our fantasy.

Maddin is pleased to offer his audience contemporary sensibilities dressed up as the past in a form that is beyond the memory of the film's viewers (unless they are students of film). Not knowing that earlier language means that the audience must create a universe of self-generated connections. Wershler, drawing on Deleuze, explains: "When we cannot remember something exactly, what we see in our mind's eye connects to a range of powerful possibilities: déjà vu, dream images, fantasies, scenes recollected from favourite plays, movies and television."[22] The audience is forced to engage with the film through its own wellsprings of imagery and memories. Maddin's reanimation of the past works through his playing with absences—historical, technological, cultural. Whether he is recreating a pseudo-autobiography or a pseudo-urban history, Maddin manufactures ghosts. Woloski uses the term "haunting" to indicate how film's spectral emanations come from Maddin's interpretation of consciousness.[23] But Maddin also likes to play the role of the pseudoscientist, the archaeologist *uncovering* a hidden past and then *recovering* the artifact (his autobiography) with a novel context such as a museum display disguised as a film. Inevitably, the location where he does his excavation is his personal psychovisceral history, which he then displays in the medium of a simulacrum of the archaic. This excavation of his own psyche is a perfect match for his cinematic "excavation of historical styles."[24] Both are surreal exercises that have a connection to reality, historical and psychological, but in a mythopoeic way.

The historical or "real" Winnipeg is the baseline for his excavations, what Wershler calls the "documentary" side of his films, but that side is always interpretive.[25] Those who were raised in Winnipeg or live there can recognize mythologized characteristics, while those for whom the city is a stranger can experience the impact of an evocative, suggestive atmosphere that mimics universal psycho-urban spaces. What comes to mind is the metaphor of a cyclotron smashing subatomic particles in order to create energy, in which one particle, Maddin's libido (the dream), smashes into another

particle, a restrictive superego (historical fact), to produce a combined dream-like historical document (the film). The clash of personal narrative and the general history of the city results in a highly personalized urban history that speaks of the uniqueness of each person's urban reality. David Church describes Maddin's films as "an uncanny amalgamation of personal obsessions and private memories made public."[26] Public obsessions and memories are privatized within the individual and so are transformed. When Maddin's libido collides with Winnipeg's history, the result is a mesmerizing mix of the archaic and the erotic. His fetishization of Winnipeg gives it a gloss of sexual transgressiveness that is both disturbing and hilarious. But he means to represent every urban person's own psychological connection to his or her city. Whatever the historical specificity of any city, the human response has an underlying universality.

Maddin's matching of the former glory of silent cinema and the former glory of Winnipeg itself means that the city's demise also matches the demise of a former dominant art form. Maddin, who once described himself as a necrophiliac when it came to silent cinema, is also a necrophile of the city, whose inner life has been drained over time. He displays a "stubborn faithfulness to Winnipeg" that can be considered a kind of death watch.[27] Here is a white, middle-aged, heterosexual male who has been witness to the inexorable demise of a city into the decrepitude of premature old age. No wonder he wants to recreate a 1930s Winnipeg, a city that was the centre of its regional universe. Maddin states that his own grandmother, whom he claims was born the year Winnipeg was incorporated as a city and whom he knew, is evidence of the youth of the city and its premature aging. His conflation of family and city, of the biological and the sociological, the autobiographical and the historical, geography and genre, results in an absurd, macabre sensibility that is both totally idiosyncratic and totally believable.

SAD EYES, SAD HEARTS, AND *THE SADDEST MUSIC IN THE WORLD*

Considered by most commentators as Maddin's most accessible narrative, *Saddest Music* is also his first film to feature Winnipeg. All his previous films were set in other locales. *Saddest Music* premiered at the Sundance Film

Festival in early 2003. It went on to win several Genies for best music, editing, and costuming. The original film script was written by Kazuo Ishiguro, who set it in London in the mid-1980s. Rhombus Films, which had film rights to Ishiguro's script, handed the script to Maddin. He and George Toles rewrote the script, translating mid-1980s London into mid-1930s Winnipeg. In keeping with the script's international theme, Maddin hired Isabella Rossellini to play the part of Lady Helen Port-Huntley, a legless beer baroness, who has organized a competition for the saddest music in the world to promote her beer.[28] By introducing a major star to complement his no-name cast, Maddin changed the trajectory of his work, making it resemble, in some ways, a more typical mainstream Hollywood product. His use of the gala musical form only adds to his film's superficial resemblance to Hollywood. What was mainstream eighty years ago (the Depression musical) becomes contemporary kitsch in Maddin's hands. Maddin prefers to give all his feature films, including this one, a melodramatic plot because melodrama is, for him, "the narrative of our dreams with all the nocturnal terrors and desires."[29] This positing of the phantasmagorical dreamscape as a valid narrative form moves beyond the playful, escapist Hollywood genre. His resurrected cinematic forms are suffused with an indulgent baroque quality. In an essay titled "Death in Winnipeg," he writes in the language of hyperbole that matches the exaggerated melodramatic gestures of the silent cinema: "My city is plunged in the perpetual night of its notorious winter, lugubriously ice-encrusted, bedecked with crystalline stalactites . . . all arrayed behind an intricate scrimshaw of frost."[30]

Such flights of literary fancy eventually filter into his construction of Winnipeg's identity as the perpetually winterbound city portrayed in *Saddest Music.* Its interiors are steamy and overheated, while its exteriors are manifestations of snowflake heaven. He presents a *mise en scène* that is quickly read as artificial: when added to the heavily filtered visual tones, this provides a child-like magic to his imagery. In *Saddest Music,* he moves the daytime universe of "Winterpeg's" glaring, sun-sparkling, snowy winterscapes into the night-land of dream, where everything is muted by atmosphere and shadow. Even the brightest whites become filmy, unfocused, and bathed in an off-light, often weak and barely illuminating. The visual presentation of most of the film's scenes is deliberately off-kilter, so the audience is never quite certain what it is viewing other than a sense of the make-belief. Winnipeg itself is reconstructed

by a combination of primitive lighting, low-budget miniature sets, absurdly retro costuming, and over-the-top melodramatic dialogue. William Beard describes the Winnipeg of *Saddest Music* as "houses angled Expressionistically and sunk to the gables in snowdrifts, hunched and shuffling passers-by bundled up against the cold, but also pajama-clad sleepwalkers perambulating like zombies."[31] As an ex-Winnipegger, I view Maddin's urban imaginary as superior to the documentarist's realism in conveying a city's identity because it evokes my childhood memories and a powerful psychological bonding with the urbanscape. As writer Graeme Smith observes, "stepping into somebody's personal dreamscape can be unnerving."[32] Yet only by entering Maddin's urban dreamscape can we begin to connect with the city's essential humanity and to understand his view that only through the convoluted psychological mechanisms by which a city's inhabitants actually read their city can we appreciate the city for what it is to them, and maybe to us.

If Winnipeg's architecture can be used a stand-in for American cities like Chicago in the 1930s, then why can't be the city be a stand-in for itself in an imagined or fanciful urbanity? Film knows no bounds in creating verisimilitude. Maddin's unpacking of the period begins with his characterization of Winnipeg as a global centre, which even in its heyday it never was. (If any midwestern city had a global reputation in the 1930s, it was Chicago.) In *Saddest Music,* however, Winnipeg's motto is "World Capital of Sorrow." This satirizing of urban branding and hucksterism combines a manic festival of song and dance with desperation.[33] Writing about the film in the *Globe and Mail,* Liam Lacey references the antics of "screwball comedies" of the 1930s era and the "stage extravagances" that were meant to represent a life somewhere over the rainbow.[34] The sad "happiness" of inebriation reflected in the phrase "drowning your sorrows in beer" is part of Maddin's social satire. The theme of drowning is a highly charged one. When the winning contestants slide into a vat of beer for a beer bath, some of them almost drown. While this is an obvious reference to bubble baths in frothy musicals, it also makes reference to Winnipeg's own history of coming close to "drowning" through ferocious floods that have struck the city from time to time. This blend of absurdity and historical events (the Depression era in North America was filled with crazy and dangerous contests) gives this film a rich illusionary quality, like the contests and the films of that time.

Maddin suggests that all urban dwellers also have their own libidinal investment in their specific urbanities.[35] The Oedipal complexes involving a deceased mother, a father (Fyodor) and his two sons (Chester and Roderick), and their shared women (Narcissa and Helen, or Lady Port-Huntley) constitute the libidinal element in the film. The unravelling of bizarre love triangles within the family provides a transgressive sexual content to human life in the city. Like dreams themselves, Maddin's representation of people, events, and locales is strangely connected and suggestive. In the film, the hidden layers of the subconscious self are transferred to the psyche of the city, with its persona as the capital of sorrow presenting a twisted and haunted self. This is a vicious digging into unresolved familial emotional meltdowns using a pickaxe.

Beginning with a grainy black-and-white colour scheme that immediately signifies the past, Maddin makes Winnipeg, in both *Saddest Music* and *My Winnipeg,* a symbol of what once was rather than what is. The transference of history into the present moment, thus making history "live," produces a mental leap that is disquieting. Which Winnipeg is this—a dead or lost Winnipeg or a Winnipeg that is somehow "eternal"? This going back suggests that the city's former glory is the best comfort zone for the audience as well as for Maddin. The film's co-writer, Georges Toles, in an essay written before *Saddest Music,* describes Maddin's view of time as amnesic and memory as "tricky."[36] For him, Winnipeg remembered is really a Winnipeg that has been forgotten, a Winnipeg whose memories have been repressed. Remembering as forgetting produces a sense of being lost. The city's past is lost and is only recoverable as a facade. Its characters are equally lost as they go through the film's narrative trajectory. The audience becomes lost in both the historical construction of Winnipeg and its narrative evolution. Maddin's play with the city's history is ultimately *make-believable*. Maddin calls this "an uninhibiting of real life."[37] The loss of inhibition that he champions releases pent-up emotions and hidden symbols that resurrect the forgotten and repressed side of being urban.

The film opens with a strangely dressed shaman fortune-teller with antlers on his head, who issues a prophetic warning to Chester Kent (Mark McKinney), a sleazy and penniless New York producer, that his fate is doomed now that he is in Winnipeg. On Chester's arm is a petite, waif-like female

named Narcissa (Maria de Medeiros), former wife of Chester's brother Roderick Kent, a.k.a. Gavrilo the Great (Ross McMillan), now an overly sensitive, melancholic cello virtuoso from Serbia. The love triangle between Chester (representing the United States), Roderick (representing Europe), and Narcissa is augmented by their father, Fyodor Kent (David Fox), who is Canadian. Fyodor is an alcoholic ex-doctor turned streetcar driver and prosthesis hobbyist. The geopolitical metaphor of the Kent family trinationality is obvious: Canada is a cross between Europe and America. Curiously, the absurdity of a Canadian father with two Canadian sons from the same mother, one of whom is a Serb and the other an American, is a perfectly normal allegory of Canadian identity both as immigration and emigration. Fyodor, who appears next as a streetcar driver, tells Narcissa that the man she is with (Chester) "may have the stink of an American but he's one hundred per cent Canadian."

From the opening scene, everyone is dressed for the cold. Winnipeg is established as a northern city not only by the winter coats but also by the shaman's reading of Chester's fortune on a block of ice, which replaces the iconic crystal ball. "Look into the ice," he tells Chester. After their streetcar ride, the couple ends up in a beer hall, where everyone is wrapped in parkas, coats, and warm hats. This is "Winterpeg," the city's Canadian nickname. The theme of the frozen north moves effortlessly into another aspect of Winnipeg, which is sorrow. When Lady Port-Huntley (Isabella Rossellini) announces that her beer company, Muskeg Beer, will hold a contest for the saddest music in the world, she calls the award "the crown of frozen tears." Winnipeg, we are told, has been named the World Capital of Sorrow for four years running. This implausible branding is used by Maddin to indicate how a negative can be turned into a positive—how a city of cold and sorrow can attract the world as long as money is involved. And what was Winnipeg historically, if not a creation (after its days as Fort Garry) of economic hope? The class divide that the film highlights begins with Helen (Lady Port-Huntley) commenting on the obscene amount of money she is making off the drinking masses and on how she hopes to make even more from the benighted Americans when Prohibition is lifted. Maddin portrays Lady Port-Huntley as a singular capitalist success, a woman whose wealth and power depends on the masses drowning their sorrows in her beer. Coming in from the cold, Winnipeggers of every lowly stripe receive the false heat of alcohol in her depressing and unheated beer parlours.

The link between class and ethnicity that is central to Winnipeg's historical identity as a working-class city of European immigrants is referenced by Lady Port-Huntley's representing the Anglo elite, the historical moneyed class of the city, who initially built their wealth by managing the grain trade and supplying the agrarian hinterland. But Helen represents a woman with more than financial capital. She also has a great deal of erotic capital. Fyodor (a true Canadian) has been enamoured of her for years, but it is Chester (an ersatz American) who steals her. Helen is also the substitute mother figure. She is enthroned throughout most of the film like a woman on a pedestal because she lost her legs in a car accident while the drunken Chester was driving. The omnipresent Fyodor ended up amputating both her legs. Living the American dream of rags to riches, she rose above her infirmities, while the legged Fyodor and his two penniless sons, Chester and Roderick, are mired in poverty-stricken self-pity, self-delusion, and self-hatred.

Class and ethnicity are linked to Winnipeg's growth through immigration, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the West was being settled. The radio contest for the saddest music in the world attracts competitors from every corner of the globe. They arrive by train—one of Maddin's iconic images of Winnipeg, which once had the largest train yards in the British Empire. The competitors pour into Winnipeg under an overhead sign reading "Lost Luggage." This comment on lost identity and on refugees and migrants as penniless, hungry masses swarming into this cold, godforsaken place to make their fortune is a perfect metaphor for Winnipeg's past. Roderick arrives from Serbia, wearing a ridiculously wide-brimmed black hat draped with a filmy veil of the sort worn by nineteenth-century female mourners. Maddin is presenting two stereotypical sides of the male psyche—Roderick's feminine, artistic side and Chester's macho self-confidence. The latter is all about making it and the former is all about feeling it. The sibling rivalry and Oedipal complex seem to flow from the loss of their mother, for whom Roderick is perpetually grieving and whom Chester has long forgotten. The American emphasis on happiness and going forth into a bright future is contrasted with the European emphasis on the value of the past and memorializing the deceased, like the nine million killed in World War I. The clash of optimism and pessimism, future and past, results in a dramatic resolution in which the present is simply a moment of flight

and confusion. Canada, as the present, is caught between the two poles of American futurism and European historicism. Poor old Fyodor bungles along to the grave as the more powerful gravitational forces of Europe and America exist in an uneasy equilibrium in the Canadian psyche, which, in a sense, unbalances it and makes it uncertain and confused over its identity.

The metaphorical clash between sensitivity and insensitivity, between European feeling for the genuine and American show biz glitz, is Maddin's definition of what it is to be Canadian—neither, and yet perhaps both. Being a Canadian like Fyodor leads to alcoholism, degradation, and obsession. This melancholia becomes Winnipeg's mood. It comes about from being trapped in the claustrophobic cold of the North with its long, long nights (there are no daylight scenes in the film), where people try to forget their sorry state through drunkenness and the only source of heat is the flames that engulf the beer hall as Chester sings a melancholic farewell. The pyre of self-immolation is the only way to make Winnipeg warm.

One of the motifs in *Saddest Music* that stands in for Maddin's relationship to the city is the figure of the sleepwalker, who makes a brief cameo appearance. Winnipeg as a city of sleepwalkers is a subject taken up more gleefully by Maddin in *My Winnipeg,* but it is introduced here. The sleepwalker as the quintessential Winnipegger is Maddin's metaphor for film as the expression of the dream state. Maddin is lost in his dream state that is cinema. When the characters in the film dream, they dream, whether flashback or flash forward, in two colours to contrast with the black-and-white main narrative. The use of such retrograde colouring (retrograde for us but advanced for its fictive time) to signify our unconscious fantasies only heightens their importance. Either prominently blue or red, the colours imply certain melodramatic moods, but their garishness also signifies artificiality. Seeing Winnipeg primarily in black and white, as a city of night and perpetual artificial lighting, represented by the amnesiac Narcissa dressed either in snow white or in widow's black, one is meant to read reality or actuality as a stark binary—good or evil, happy or sad, rich or poor, and so on. But the colour dream life in the film represents the psyche's true home. In a sense, Maddin overturns the world of Winnipeg and its characters by substituting psychic dream life for reality. The urban landscape of everyday reality is the true realm of sleepwalking that leaves us unaware of what we are doing, while the psychological self that we

repress is rich, energetic, and fundamentally engaging. There is colour where our fantasies play but dullness where our feet walk. To locate this urbanscape in an imaginary realm, Maddin presents Winnipeg as a city without high-rise towers or office buildings. Instead, his urban facades are singular rundown buildings, large Orthodox crosses, and meandering streets like one might find in a village. Any realistic urbanity has been removed and replaced with an illusionary world of the simple and the symbolic. The stage on which the musicians and dancers compete is drawn geometrically, reminiscent of German expressionist decor from the 1920s. This staging is then reflected in the staged constructions of Winnipeg's angular buildings that never stand at right angles but always look ramshackle and ready to collapse. This is a fairy tale universe, a backdrop to myth and fantasy.

Winnipeg, the city of perpetual snow and night and derelict buildings, whose only happiness seems to be in outdoor hockey players singing as they skate, is represented as a one-season city and a poster child for sadness. In the end, Chester is killed by a distraught Lady Port-Huntley with a piece of broken glass from her beer-filled glass legs that Fyodor has made for her. The legs shatter when Roderick plays his cello in the final round and beats out Chester, who has enlisted national teams from around the world for his musical extravaganza by telling them he will pay their way home when he wins. Of course, he doesn't and the dupes are all left stranded in Winnipeg like the real immigrants before them.

The binary opposition between remembering (memory) and forgetting (amnesia) that supposedly characterizes Winnipeg becomes even more pronounced later in *My Winnipeg,* when Maddin dredges up all kinds of "facts" about the city that he then massages into his own subversive universe of half-truths, lies, and imaginative surprises. *Saddest Music* ends with a surfeit of iconic imagery—Lady Port-Huntley's American portrayal of the Statue of Liberty in Chester's grand finale and Chester, Nero-like, playing the piano while the fantasy world around him burns up as a sign of the film's ending.

The characters that Maddin has placed in his Winnipeg match the two-dimensional cardboard facades that he uses to represent the city's physical space. This is a city without any vistas, a city whose buildings are smaller than the people on the street. Everything is shrunken. Maddin sees film as a liberation from reality for the audience. He makes solid use of generational

struggle (fathers and sons), class (the Anglo and the ethnic), and psychological concepts such as Freud's Oedipal complex and Jung's archetypes. He also adapts his archaic film genre to elements of farce, as people rush to and fro in a constant haze of misunderstanding.[38] Together, these elements form an intricate complexity, a web of meanings that are not easy to negotiate but that eventually work for today's audiences because of the numerous and disparate associations they make. The real geography that Maddin the archaeologist has exposed in *Saddest Music* is one that is psychic (the shaman opens and closes the film) rather than physical. He has turned the real history of Winnipeg upside down. He has reversed history through fantasy, turning it into a work of art.

SEARCHING FOR EVERYONE'S "MY WINNIPEG"

There isn't that much generic distance between the fictional mode of *Saddest Music* and the "docu-fantasy" mode of *My Winnipeg,* the final instalment of Maddin's autobiographical trilogy.[39] *My Winnipeg* won Best Canadian Feature at the Toronto International Film Festival and Best Feature Film from the Toronto Film Critics Association. That Torontonian cinephiles can appreciate the film's charms confirms William Beard's observation that *My Winnipeg* has proven to be Maddin's most popular film.[40] How does a film that identifies Winnipeg, a city that Beard calls "unremarkable and isolated," generate such critical approval?[41] It must contain universal archetypes that appeal to a broad audience.

The film begins with the most universal of archetypes, the Mother—supposedly Maddin's mother. She is a played by Ann Savage, a starlet of 1950s B-film fame. Mother is also the mother city, the maternal umbrella under which he was raised. But for Maddin, the city's persona as a nurturing mother is twisted into a nagging, harassing, judgmental archetype—more aged crone than youthful beauty. Her appearance is followed by Maddin's own voice-over narration pretending, like *Léolo*'s diary, to be the authentic voice of the self. In certain screenings of the film, Maddin himself gave a live voice-over. The script pronounces a desperate triple incantation while taking the proverbial train out of town:

Winnipeg,
Winnipeg,
Winnipeg,
Snowy, sleepwalking Winnipeg.

My home for my entire life.
My entire life.

I must leave it.
I must leave it.
I must leave it now.[42]

We then enter the narrative of Maddin's failure to leave, to break with his mother city, to grow up and be a man free of her clutches. This image of a young man trying to flee the maternal nest has been played out innumerable times. Anyone with a youthful fantasy of going to the bright lights of a metropolitan centre—be it Toronto, New York, London or Paris—can identify with it. The Mother and the theme of escape resonate with audiences. The characterization is a lot simpler than that of the Oedipal *Saddest Music*. Maddin has hooked us on Winnipeg because it is no longer Winnipeg, the real; instead it is Winnipeg, our mindscape. His mother is our mother, all mothers.

Maddin's initial model for *My Winnipeg* was Walter Ruttmann's 1928 *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*.[43] Ruttmann's film mythologizes the city as it was in the roaring 1920s. Maddin had a similar mythologizing intent for his film. "I wanted to show people what it's like to live here in a mythic way," he said.[44] But the mythic elements he refers to are his own referential combos: snow and sleepwalking, entrapment and dreams, memory and family, juvenile lusts and middle-aged regrets and disappointments. Familial life—and by extension, city life—becomes a series of inexplicable, mysterious traumas that linger on and on, the past infecting the present with reverberations of irrational occurrences.

Mythologizing Winnipeg is reflected in the real life experience of a certain Mr. Nguyen, the Vietnamese immigrant tailor whose shop occupies the space once used by Maddin's mother and her sister Lil as a beauty salon. Mr. Nguyen's shop front appears several times in the film. Mr. Nguyen stated in

an interview that he has ended up being a costume tailor for Hollywood films shot in Winnipeg (including *Capote*), something he never would have imagined when he came to the city in 1989. "Who thought I'd be working on Hollywood movies in Winnipeg," he mused. "But with life, you never know."[45] It was Maddin's intervention that turned the tailor's real life into a Hollywood fantasy. He gave the shop a mythic trajectory because of his connection with it.

Mythologizing is a process of turning the real into a suprahuman reality that remains connected to the real in some way. Turning actuality into fantasy is a very powerful alchemy that lies at the core of the auteur persona. Although *My Winnipeg,* in keeping with its memoirist tone, has a much slower pace than the frenetic cacophony of rapid-fire images in *Saddest Music,* the film retains the undertone of melancholy that distinguishes *Saddest Music*. This emotion permeates the Maddin oeuvre and thus infects his Winnipeg. *My Winnipeg* contains important references to a former "Happyland" in Winnipeg that no longer exists, and the film ends with a "what if" proclamation of a return to Happyland. Here again is the facade of memory masquerading as historical fact. A nostalgized past will come alive, and as it does, present-day adult sadness will evaporate. Madden plays up the ironic and the tragi-comic aspects of this return by revealing that happiness is a facade created to hide the underlying sadness of existence. The generalized lost childhood of "happiness" that adults fantasize returning to is exposed by Maddin as a false front. "The seismograph of my childhood," Maddin told a reporter, "and the seismograph of the fictional Guy Maddin would be close."[46] This effective union of reality and fantasy under the sign of a morose moon is repeated in the 2010 publication of the script for *My Winnipeg,* a book that combines the script with interviews, essays, and images from the film and from Maddin's life In the book, Maddin expertly weaves fact and fiction into misleading accounts of his life, all in the interests of mythologizing Winnipeg and himself.

Maddin's form of authorship, a meticulous unravelling of an autobiographical thread that seems to reveal nothing much except trauma, is a key aspect of the argument made in this current volume about the city and the self. Maddin believes that it is foolhardy for an auteur to ignore the autobiographical.[47] But what distinguishes Maddin's autobiographical impulse from that of other auteurs discussed in this book is his ability to memorialize the past as living artifact. His art reminds us constantly of its *backward-looking*

stance and of how such a stance impacts cinema in Canada and cinema practitioners in general. The past is presented using an archaic mode rather than a mode that belongs to the present. He tries to confuse us, tries to make the dead look alive, but in a dead-like way. The genius of his authorship is his uncanny ability to stage the past and its characters inside a personal fantasyscape. The use of occasional iconic artifacts (streetcars, trains, crosses) is suggestive of an actual urbanscape rather than a re-creation. The term "docu-fantasy" is a perfect statement of Maddin's delight in the union of opposites, in the marriage of differing sensibilities, which he stretches out into a lengthy DNA sequence described by one writer as "a vaporish melange of civic history, archival footage, bald-faced fabrication and wheedling confessional," resulting in "a city reconfigured as dreamscape."[48] Maddin actually glorifies the past as a realm worth living in. His act of resurrecting deceased genres, the ghosts of torn-down buildings like Eaton's and the Winnipeg Arena, dead family members, and long-gone sports heroes challenges his audiences to do likewise in their own lives and for their own personal cities. By excluding the rural and the wilderness from any sense of his Canadian selfhood, Maddin's urban imaginary becomes a purist's act of urban devotion. Home, family, love, and death are what the city is.

Katherine Monk, who explores so well the sexual underpinnings of Canadian cinema in *Weird Sex and Snowshoes* (2002), reviewed *My Winnipeg*. "This is definitely his Winnipeg," she writes, and later goes on to describe the film's mood as "somewhere between the angst-laden strains of *The Twilight Zone* and the overly earnest frames of early National Film Board reels."[49] This bipolar description shows Maddin both inhabiting and satirizing Hollywood and Canadian national cinema. Monk characterizes *My Winnipeg,* along with his other films, as "mutant fusions of high art film and lowbrow humour."[50] Again, Maddin's power to mutate genres, to play successfully with opposites, allows him to formulate his own cross-genre films, created from fragments and obscure artifacts.

Another journalistic perception of mixing is that of Peter O'Neil, who called *My Winnipeg* a blend of the tragedian Igmar Bergman's fictional *The Seventh Seal* with the tragi-comic documentarist Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*.[51] Like Monk, he points out Maddin's ability to pull together very different film styles. Both Monk's and O'Neil's observations parallel Maddin's

My Winnipeg (Guy Maddin, 2007). Courtesy of Jody Shapiro.

own bipolar take on Canadian identity in *Saddest Music*. "I couldn't separate my Winnipeg from my home; my hometown from my home or my family," Maddin told film reviewer Jay Stone. "They're all entangled, so I just knew immediately that those three layers would have to be presented . . . simultaneously."[52] This biographical/historical mix is precisely how any inhabitant experiences his or her urban life, especially from the perspective of memory. Certain traumas are fused in the psyche, and they rise above the everyday flow of events that disappear into each other. These traumas can be civic or private, but our relationship to them is always personal. "A city is nothing but streets and edifices teeming with memories," Maddin stated cryptically.[53] Memory's accentuation of a few key moments is what feed mythologies of the self. While Maddin seems to be dealing only with his own very specific autobiography in the film, he is in fact creating a framework in which spectators can project their own autobiographical memories. In this way, *My Winnipeg* becomes *Everyone's Winnipeg*.

Maddin can be surrealistic when he takes an iconic figure such as Manitoba's official emblem, the bison, and comments on its sexual orientation or invents a a taxi service that works only in back alleys or laws that govern sleepwalking. He wants to make us make us laugh at the mythic made absurd. And that potential for absurdity is not specific to Winnipeg. As Rick Groen wrote in the *Globe and Mail,* "Maddin's absurdist Winnipeg could be any small city anywhere."[54] But it is Winnipeggers who stand to gain the most from Maddin's hyperbolic mythologizing because they grew up with the official version of events and platitudinous public meanings attributed to both history and locales. Maddin's turning the real St. Mary's Academy for girls into a battlefield between uptight fathers and randy interlopers could be applied to all private girls' schools, but it's a specific Winnipeg lampoon. St. Mary's Academy, whose public image is a pious refuge for virgins protected by black-clad nuns, is turned by Maddin into a fortress of libidinal repression. Those who attended the academy would have their own response to his outrageous claims, while those who knew it by reputation or identified it with other private girls' schools in other cities would have their own fun.

My Winnipeg is a highly peculiar journey into what Rodney LaTourelle aptly calls "psychogeography."[55] This term suggests that the geographic mapping of what the mind's eye sees is comparable to physical geography, that the

psychological embracing of the urban is as mythological as is the mytholo-
gizing of the land and nature in the nationalist-realist project of modernism.
Maddin, as our guide into his memories, begins with home and the Mother
and ends with the Winnipeg Arena and the Father, in which the destruction
of the arena is equated with the death of the Father. The portal into anoth-
er's mindscape is meant to release the viewer's own inner demons, the ones,
Maddin claims, that viewers have been "too frightened to uncover for them-
selves."[56] Maddin uses both the production and the screening of his films as
a form of collective and personal therapy. The script refers specifically to his
making of a film within this film that is supposed to be a project that provides
him with therapeutic results so that he can finally leave Winnipeg, where
he has been "trapped" for half a century. "I really thought by making *My
Winnipeg* I would cure myself of Winnipeg and be free to leave," Maddin said
in a *Cineaction* interview. Of course, he didn't leave, since Winnipeg remains
the locus of his creativity. He realized that his obsession with staying or leav-
ing was misguided, that he could do both.[57]

In "My (Other) Winnipeg: Excerpts from a Phantom Film," an addendum
to *My Winnipeg* published in Winnipeg's cultural quarterly, *Border Crossings,*
Maddin rehistoricizes the fantasies in *My Winnipeg*. "Strange is the role of
memory in this city that no longer recollects why it's even here," he writes.
"Even more strange is the way the city forgets its amnesias." Again, Maddin
uses the amnesia trope to offer himself as the archaeologist of memory: "We
Winnipeggers visit the cityscapes of both worlds, the past and the present,
which exist contemporaneously."[58] By adopting the royal "we" of urban iden-
tity, he is able to make the present look like the past and the past look like the
present, which is precisely what memories do.

On March 6, 2010, Maddin appeared at the Alberta College of Art and
Design in Calgary to offer a live narration of *My Winnipeg,* as he had done in
other cities, thereby performing his authorship publicly and using his pres-
ence to evoke authenticity. After the film, he held a Q&A in which he explained
impishly that the documentary mode is highly subjective and that his film com-
bines one-third myths, one-third wishful thinking, and one-third factoids.[59]
The fairy tale quality of his art conveys the spirit of a child's bedtime story
being read by a parent or relative. There may be "documentary" images inter-
spersed in the film, but there are also clever cut-out animated re-creations of

historical events and absurdist redramatizations of nonexistent family events. As soon as the audience, who may not know Winnipeg, senses the game, they can enter the spirit of the film guiltlessly.

The film's opening oracular pronouncements by the fictive Mrs. Maddin parallel the seer's pronouncements in *Saddest Music*. Nothing can fool Mother; nothing can fool the seer. With a crooner singing "My Wonderful Winnipeg . . . Wonderful Winnipeg, where I belong" (*My Winnipeg* is highly musical, like its predecessor), Maddin establishes wonder as the basic element of his film. "It's no Eden but it's home sweet home to me," the song continues. Cinematic Winnipeg becomes a wintery wonderland shot in Maddin's proverbial "snow noire" style.[60] Taking up the troika of "the forks, the lap, the furs" as the mantra of the city, he uses images of a naked female torso to represent the female genitalia of forks, lap, and fur. While The Forks is a tourist branding of the site where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers meet in the heart of the city, Maddin turns it into an erotic, earth-mother symbol, far from the trendy shops and fast-food outlets where people go for an escapist experience now. He goes "deeper" than the buildings' original usage as railway warehouses, into the place's Aboriginal past. The confluence of the two rivers, one flowing west to east and the other south to north, made the site a meeting place. It becomes the womb of Maddin's originary fable, akin to the origins of Rome's seven hills in a she-wolf and her cubs. The city is his mother. While the sleepy Maddin character tries to escape the city (his mother) in a nightmarish dream, he intones: "My mother. A force as strong as all the trains in Manitoba. As perennial as the winter. As ancient as the bison." The pull between the powers of the eternal past (mother, winter, bison) and the power of the present (the train) is an uneven one. The past wins. Even the concept of escape by train is an anachronistic representation. It's all past. Train travel via Winnipeg is an anachronistic exercise for the few who try it, a journey into nostalgia.

The past is represented in the family as a generational continuum. At ground level in the building that housed Lil's Beauty Shop is the space for business, the site of the public persona. Above is the private space inhabited by Maddin's nuclear family, while in the back is where Grandma and Aunt Lil live. Maddin calls his world a "gynocracy" because the women's work and all the women who came for hair care were what penetrated his consciousness. His father was absent, working at the Winnipeg Arena, which served

as a male "home." "Dreams are sweet," the narrator pronounces. "Waking is bitter." It was his mother and aunt who created dream-like beauty for their customers. They made life "sweet"—for a while, at least, until reality set in and another visit to the beauty salon was required. In the world of sweet dreams, Maddin identifies archetypal episodes of family history that he pretends to have acted out in his "family-film within a film." The set he recreates of the family home includes his father buried under a rug in the living room, a presence that everyone can ignore. The pyschodramas that he presents for the audience include an ingenious construction of an imaginary reality television show titled "LedgeMan," where a ritual of suicide is threatened on a daily basis. This metaphor and cinematic homage to his teen brother's suicide signifies the importance of his death to the family, because the television show, we are told in the film, has played for fifty years.

Maddin undermines public discourse about the city's moment on the world's political stage (the General Strike of 1920) when he impishly injects a sexual content into the class struggle. He creates an ironic story of the bourgeois fathers of the daughters of St. Mary's Academy manning the barricades of the school (rather than the more typical workers manning barricades) to prevent the Bolshevik rabble from defiling their daughters as they march by in protest. Maddin resurrects ancient terms like *Bolshevik* and *bourgeoisie* in his narrative to give the audience the flavour of class warfare but then deflects it into a Freudian scenario. His use of cut-out silhouettes in animated historical sequences expresses his view concerning the cartoonish character of most historical representation as two-dimensional and cardboard-like. These narratives have no depth of field, no perspective. Instead, they are mere verbal puppetry.

Maddin prefers to view reality as a struggle between two worlds—the psychic and the physical—with his preference being the psychic. He informs the viewer that there are actually four rivers that meet in Winnipeg rather than two. According to him, Aboriginal people believe that below The Forks (where the Red River meets the Assiniboine) lie two more rivers, which have a powerful magnetic force. This is meant to imply that Winnipeggers live in a universe with a paranormal dimension. Of course, in Maddin's Freudian lexicon, "the forks" refers to female genitalia. In his *My Winnipeg* volume, Maddin embraces the psychic Winnipeg as "Sweet, subconscious city!"[61] What is subconscious

in Winnipeg's historical waters is the confluence of two great cultural rivers: the Aboriginal, represented by one of the provincial legislature's bison statues, which Maddin calls Broken Head, and the European immigrant, represented by the Golden Boy statue atop the legislature, which he claims, tongue-in-cheek, is a secret statue of the Greek god Hermes. Maddin is very clear that Aboriginal culture remains a powerful force in Winnipeg, even though historically it was displaced by Euro-Canadian culture.[62]

One of the finest absurdist digressions in the film is the narrator's claim that the proliferation of female street names in the city happened because of the desire to acknowledge the names of the city's more famous prostitutes. This claim is typical of Maddin's endearing hyperbole and his belief that the city is fundamentally an erotic space. He also raises the city's winter snowdrifts to a psychic level by describing them as "mazes of ectoplasm," and he presents its back alleys as the true thoroughfares, with true signifying subconscious dreams. He calls this realm the "secret city" filled with the "illicit" and the "shameful." One street, he claims, is a hermaphrodite because its front street and back lane are indistinguishable. All these quips filled with sexual innuendo turn Winnipeg into a city of transgressive desires. But as the early-twentieth-century psychologists liked to point out, eros (love) and thanatos (death) are cut from the same neurotic cloth. That is why Maddin's cheeky erotic gloss on civic pride is balanced by his lamentation for the destruction (death) of the Winnipeg Arena and its replacement by the MTS Centre, where long ago the mighty Eaton's department store dominated the city's retail trade.[63]

Maddin's voice rises to a pitch of indignation and disgust as he denounces the new arena as a "zombie in a cheap suit." He then proceeds to engage in a homoerotic description of the life in the holy cathedral of hockey, his father's Winnipeg Arena. "Urine. Breast milk. Sweat. The hockey cathedral's holy trinity of odours," the narrator intones, reminding us that hockey is sacred, a religious rite. This trinity seems to be the male animus of the earlier "forks, the lap, the furs" incantation that he associates with the female anima. "Now my building lies like a heart ripped open in the snow, closed to the public that worshipped in it," he laments. No wonder the home associated with the mother exists and so the Mother has to be personified as alive, while the arena has disappeared along with the father.

This conjunction of homoeroticism, religion, and sports in a secular temple providing pagan ecstasy is followed by his story of a kinky Golden Boy swimsuit contest, supposedly held in The Bay's well-known Paddlewheel restaurant and judged by a leering mayor, and the story of the multi-tiered Sherbrooke Swimming Pool, whose lowest level was occupied by boys engaged in nude frolic. Maddin tells us that this is the world of subterranean desires (in Jungian theory, water is a symbol of unconscious desires), the world of the pool beneath the pool beneath the pool, whose waters came from "the forks." This symbolism is meant in good fun, but it also alludes to the private nature of the mind and the worlds hidden behind the thousands of closed doors that make up a city's residences and enterprises.

Maddin ends the film on a sardonic note when he invokes a supposed Aboriginal Happyland, a tent city of the dispossessed and the homeless occupying the rooftops of office towers (outdoor penthouses, one might call them). He resurrects the iconic teepee of the presettlement era as a symbol of an earlier history, but at the level of carnival, similar to the First Nations encampment at the annual Calgary Stampede, where nineteenth-century costuming is *de rigueur*. And he is also happy to announce a comic-book heroine, one Citizen Girl, as the "what if" saviour of the city. He describes her as "a concerned comrade" who will right all the evil done throughout the city's history: restore the Eaton's store, resurrect the Winnipeg Arena, and so on. She would be the city's new lap, providing true succour—security, caring, and loving—which his mother's lap (the old Winnipeg) never did. As a final word to the viewer, Maddin as narrator (and script writer) reminds us that Winnipeg's (and his own) sleepiness is aligned with the psychoanalyst's couch. "Lying on the couch," he tells us, means an offering of fabulous imagery, where we narrate our dreams. He wants the audience to play at being psychiatrists trying to explain the meaning of scenes such as his late brother and mother lying together cuddled in the snow, one of the few times in which Mother exhibits caring. Maddin wants us to accept that there is a necrophilial attraction to what is long gone, to people who have passed away like certain buildings that have been torn down. His grand conceit is that laying his traumas down for psychotherapy is also a form of civic therapy. By "exposing" certain truths that he has fantasized, he thinks he can purge himself and other Winnipeggers of the city's hold. William Beard, in his magisterial study of Maddin's work,

claims that the city of *My Winnipeg* is completely a figment of Maddin's imagination, existing "only in fantasy," while at the same time the film produces "titters of recognition in local audiences."[64]

CREATING THE MYTHOLOGICAL CITY

Under Maddin's direction, Winnipeg is reconstituted as a fabled entity, a city rich in fantastic stories that grow forest-like out of its nutrient-rich gumbo. When Maddin fables his city with surreal explanations, he removes it from the temporal zone and gives it an aura of timelessness. The archetypal figures of Mother, Father, Son, and so on are part of that timelessness. He casts these figures in a postmodern light through symbolic associations. For example, with the absurd television soap opera "LedgeMan," he evokes the symbolic power of ledges and suicides in our culture and so slips in the real suicide of his brother over a failed love affair. Another aspect of fable is its approximation to dreamlike states, which can be either drawn out or fleeting, and we have no real way of gauging the duration of a dream except through emotional impact. The passage or sense of time in a dream is tied to emotions, whose intensities are not mechanical or regular like the divisions of a clock.

The city of transgressive desires visualizes space in a different way. The contrast of black and white and the duality of two-colour inserts shift the visual experience of urban space. Just as Maddin shrinks and expands time at will in the film, he also shrinks and expands space beyond any physical or historical reference points. Like the spaces portrayed in dreams, the spaces of his fantasy city are difficult to fit into a strict physical representation. Maddin's Winnipeg is more suggestive and evocative of mental perceptions than sensory ones. In *My Winnipeg,* the train window that frames the Maddin character is the visual equivalent of cinema. The fuzzy background scenes that he imports into this frame are meant to emulate the borders of the film viewer and the dreamer.

Maddin makes much of Winnipeg as a maternal lap that cradles him. That the lap is very much an Anglo-Canadian one ignores the importance of seminal figures like the Métis leader Louis Riel and the important role of the francophone community of St. Boniface in the city's identity. A symbolic example of this omission is the "third" river in Winnipeg, which is the creek-like Seine that

flows through St. Boniface and empties into the Red River near The Forks.[65] Like the French fact in Winnipeg, it is forgotten in Maddin's city. Likewise, Louis Riel, the father of Manitoba, whose remains were buried on the grounds of St. Boniface Cathedral, does not make it into the mythology of the city since it became a city only after the famous rebellion. The whole Métis heritage of the place is passed over: Maddin seems unable to fantasize the Métis fact into a transgressive desire.[66]

In both *Saddest Music* and *My Winnipeg,* the old man, the father figure, is present. The male trajectory from youth to old age is core to Maddin's narratives. He is highly conscious of how generations impinge on each other and how each generation struggles to free itself from the regime under which it was raised. The sibling rivalry and the father-son conflicts over women depicted in *Saddest Music* express part of his stance toward the parental generation. Maddin is forever the son and never the father. This approach fits the psychoanalytic categories concerning dreams and fantasies that he favours and explains why he considers *My Winnipeg,* along with the other two autobiographical films (*Cowards Bend the Knee* and *Brand upon the Brain)*, therapeutic.

What marks Winnipeg as a city of transgressive desires is the importance of psychohistoric and psychogeographic elements to his storytelling. When Maddin metamorphosizes poor Roderick Kent into the Serbian cellist "Gavrilo the Great," he consciously adopts the first name of the 1915 assassin of Archduke Ferdinand, whose murder sparked World War I. Serbia became a victim of that war, much like it did under the American-led NATO bombing of 2000 over Kosovo; Maddin comically acknowledges the latter event through Roderick's triumph over his American brother. Maddin gleefully transfers historically important events into a sexual paradigm, whether it be the two brothers in *Saddest Music* or the Winnipeg General Strike of 1920 in *My Winnipeg,* which becomes a metaphoric front line between the libido (the workers) and the superego (the bourgeoisie).

Likewise, the psychogeographic is highlighted in the imagined forks beneath the forks of Winnipeg's two rivers. Maddin uses this fictional claim to create a vast pseudohistorical apparatus of events, whose casual factors are linked to the paranormal spirit world. The city is haunted by its transgressions, be they sexual, like the naming of streets after prominent prostitutes, or historical, like the destruction of venerated buildings such as Eaton's or

the Winnipeg Arena. While it would be easy to conclude that it is the archaic film genre that distinguishes Maddin's films, however, I would argue that it is his excavation of the rich humus of psychoanalytic ideology that is the prime mover in his films. In this, his films are reminiscent of Lauzon's *Léolo* and its coming-of-age narrative. But Maddin goes further than Lauzon by making transgressive desires and the dream world a general part of urban life—attributing desire to buildings and rivers, giving the city a certain convulsive soul, dominated by sorrow for past sins. Maddin's city is a figment of twisted dreams and convoluted memories. That is why his city, unlike Lauzon's Montréal, is created on a set.

Umberto Eco describes humanity as "playful creatures" who are more interested in amusement than truth.[67] This sense of play is Maddin's forte as he ties personal and public histories into a psychosexual knot, creating a psychological carnival where the serious, the sensual, and the comic become one big dreamscape. His urban cosmology gathers meaning from a mix of Jung and Freud, Greco-Roman mythology, and Aboriginal creation myths, wrapped up in a Marx Brothers pastiche of slapstick silliness. This is the secret at the heart of the heart of the continent that he calls "Winnipeg." Winnipeg, as the home of transgression and immorality, is the archetypal "Sin City." In this, it is no different from the attribution of debauchery to cities since the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah was posited as the opposite of the sacred city of Jerusalem. When Maddin turns a hockey arena into a temple of manliness in the Greco-Roman sense, he likens the tearing down of the arena to "blasphemy." His passionate lifting of the secular to the sacred by using such descriptors as "temple" is his game of reinvesting identities with their opposite character. His invention of faux-historical truths by deconstructing the fallacies of conventional historical storytelling is a technique befitting the archaeologist of Winnipeg's arcane facts. The only truths that matter are fabulous ones. The label he created for the film, "docu-fantasy," reflects the two polarities that he bridges. The incorporation of documentary claims and documentary footage into the film to make it seem a valid history is a device that only highlights his re-creation of Winnipeg as a city with a perverted past, filled with libidinal desires.

Maddin's closest colleague in this self-styled docu-fantasy genre is Gary Burns of Calgary, who, like Maddin, has both fictionalized and documentarized his maternal home. Burns is the master of the faux documentary, or what was

earlier called the "mockumentary." While he cannot draw on the historical richness of an older urban identity that Maddin exploits so convincingly, the Calgary that he presents in his films becomes the epitome of superficiality and suburban blandness. Where Maddin revels in the gloom of his Freudian pronouncements and digressions, Burns plays a lighter satirical tune. And where Maddin delights in the shadowy world of black-and-white film cinematography, which represents artful construction because we naturally see in colour, Burns prefers to shoot his urban imagery in off-colour tints reminiscent of comic books. These differences aside, the two auteurs are conjoined by their having lived in their respective cities since birth, allowing them to mirror their cities with an imaginative authenticity. Their cities are imaginary urbanscapes rooted in authorial subjectivity.

7

THE CITY OF ETERNAL YOUTH

Capitalism, Consumerism, and Generation in Burns's
waydowntown *(2000) and* Radiant City *(2006)*

Gary Burns was born in Calgary and grew up in an area close to a mall. This childhood of malls and suburbs provided the background to his preoccupation with this aspect of Calgary's urban identity. Unlike Maddin, whose Winnipeg roots were in the inner city, Burns's early years were spent in a suburban environment. In Calgary, the lack of historical pedigree (Fort Calgary dates back to 1877; Fort Garry was established much earlier) gives more prominence to suburbia and all things new. Class conformity, upward mobility, and rising real estate values are at the core of the suburban promise. With shiny new malls and the automobile, suburbia remakes the urban in the image of eternal youth and childhood. Everything in suburbia bespeaks newness, success, security, and cleanliness. It's the home of young families just "starting out." Like birth, suburbia is often read as a beginning. It is also inscribed with a sense of

promise and future. Because Calgary has grown exponentially since the 1970s, while Winnipeg has stagnated in the same time period, Calgary developed a downtown core filled with new office towers where suburbanites work—the two sites of newness match each other. Winnipeg and Calgary are signposts of differing economic realities that are reflected in the contrasting work of Maddin and Burns.

Film Comment, a journal published by the Film Society of New York's Lincoln Center, offers big city attitudes in its reviews, so in Mark Peranson's review of Gary Burns's signature film, *waydowntown,* he concludes that Burns's Calgary must be added to "the vacant landscape of postmodern urbanism" along with Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto.[1] This promotion of Calgary to the major leagues of North American cities is surprising, yet in terms of cinematic representation and the way in which *waydowntown* reflects a certain stereotyping of North American urbanity, Burns's Calgary is a major player. The vacuity of corporate and suburban life is the defining characteristic of his city. This emptiness is missing in the work of the auteurs discussed in previous chapters. For example, *Maelström*'s Montréal is full of crowded downtown streets, high-rise life, and traffic: one cannot call this cityspace a "vacant landscape." *Rude*'s Toronto is populated with rough streetscapes that reflect gritty social realities full of emotion and human drama. And even in the dead of a frigid winter, Maddin's Winnipeg streets are alive with bundled-up humanity. But Burns's urban universe is restricted to the claustrophobia and artificiality of shopping malls and Calgary's hermetically sealed Plus-15 walkway system, which, when *waydowntown* was made, consisted of fourteen kilometres (now eighteen) of glassed-in and heated passageways linking all the major buildings in the downtown core. Burns's cinematic Canadian city is like no other Canadian city discussed in this book because it reflects Americanized corporate architectural, commercial, and social values. The film's reference to a "vacant landscape" relates to the emptiness of the corporate sphere for the human soul. That is why Calgary can be any North American city: it exists as a projection of late capitalist desire, which can transform any urban space into a corporate haven, a white-collar universe of contented or discontented slaves who can only negotiate this soulless environment through games and fantasy.

This image of Calgary as Canada's most Americanized city (both politically and culturally) has grown out of the city's economic dependence on the

energy industry, most of whose product (natural gas and oil) is destined for the United States. The city has the largest number of head offices in Canada after Toronto, making it a mecca for corporate ideology and proponents of free enterprise. The city's elite project an entrepreneurial ethos of corporate conformity, urban boosterism, mindless consumerism, and ostentatious exhibition of new-found wealth. Calgary is a white-collar town proud of its conservatism and its capitalist identity. Not surprisingly, Canada's currently ruling federal Conservative Party is rooted in Calgary, and the province of Alberta is a one-party state: in 2012, the Progressive Conservative Party won yet another election, making its rule continuous since 1971. Burns's treatment of this dominant social environment in Calgary is satirical and subversive. The visual tropes in his films create a scathing critique of the anodyne beliefs that dominate the city. Propelled by the conventional tools of dark comedy, a genre that Burns manipulates to rhetorical advantage, his two major films about Calgary—*waydowntown* (2000) and the mockumentary *Radiant City* (2006)—portray stifling environments and robotic people.

When Burns (b. 1960) made *waydowntown,* he was forty years old. After studying fine arts at the University of Calgary, he went to film school at Concordia University, in Montréal, and quickly launched into a film career as an auteur director. His Montréal-inspired student film (*Happy Days*) became the basis for his first feature, aptly titled *The Suburbanators* (1995), a film about a pair of young white males who meet a pair of Arab men trying to retrieve some musical instruments from a friend's apartment. The film was an ultra–low-budget production about white male slackers. The following description by reviewer Craig MacInnis highlights the contradictions that Burns exploits: "The way Burns catches the drab locality of the suburban West—a slacker's repudiation of the nearby Rockies and their postcard grandeur—was, arguably, the best thing about *The Suburbanators*."[2] Burns was working within an emerging genre represented by such films as *Slacker* (1991) and *Dazed and Confused* (1993). He explained that "the film is about . . . boredom, about not having the ambition to do much of anything. It fits in with suburban alienation. . . . It's realistic and that's why people come up to us after the film and go: 'Oh, man. I've been there. I know people like that.'"[3]

Burns continued the slacker theme in his second feature, *Kitchen Party* (1998), in which the same white twenty-something generation is portrayed

as living in suburban limbo. Both films were comedies inspired by his own generation of white males who grew up in what Burns came to view as suburban dysfunction.[4] Burns claimed that *Kitchen Party* was shot in a bungalow that "looked 'exactly' like the bungalows in which he grew up and partied."[5] "You've got to write about the things you know," he told an *Edmonton Journal* writer. "I just looked back on my own experiences."[6] His world is the primary fuel that drives his auteurist ambition. Burns treats the built suburban and urban worlds as nongeographic, as cultural universes that could fit any North American city. Yet his socially critical attitude toward suburbia resulted in what one critic termed an "anti-Hollywood teen party movie."[7] In other words, the protagonists did not learn any uplifting lessons as they do in Hollywood versions.

Burns's first two films have socially realistic, male-driven plots about a generation that has become disconnected from the real world through their upbringing in suburbia, a site characterized by a lack of conflict and contact, programmed public space, and sameness. Burns could be very specific about Calgary while at the same time offering the city's image as a universal paradigm. This was possible because his construction of urbanity is in harmony with the new era of Canada-US free trade that generated a continental-oriented Canadian economic and cultural life in the 1990s and 2000s. And of all Canadian cities, Calgary is the most continentalist in its orientation.[8] When Burns applies the broader cultural lexicon of vacant urbanity to Calgary, the city provides all the visual clues of vacuity that the filmmaker requires. Brenda Longfellow, in her study of metropolitan dystopias, points out how well Burns is able to show that "populist vernaculars, at least in Canada, are indistinguishable from the globalizing effects of American cultural and economic influence."[9]

The greatest site of suburban alienation is the shopping mall, whose existence is tied to the main means of locomotion in suburbia, the automobile. "Malls are intensely ideological places," writes Karen Virag in "From West Edmonton Mall to the Westend Shopping Centre."[10] Calgary's sister city, Edmonton, boasts what was once the largest indoor mall in the world (800 stores and services, 110 eateries, 5 million square feet, 20,000 parking stalls), but it is cinematic Calgary that has come to represent "mallism" in all its despoiling grandeur. *Mallism* is a term I use for both the ideological

valorization of the mall as a socioeconomic entity and for the physical space that it constructs. Its origins lie in the glassed-in arcades of nineteenth-century Paris that Walter Benjamin analyzed in his unfinished "Arcades Project." Benjamin viewed arcades as a bourgeois phenomenon, home to the roving figure of the *flâneur,* who amused himself by wandering aimlessly through urban space, watching life go by. Burns likewise reads the mall as a bourgeois construction, but he sees in it a fundamental site of contemporary human alienation, a space inhabited by youth drifting through a meaningless existence generated by the absurd restrictions of suburban life. For Burns, Calgary's commercial and residential infrastructure provided the perfect metaphor for youthful alienation.

MALLISM AND *WAYDOWNTOWN*

Calgary's Plus-15 system comprises dozens of enclosed walkways approximately fifteen feet above street level that link downtown office towers. The walkway system has doubled in size in the past twenty years; developers of downtown office towers are offered an incentive of extra office space for "every foot of bridge or public easement they agree to build."[11] So the system has become self-perpetuating, spreading its tentacles throughout the downtown core, whose skyline, Manhattanesque in its density, represents a small population on a huge urban footprint. While the urban core is a jumble of high-rise buildings, this city of one million is spread over one of the largest land footprints in North America on a per capita basis. The glassed-in maze of passageways symbolizes the subservience of public space to corporate interests. Burns's *waydowntown* was shot in the Plus-15 system and quickly gained cult status for its portrayal of the alienation of young workers. In the Canadian cinematic world, the film catapulted Burns into the spotlight.

Because many of the Plus-15 overpasses culminate in office tower "food courts" very similar to those found in suburban malls, the Plus-15 system may be said to emulate the suburban shopping experience as it funnels humanity to predetermined destinations. The system is rationalized as an extension of corporate Calgary, which doesn't need to or want to experience the local weather or the underclass roaming the streets below. The heated Plus-15 network is

completely enclosed, so that office workers from suburbia can step into their attached heated garages at the front of their suburban homes, drive their cars on freeways to their downtown offices, park in a heated underground parking garage, walk to an elevator and ascend to the office. During lunch or coffee breaks, workers can access the entire downtown, including shops and eateries, using the walkways. At every moment of the day, suburbanites who work downtown are sealed from the outdoors. Using the Plus-15 overpasses, they never have to go outdoors and can simply repeat the same heated journey for the commute home, again never ever having to step outside into the open air or street. This generates a feeling of enclosure, a wall-like security and white-collar conformity for those from suburbia, many of whom have developed an aversion to or perhaps even fear of downtown street life. With the convenience of the Plus-15 system, they never have to leave their comfort zone; they can choose to spend the time away from the office with friends and colleagues with whom they share fashion, taste, and ideology. This Monday-to-Friday pattern can be repeated on weekends by driving from the house to a mall and back. Longfellow considers the Plus-15 spaces, as portrayed by Burns, to be spaces of "irreducible banality, anonymity and reproducibility."[12] To capture this restrictive, banal reality, Burns begins his film with the youthful protagonist, Tom Bennett (Fabrizio Filippo), sitting in his car in the underground parkade of his office tower and smoking a joint before he returns to work. He and his alienated co-workers, all of similar vintage, have made a bet to see who can last the longest without going outdoors. The film begins on day 24, but the game is simply a commentary on every Calgary suburbanite who commutes downtown from their home, day after day, year after year, locked into the same hermetically sealed reality from which there is no escape.

The film's symbolic impact was recognized early on, when the American distributor of *waydowntown* postponed its opening in New York until January 2002 because of the Twin Towers attack of September 11, 2001. Anything negative about the lifestyle choices of those slaving in office towers would have been considered an insensitive insult to the memory of the victims. Brenda Longfellow observes that whereas the phallic tower was once a statement of masculine authority, it became an indicator of extreme vulnerability with the September 11 attack.[13] While office towers are usually associated in the popular media with narratives of corporate intrigue, Burns's attack on the

meaninglessness of what goes on in them for most of their denizens gives corporate culture a sense of absurdity. According to the film, nobody employed in this milieu really works and nothing is really achieved. Instead, a great deal of energy is wasted on insignificant projects, like finding a gift for the boss or following the kleptomaniac boss to prevent him stealing from stores over the lunch hour. Interpersonal games are the main preoccupation of the cogs that work here. Brenda Longfellow offers a devastating description of how *waydowntown* and two other Canadian films produced in the same year depict urban life. "The city has been transformed," she writes, "by the power of global corporate culture into a dystopian, soulless site of claustrophobic anonymity and redundant functionalism: chrome, steel and glass, food courts and malls." Urbanites are portrayed as "proletarianized white collar workers in their twenties and early thirties" who are "uniformly ethnically homogeneous (white)." She contends that the locus of *waydowntown* is "an anonymous, generic anyplace—or anyplace within continental North America."[14]

This conjunction of the "real" Calgary with Burns's cinematic imaginary of the dystopian metropolis may be said to undermine the specifically Canadian character of the film, but it does so in a way that brings the issue of the Americanization of Canadian urban identity to the forefront. Curiously, the cinematic depictions of neither Montréal nor Toronto develop this link between Canada and the United States. The continentalist imperative that makes Calgary appear like any North American city is specifically linked to Burns's virulent anti-surburbanism and anti-mallism. It is also linked to the generational focus of the film and its white-only universe, whose ethos has been formed through North American corporate advertising. Burns views global capitalist ideology as the enemy. In this way, *waydowntown* becomes a signature film about late-twentieth-century capitalism. That he never makes the "oil patch," as it is known locally, part of his portrayal means that the film does not have to deal with the self-glorifying rhetoric of Calgary's business class and its jobs-over-the-environment claims. By eliminating this fundamental aspect of Calgary's socioeconomic reality, he is able to North Americanize the film. Other than the radio announcer's voice-over identification of Calgary as the city in question at the beginning of the film, Calgary's particularity is hidden to most non-Calgary audiences in favour of an anonymous urbanity.

In Burns's hands, downtown as a fantasyland shopping experience is a counternarrative to the valorization of capitalist globalization. At the end of the film, the city is portrayed as a plaything existing under a glass bubble, a sealed cosmos. The city as mall is anti-natural. It is a space that is completely dependent on energy-devouring mechanical systems. As paradigmatic public space, it offers nothing except the distractions of consumerism in all its banality and anonymity.[15] Every mall is the "same" essential place, engraved with tidiness and illusion. A mall in Dubai, in Beijing, or in Calgary is similarly constructed. The same air-conditioned universe of brand-name shops envelops the globe. When Burns portrays the aged Mr. Mathers, founder of the corporate office where Tom and the others work, as a spry kleptomaniac, he is playing a riff on capitalism as theft and corporate life as a mental illness.

Don McKellar, who plays Brad, Tom's despondent co-worker, in the film, interviewed Gary Burns for the *National Post* when *waydowntown* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2000. McKellar described the film as "a very Calgary film," to which Burns replied, "Calgary hasn't been overly represented on film. . . . This is one of the first films where Calgary is Calgary, and *not some anonymous city*."[16] In this interview for Canadian audiences, Burns was playing up the Calgary-specific urbanity of the city while at the same time maintaining the idea of the city space as an anonymous North American milieu. Burns's overriding condemnation of the Plus-15 system implies a broader critique that reaches out to the very essence of late-twentieth-century urban-planning values: suburban sprawl, automobile-friendly infrastructure, and interiorized commerce, with everything contained and sealed like a lab. The ultimate descriptor is sterility—safe, secure, clean, and utterly devoid of any emotional or sensual interface.[17] Everyone who enters the mall enters a space that belongs to, and is tightyly controlled by, the corporate Other. In fact, the mall contains no genuine public space—legally, it is all private property—but it creates the illusion of being public space because anyone can enter it. The film cost a modest $1.5 million to shoot on video, and the locations were Calgary's Eaton Centre, Bankers Hall, Canada Trust Tower, and TD Square—all part of the city's urban-branded reality and all linked by Plus-15 overpasses. The presentation of Calgary as the epitome of anonymity and dullness aligns the city with the clichéd staples of sociological analysis. While Calgary has a significant Asian demographic, for one, it has never developed a diverse and vibrant urban

image. Compared to any Canadian city of a similar size, it appears as more or less monocultural. Perhaps that explains the surprise of the rest of the country when Calgarians elected the first Muslim mayor in North America in 2010. Nevertheless, the newness of the city (it began as a North-West Mounted Police fort in the 1870s), its links to Alberta's oil business, and its overall white macho (and cowboy) identity make it a prime example of the kind of urbanity that Burns is trying to pillory. Film critic Rick Groen, writing in the *Globe and Mail,* found Burns's portrayal of Calgary "surreal" and the film's tone hyperbolic. The urban space becomes, in his words, "a patent absurdity," no matter how real.[18] Absurdity and surrealism are two qualities of Maddin's filmic Winnipeg, but applying these qualities in Burns's Calgary is quite different. While Maddin uses the devices of silent cinema (from diverse kinds of black-and-white film stock, to expressionist sets, to exaggerated pantomime) to construct his surrealist visual effects, Burns uses off-shade colour hues, banal dialogue, and stereotypical characters like a denigrated security guard to create his unreal-real world. It is not surprising that some consider *waydowntown* an exercise bordering on science fiction. This attribute is expressed in a scene portraying Tom, the protagonist, flying through the office and in daydream sequences of Tom as a Clark Kent/Superman character, first soaring and then diving to the rescue.[19]

Calgary journalist Bob Blakey spoke to James Martin, one of Burns's co-writers on the film, about the nightmarish aspects of office life depicted in *waydowntown*. Martin commented that Burns had never worked in the office towers of Calgary, but he said that he had and confessed that he didn't find the experience as alienating as Burns portrays it to be.[20] A Montréal reviewer, while acknowledging the element of exaggeration, termed the film "utterly believable."[21] That the film could resonate with a Montréaler suggests that Burns touched a raw nerve about contemporary urbanity. According to Ottawa reviewer Jay Stone, "*waydowntown* is populated by the very people you see at the very downtown malls the movie honours."[22] The mirroring of recognizable urbanity in Burns's film is related to Calgary's actual office space, its corporate identity, and its ability to be Everycity because it captures the monotony of office tower existence everywhere. The injection of the Plus-15 system, like a drug, enhances the experience and makes it even more surreal.

In a major study of Burns's oeuvre, Patricia Gruben highlights a number of salient features of his films, including *waydowntown*. She notes, in particular,
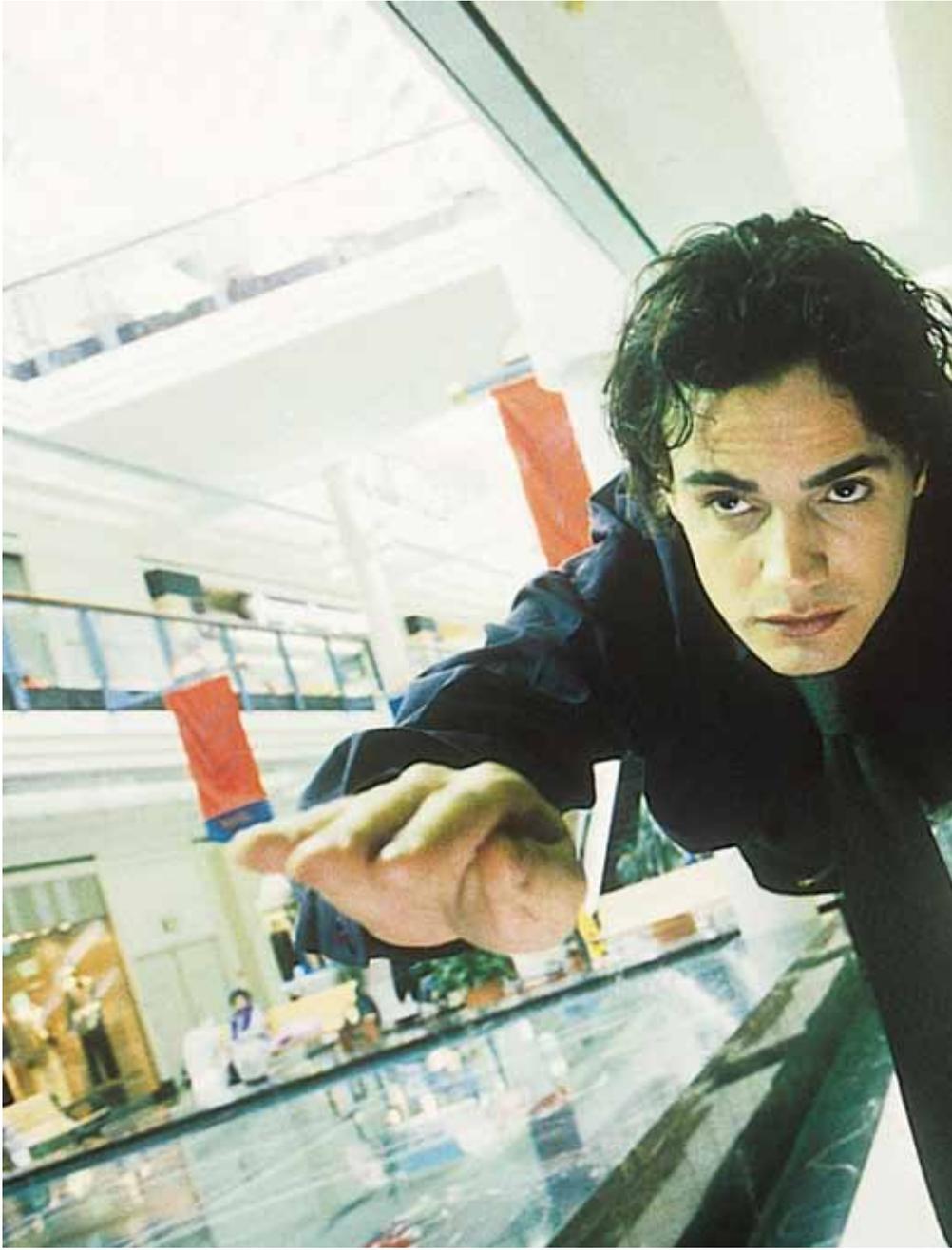
waydowntown (Gary Burns, 2000). Courtesy of Burns Film Ltd.

how male-oriented all of his films are: "All four feature young [white] men confined in highly controlled atmospheres, resisting the numbing effects of conformity."[23] Regardless of whether the male imagination is epic-heroic, in drama, or anti-heroic, in comedy, it narrates resistance against overwhelming odds. Burns's anti-heroes are slackers for whom employment is meaningless drudgery. Because members of his generation work in an environment of "architectural and cultural blandness," they can only find meaning in escaping from that entrapment.[24] *waydowntown* is much less autobiographical than his first two realistic features. Since Burns had never worked in a corporate environment, he approached that world with a certain sense of play and magic and turned it into a comic-book image, a convenient way for his escapist male generation to enter an alien world. His gaze is not only white and male and youthful; it is also working class, which brings a critical attitude and ideology to the film. He visits the corporate world as if it is an alien planet. At the same time, he establishes the "reality" or actuality of Calgary by equating its skyline to the classic skylines of other cinematic films and creating a split-screen montage of elevators, mall shops, and parkades that tell the audience that this city is like the city they know, or like any city with an office-tower skyline. Human existence in this space is "a bad drug trip."[25] This hallucinatory quality meshes with the illusionary projections of retail malls, for which the made environment is pure artifice. To remain sane, Burns argues, humans must alienate themselves from the mall and adopt a critical stance toward its offerings.

This ideological bent to the film comes from Burns's belief that he is, as he specified in an interview, "serving the community" through his social critique.[26] That critique originates in a combination of his generation's attitudes and his working-class upbringing. Sharon Corder and Jack Blum, in their commentary on the film's "subversive charm," claim that Burns's political sensibility is one of anti-Hollywood populism.[27] By this, they mean that the film displays a non-American populist outrage. In American populism, the protagonist can rail against the omnipotent corporation, its greed and corrupting power, but he must always triumph over that evil presence and affirm the strength of the heroic nonconformist. Burns takes a Canadian stance on populism: in his eyes, success, if any, is fleeting and indeterminate. A sole individual might escape its grasp, but the grasp remains as tight as ever. The domination of modern life by the values of the corporation, whose only connection to

nature is a destructive one, means that humans become alienated from themselves as physical, natural creatures. They also become alienated from their social selves because the humanity promoted by corporate culture is selfish and uncaring toward others. In such an environment, interpersonal relations become flawed and confrontational. There is very little social support in a capitalist environment. Such a world is wide open to attack.

What is it exactly that makes this film such an insightful satire? With an anonymous skyline and a radio announcer's voice blabbering in the background, Burns seeks to establish the typical urban milieu—the tedium of commuting in a car from a faraway suburb to work downtown. Then the screen is filled with a split-screen sequence of various downtown office venues—people in an elevator and the soon-to-be-identified protagonist, Tom, heading down numerous flights of stairs to a parking garage, where he sits in his car to smoke a joint, psyching himself up for another day in the workforce. The split screens are composed of different dominant hues—lime green, murky blue, and creamy yellow—which signal that realism is about to fall by the wayside. These garish, poor-quality, comic-book colours indicate that we are about to enter a cartoon realm of fantasy. The basic conflict in the film occurs when the daydreams and fantasies generated by the monotony and absurdity of office life clash with the humdrum existence of the workers.

When Tom steps out of his car to return to work, he sees a dead mouse, which he takes as a prop for one of his office pranks. While the radio announcer's voice mentions Calgary in a fleeting moment that can easily be missed by the viewer, the Calgary-attuned audience immediate sees the significance of the dead mouse. It is a symbol of false rhetoric—Alberta's oft-repeated claim that it is a rat-free province. Finding this "rat" in downtown Calgary signifies that all is not as it seems in the pristine universe of the city and its chest-thumping corporate culture. For the non-Calgary audience, the dead mouse is a sign that nothing natural can survive in this artificial world, which is a monstrous death trap. The only living creatures that do survive in the office are those that are sustained by artificial systems.

Tom provides his own voice-over narrative by describing the city in comic-book terms as levitating from the earth and then being covered by a huge glass dome. His thought is realized onscreen in a rather simple special effect in which the city is presented as a plaything ready to be picked up by a

Superman-type male hero and lifted from danger. The city as a comic-book fantasy is meant to symbolize youth and its problematic relationship with an adult reality to which it must reluctantly adjust. Tom's musings help bring him into focus as the anti-hero of the film: he is too pretty to be a typical Hollywood square-jawed hero, and his purple-hued lips make him look like a badly coloured mannequin. But because he dreams, as Léolo would say, he is more than a cartoon. It is his dreams that actually guide him out of the prison (the mall) that he inhabits because they offer a counternarrative to the meaningless dominant discourse. The prison is actually constructed of glass, signifying a see-through entrapment, permeable by light but not air. The lack of fresh air is an oft-repeated observation by the characters in the film and refers to the stultifying "inside" atmosphere that encourages lethargy rather than action. The glass bubble over the imaginary floating city becomes the glass walls of the Plus-15 system of walkways, which, in turn, become the glass covering Tom's cubicle ant farm, the glass windows of the office tower, the glass windows of the mall stores, and so on. We can see through the glass and what we see are humans as ants scurrying around, trapped in a bubble—an artificial environment from which there is no escape. In Burns's cinematography, the human body is objectified as an organism caught on a treadmill or an escalator over which it has no control. It is simply being carried along.

Burns attacks the Plus-15 system because it is a replication of the much-despised mall and its ideology of consumerism. The mall pretends to be a streetscape with storefronts, eateries, and boutiques, but this streetscape is a totally constructed, corporately controlled reality that has no historical depth or evolutionary power. It has been made solely to foster commerce. The film's constant reference to stale air presents this essential life force (air) as something that has been polluted and is debilitating. It is unnatural air. The metaphor of not being able to breathe, which the film exploits endlessly, implies that the mall brings on death, that it suffocates its users. In turn, suffocation suggests a tightening control, a stricture that has one by the throat. This unrelenting view comes from Burns's view of the mall as an artificial environment much like the interior of a spaceship or an airplane. In contrast, the street outside is elemental. It has rain, wind, sun, smog, whatever weather is present. It also has panhandlers, the poor, the mentally ill—all of sorts of people. It has traffic and it has a streetscape that evolves with time as

buildings are torn down and replaced. It has a natural life that stands in stark contrast to the unnatural pristineness of the mall, whose purpose is to hide history and change. The constant, unchanging quality of the mall contrasts with the flux of the street, and it is that flux that Burns values. The enclosing sense of the mall feeds Burns's denunciatory rhetoric and his desire for the freedom of the street, its diversity, and its insecurity. In the mall, Burns tells us, one goes nowhere because wherever one goes, it is the same, while on the street one goes somewhere, because the streetscape changes. In numerous interviews about the film, Burns has denounced the Plus-15 system for destroying Calgary's downtown street life, degrading it to near nonexistence, which has been noted by numerous commentators on downtown Calgary's "dead" post–rush-hour ambience.

Burns adds some diversity to his film by featuring female characters and nonwhite men in minor roles. This could be simply for dramatic effect and to allow the farcical sex scenes to happen, or it could be a sign of comic maturity. Deadpan actor Don McKellar plays Brad, a forty-year-old office colleague who is going suicidal after twenty years at Mather, Mather, and Mather and whom Tom nicknames "Sadly I'm Bradley." He too is glassed in. He has prepared a Molotov cocktail–style container (a two-litre pop bottle filled with marbles) to break the office window so that he can throw himself out. He repeatedly practices hurling the bottle but never breaks free. The "marbles" that weigh down the jar represent his mental health, as in "losing your marbles." Tom, who has been in his first postgraduation job for only five months, doesn't want to turn into a Bradley-like casualty. He senses that they are all being driven slowly insane by "polluted downtown air." To help keep their sanity and to effect something outside their monotonous routine, four office workers have made a bet to stay indoors, in this polluted environment, for a month. They are Tom (Fabrizio Filippo), his nemesis Curt (Gordon Currie), Tom's confidant Randy (Tobias Godson), and Sandra (Marya Delver), who is the newly minted assistant office major domo ordering people around. When Sandra asks Tom if he has "a minute," he responds cheerfully, "millions." Their work space becomes timeless in that the plot, which revolves around getting a gift for the boss's retirement party, takes place over a single lunch-hour on day 24 of their bet, during which time Tom sports a half-dozen-plus necktie changes. The sense of unchanging time, an eternity of boredom in which nothing changes except

the colour of your tie, is what Burns is trying to convey in this satire of white-collar work.

The comic-book spirit of the film is augmented by the office nicknames of various characters like Weepy Vicki and Sadly Bradley. Their identities fit the flat, two-dimensional plane of a comic book. Their comic-strip office life is filled with corny, interpersonal intrigues that are augmented by hallucinatory episodes like Tom's glimpses of a Superman-like character in tights and cap or Brad's masochistic stapling of slogans on his chest, or the continuous references to suicidal impulses. This is what life in the bubble leads to—madness. After being sent on an errand to buy Mr. Mather a retirement gift in the mall attached to the office, Tom, in one of his numerous soliloquies, asks sardonically, "What do you get a boss that has stolen everything?" What else but a glass vase, in keeping with the glass metaphor! The vase gets broken when Tom engages in a sexual tryst in his VW with someone he ogles in the food court. The breaking of the vase signifies the "breaking out" that will occur later in the film.

Tom's questioning about the meaninglessness of work life applies to the whole capitalist structure in which he is a cog. He wonders if he is beginning to smell of decay, like the rottenness infecting Mr. Mather's mind. This is the great worry of the young, those who enter into a world dominated by their elders and to which they must pay homage and allegiance. Tom wonders if he will end up as a Mr. Mather character, constantly followed by the young Sandra whenever he steps out of the office to prevent his being arrested for theft. Sadly Bradley is near suicidal after twenty years at the company, while the founder, Mr. Mather, has been there for fifty-six years and is so far gone that the only pleasure he has in life is shoplifting. It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world, in the sense of being insane, but also angry.

Each of the four young white-collar workers in on the bet starts to unravel in the course of the lunch hour. Sandra's self-esteem collapses because she has to spy on Mr. Mather. She develops symptoms of hypochondria and is assaulted by strange odours—frightening smells that eventually drive her outdoors, thereby causing her to lose the bet. Randy, meanwhile, becomes angrier and angrier; he is finally pushed outdoors while hidden inside a garbage can and then marooned, unable to get out. Curt, the corporate yes-man who hid the fact that he had once lived in the office tower for a whole year and so was a front runner to win, is so blind to the absurdity of his life that he never leaves it. The

only character who redeems himself is Tom, who claims that the inside air has made him "selfish and uncaring." These are the values that life in the office and the mall promote, whether in the role of employee or consumer. This is the air of capitalism. Tom undergoes a conversion, apologizes to everyone whom he has somehow hurt, and decides to become a superman by stepping outside the building, thereby losing the bet. At one point, he yells out triumphantly, "I am not a winner!" Before Tom forsakes his job and goes outside, he symbolically liberates the ants. The film ends with a split-screen sequence that suggests his split personality and then a series of stop-frame close-ups of Tom's eyes as he looks up from the street to the tower from which he has just escaped.

The fundamental motif of the film is the stereotypical comic-book male superhero that plays so successfully to young minds rebelling against parental control and the constant strictures of society. They can imagine themselves in a role in which they are superior to the adults who control them. Tom is a Clark Kent/Superman character, who by day is an ordinary mortal working at an ordinary job but who can, at any moment, shed his mortal identity and become the saviour of the world.[28] He is shown flying through the air, and his role model is a mysterious Superman lookalike who appears to him from time to time in the film. While Tom cannot save "the world" from evil, he certainly can save himself from the evil world in which he lives. In this way, he is less American and more Canadian because his superpowers are limited to helping himself. In seeking forgiveness and offering restitution for his sins, Tom becomes a moral figure, transformed from a self-centred egotist to an altruistic, caring persona.

Burns's use of the Superman figure is one way of Americanizing—and thus continentalizing: not only can this iconic comic-book hero can be considered the archetypal superhero, but Superman also offers a commentary on the male imagination and how it is informed by the myth of male heroism. While most of the males in the film are frightened characters crushed by their milieu, Tom is slightly different because he is trying to think his way out of the situation rather than keep himself drugged. His trickster personality turns out to be as clever as that of the epic hero Ulysses, who knows how to avoid entrapment and slay dragons. Tom's filmic journey from anti-hero to hero isn't exactly on the level of a Homeric epic, but his salvation is edifying for the audience. Unlike his earlier slacker films, Burns offers an olive branch of hope and

individual agency, thereby playing to the emotions of a mainstream audience. But the horror of the city as a mall and office-tower nightmare remains. The mall's tentacle-like reach to every corner of existence continues unabated in spite of Tom's escape from its clutches.

While the generational struggle and viewpoint in *waydowntown* is mono-lithic, the generic element is more complex. Burns mixes the conventions of black comedy with the comic-book genre in a preliminary attempt at a cross-genre film, but without the advanced animation, initially used in Hollywood films in the 1990s, that adapts comic-book and graphic-novel characters to the screen. Using simple technological effects, however, such as Tom flying through the mall (achieved by the actor being on a moving dolly with his tie covering up the supporting pole, which was airbrushed in postproduction) actually enhances the fantasy aspects of the film. *waydowntown* glorifies youth rebellion through humour and occasional use of fantasy. This easy-going approach to urbanity made the film an audience pleaser.

That the Superman motif represents an urban hero (the comic-book character Clark Kent works at a metropolitan newspaper) is apropos for a city that is meant to represent any North American city. The film's spatiality is claustrophobic, but in a transparent way because of all the glass. This trans-parency symbolizes an internal imprisonment. Nobody forces the employees to play the game: it is a self-imposed survival game. Presenting urban space as brightly lit, ultraclean, and homogenized equates corporate culture with artifi-ciality. The orality of the film resembles a series of sound bites as the denizens of the office speak in clipped phrases. Even Tom's philosophical question-ing is populist and simple to understand. The temporality of *waydowntown* is represented by a lack of heritage buildings, of historical depth, or of any sub-stantive diversity, while the spirit of boredom and the need to rebel against the city's imposed timelessness constructs the city as a site of inactivity and mental sleepwalking. The sense of automatism that the film conveys speaks of a robotic existence that is preprogrammed and unalterable.

Another aspect of the film's spatiality and visuality is its use of verticality as the main spatial element. Life is an up-and-down experience: that is the main motion in the film. Going down to street level is the sign of liberation, whether by running down the stairways or throwing oneself off a ledge to the sidewalk below. The lateral movements inside the office or the mall are suggestive of

the ants in the glass case because they occur in designated passageways. With various levels of the glassed-in mall serving as another version of the ant farm, Burns also offers suggestions of earlier filmic views of a futuristic urbanity going back as far as the 1927 classic *Metropolis*. The emphasis in *waydowntown* on verticality and the artificiality of a mass society going about its mindless business is a resurrection of a trope in science fiction urbanity of the city as a vast vertical network of activity that is enclosed and imprisoning. There is no subjectivity, only objectivity. The verticality of the film serves as a metaphor for higher and lower morality. But this dimension disappears in Burns's *Radiant City,* where suburbia has no elevation whatsoever. While downtown is vertical and monotonous, suburbia is flat and monotonous: they are two sides of the same urban coin, equally constricting and facile. Whereas Maddin creates a phantasmagorical city stirring with libidinal impulses, Burns creates its opposite—a saccharine entity that is so regimented that it invites rebellion.

SUBURBIA AND *RADIANT CITY*

With *Radiant City,* Burns moved to Calgary's suburbs, a space that is the horizontal equivalent of the vertical space of *waydowntown*. Linked through the commuter-worker, who inhabits both spaces in the course of a day, both worlds are equally vacuous. Rather than the universe of young singles living in a high-rise office tower in *waydowntown,* we are presented with a world of young families living on a stretch of prairie filled with cookie-cutter neighbourhoods. Again, Burns turned to a collaborator, CBC journalist and radio host Jim Brown, this time for both the writing of the screenplay and the directing. While Maddin called *My Winnipeg* a "docu-fantasy," Burns was working in a related genre, the faux documentary, a film genre that mixes fiction with nonfiction in much the same way that creative nonfiction blends fiction and nonfiction. The purpose of this mixing of opposites is to add a greater emotional element to the film, to illustrate dramatically the filmmaker's point of view. The Moss family, the focal point of the film, is fictional, but the landscape of the Calgary suburbs is real enough, as are the various experts whom Burns engages to pillory the architecture and the social dynamics that suburbs create within families and their communities. In an interview with the *Winnipeg Free Press,* Burns explained

that living in Calgary means that "you can't avoid suburbs. It's the defining characteristic of this city."[29] Although a few years earlier, he had said that it was the Plus-15 system and the mall that defined Calgary, they are in fact two sides of the same coin. While Maddin equates Winnipeg with snow, sleepwalking, and eroticism, Burns equates Calgary's suburbs with "a skin disease."[30] Burns himself lives in Calgary's inner city, in the funky neighourhood of Sunnyside, a liberal-minded, mixed community of century-old homes, walk-up rental housing from the 1970s, and upscale townhouses, with a commercial district of coffee shops, restaurants and clothing stores only a few minutes' walk away. Just as he never worked downtown, he does not live in the new suburbs that he describes. His "village" of Sunnyside is as far politically, socially, and architecturally as one can be in Calgary from the city's ever-increasing suburban sprawl. In local mythology, Sunnyside represents nonconformity, just like Burns's films do.

Radiant City was co-produced by the CBC, the NFB (National Film Board), and Burns's own company, making it a production dominated by the public sector. Since both the CBC and the NFB share a legacy of social criticism, informed public discourse, and investment in the documentary mode of filmmaking, their involvement in the project confirms the film's social messaging. In the same way that Maddin's *Saddest Music in the World* and *My Winnipeg* complement each other in a fantasy depiction of one city, so Burns's *waydowntown* and *Radiant City* constitute an exercise in twinned polemics. One of Canada's most knowledgeable interpreters of Canadian cinema, Geoff Pevere, calls *Radiant City* "funny, astute and more than slightly unsettling."[31] Burns's rhetoric likens suburbs to monstrosities. Canadian philosopher Mark Kingwell, as a commentator in the film, characterizes contemporary suburbia as "post-apocalytic," meaning that it represents science fiction film images of lifeless quiet. It is a kind of dead zone inhabited by zombies, who are mirror images of the automatons in the office tower and the mall. Everything is so neat, so tidy, so manicured that it looks unreal and artificial, just like a mall.

When the film debuted at the Calgary International Film Festival in the fall of 2006, a Calgary journalist described its subject matter as "the relentlessly beige miasma of cul de sacs that ring Calgary and most every city on the continent."[32] Again, we have the equation between Calgary and other North American cities, an indication of Burns's ability to use Calgary to represent the worst of the continent's contemporary urban space. Another aspect that

links *Radiant City* to *waydowntown* is the theme of fakeness. Co-writer Jim Brown describes the faux style of suburban houses as "fake Arts and Crafts, fake Tudor, or fake Victorian."[33] It is the same fakeness, the same sense of a false community (of consumers) that inhabits the mall. Both Brown and Burns are convinced that suburbia needs to be replaced with a "new urbanism" that includes mixed housing (read different classes), real rather than chain restaurants, convenient public transportation, and, most of all, a vibrant street life that comes from proximity and diversity.[34]

While the filmmakers dream of an alternative to the fake facades of malls and suburban homes, those who share the corporate mindset that lies at the core of Calgary's socioeconomic identity view both as beneficial. They see malls and suburbia as vibrant and attractive spaces, and they appreciate the emphasis on safety, security, and homogeneity.[35] For Burns, the most problematic part of suburbia is its utopian aspirations. *Radiant City* is named after the imaginary urban universe, "Ville Radieuse," conceived by French architect Le Corbusier in the 1930s. The whole idea of a "planned" community or urban space in which a person or a group decides how to satisfy human needs in a built environment is precisely the approach that Burns rejects. He prefers a denser, more varied, urban identity that reflects the historical evolution of a site.

While *waydowntown* has a single oblique reference to Calgary, the name of the city where *Radiant City*'s suburbs are located is never mentioned. Again, we have the urban anonymity that allows both films to speak for a wider identity than just Calgary. Burns's collaborator, Jim Brown, grew up in the suburb of Don Mills (now part of Toronto) in the 1960s and 1970s. In comparing his childhood experience with the new suburban reality, he noted that contemporary suburbs are "completely different from those built in the '60s and '70s, where . . . you could still ride your bike to a whole bunch of different stores, the library, ball diamonds."[36] The whole idea of suburbia is the clustering of functions, but separating residences from services (such as malls) forces people to drive, sometimes long distances. In a nod to the architect Le Corbusier's futuristic designs, however, Brown admits that along with the suburban emptiness, "there's a geometric beauty, a modern, straight-line, clean-edged beauty, to these communities as well."[37]

Katherine Monk says that *Radiant City* is a journey "even further down the rabbit hole" than *waydowntown*.[38] But she is wary of the faux documentary

style of the film, which, she argues, results in "generic visuals and predict-able anti-suburb rhetoric."[39] The view of suburbia presented in the film, both visually and narratively, takes up postmodernist deconstruction. By pasting the label "unsustainable" on suburbia, Burns ties it, as an economic phenom-enon, to agribusiness monoculture, landscapes of chemical farming, tracts of clear-cutting, and rapacious commercial fisheries. Suburbia is constructed as a dystopia, an environmental disaster, and a threat to sustainable cities.

The film begins with aerial and ground shots of anonymous subur-ban tracts. In a glum, treeless landscape, we meet the actor-ensembled Moss family—mother Anne, father Evan, son Nick and daughter Jennifer, plus tod-dler Emma. Mother and father are interviewed driving in their respective vehicles. The children are positioned in front of their homes like lost match-sticks. "I don't know anyone who lives around us," young Nick tells us. So there it is—a nuclear family in their cars living anonymously, or so it seems at first. The Mosses are juxtaposed to a series of experts who repeatedly under-score the failings of suburbia. The most humorous of these is James Howard Kunstler, the American author of *Geography of Nowhere* and other similarly titled books, who informs us that 80 percent of all construction in North America has happened since World War II and that suburbia is a crime against social well-being. Mark Kingwell, a philosopher and Torontonian, informs us that suburbia is a form of flight *to* isolation, a movement that seeks to avoid a life of the close proximity that is the essence of city life. But somehow, humans survive in this barren environment, supposedly devoid of sociability.

Burns and Brown then introduce the viewer to a series of suburban com-munity names—Chaparral, Cranston, Copperfield, and so on—all of which are names of real suburban communities in Calgary. The Moss family lives in "Evergreen," an imaginary community invented for the film. But the film is always balancing the fictional Moss family with the real experts or with a real-tor who praises the "power centre" suburban malls, which are only a "short" drive away. Evan, the father, spends two hours per day commuting on the freeway, while the mother, Anne, spends hours hauling the kids to their vari-ous sports events and arts classes in the family van. A graphic tells us that the average North American commuter spends fifty-five work days each year commuting in a vehicle. That means, horrendously, that commuters spend the equivalent of eleven five-day work weeks in their cars every year. Besides
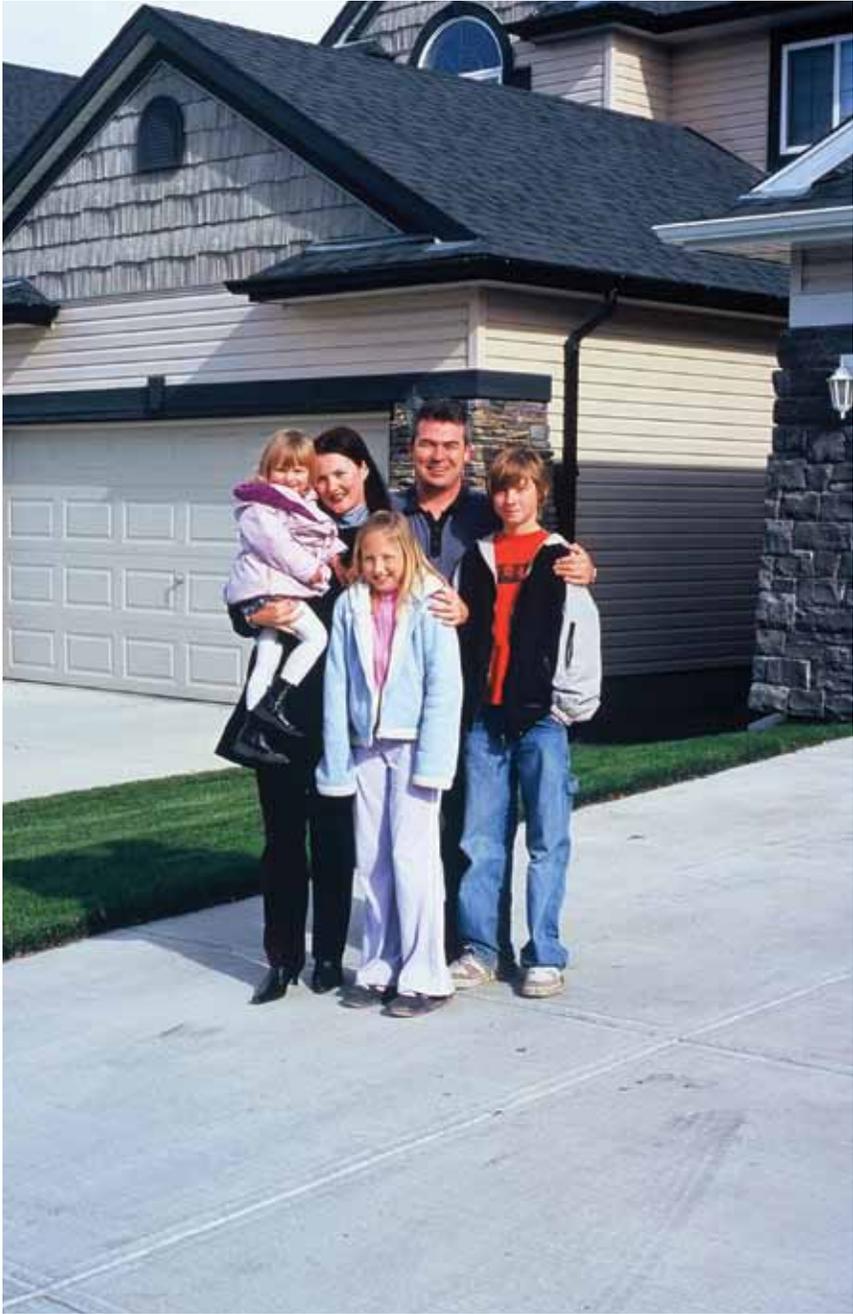
Radiant City (Gary Burns, 2006). Courtesy of Burns Film Ltd.

contributing to obesity, the film tells us, this auto culture also promotes intolerance because of the social isolation of commuters.

An important motif in the film is the fantasy world in which the two Moss males engage, which contradicts the theme of social emptiness. Father Evan, along with other suburbanites, is acting in an amateur production of "Suburb: The Musical," which is a satire on suburbia being put on at the local community centre. Evan remembers a childhood living on a street where the overhanging tree branches from opposite sides of the street actually met. Son Nick is involved in an amateur video of a paintball game that he and his friends are creating. So Nick does have buddies; he does have a group of friends. Since Evan and Nick are alter egos for Burns and Brown, having the Moss males being creative and artful while living in suburbia is somewhat contradictory. Obviously, the experts in the film who attribute characteristics to suburbia are missing something. Burns and Brown show, therefore, how humans can subvert the dominant narrative.

The female component of the family is more defensive of suburban life. Mother Anne is the harried housewife who defends her preference for big houses in the suburbs over small houses in the city. She is the obvious villain. Another family in the film consists of a single mom and her teenage daughter, who use the bus because they don't own a car and live in a multifamily unit on the edge of the community. One expert in the film refers to the construction of suburban housing as "social apartheid" because of the way it divides lower-income from higher-income classes. The contrast between the poorer denizens of suburbia who need to use public transport and the better off, two-car families is a core critique. This class analysis is something that Burns carried off well in *waydowntown* and continues here.

The film ends with the actors dropping their fictional roles and commenting on their own experiences of suburbia, a prerequisite for getting a role in the film. Their anecdotes add an aura of authenticity but no real depth to the narrative. This end-of-story truthfulness confirms that in reality, life in suburbia is not totally negative. It shows the actors in the film accepting the economic necessities that drive them to live there. The film lacks the power of Maddin's delightfully autobiographical fantasy, *My Winnipeg*: it simply is not as engaging, but that is to be expected considering the topic. Burns is not creating a sensationalist "Suburban Housewives." The smiling Moss family in

the closing freeze-frame, which gradually moves to a fuzzy close-up, is a fiction that parallels the "smiling" landscape of happy suburbia. For those following the narrative and trying to be engaged by it, the mixing of genres is not always seamless or comfortable. Perhaps Burns was limited by the inherent didacticism of the documentary mode, which is not open to his inherent comedic inclination, or perhaps the presentation of such an alienating reality in a contradictory way creates confusion. Viewers simply do not want to identify with suburbia, a place without glamour, drama, or excitement, but many of them also live there and know what it feels like to make a life there. For them it is a human place.

The acting in the film, while conceived as an emotional add-on to the documentary mode (the well-known technique of docu-dramatization), makes the talking-heads commentaries seem a bit unreal. The play within the film in which suburbanites critique their situation becomes a metaphor for the whole film. When the fictional Mosses and other families come offstage to reveal their real selves as nonactors, we discover that there isn't much difference. They are typical Calgarians. This narrative closure is not as effective as the catharsis in *waydowntown* when the protagonist breaks free. In *Radiant City,* suburban sprawl continues unabated. The "horror"—as father Evan calls suburban life, referring to the film *Apocalypse Now*—never ends. In fact, the war metaphor is an underlying one in the film. The reference to the Vietnam War suggests defeat, the implication being that suburbia is a war on society and nature and that it will eventually collapse. When the teenage boys play paintball games in the mud of a suburban construction site, the scene evokes World War I trench warfare, and when they get in between the houses that are going up, it seems like urban guerrilla warfare. In the end, *Radiant City*'s black comedy and satire comes across as muted in comparison to *waydowntown,* and the film's faux documentary elements can be disorienting to the audience.

THE FOREVER YOUNG CITY

Both of Burns's films have a youthful focus—from the twenty-somethings of *waydowntown* to the Moss kids of *Radiant City*. He embraces youth as carriers of a counternarrative that exposes the hypocrisy and idiocy of the world

they inhabit. He also believes that the comic genre is an appropriate one for social criticism, a tradition that is as old as Greek drama. Calgary, whether as a downtown mall or a suburban tract, is forever young in Burns's universe, because it is always eschewing natural decay. The city's obsession with newness and disinterest in the old makes it a paradigmatic city for American values. American culture promotes youth culture in consumption, setting trends for the adoption of new technologies and fashions, and as a metaphor for its own perpetual need to stay youthful and alive. The contrast between the Old World of Europe and the New World of America has been characteristic of North American rhetoric for two centuries, but no other filmmaker in Canada has given his native city such a thick American gloss. The comic-book motif of *waydowntown* is part of that generational orientation toward youth, and the film's adoption of an iconic American comic-book superhero character only enhances the equation between the embrace of American culture and the worship of the new and young. But the artificial environments that spring from capitalist development are viewed by Burns's dissident eye with disdain and a certain apocalyptic fear. The grand narrative of success that comes from being upwardly mobile in the capitalist world and living the "good life" in suburbia is one that Burns repudiates and lampoons. He believes in the value of a preserved urban tradition, of an evolutionary urban environment that grows naturally out of older housing stock, and of a world in which people walk rather than drive everywhere. In the newer suburbs, nothing is replaced. The space occupied by the mall, the office tower, or suburbia, which are all manifestations of capitalist values, are turned into dystopias that are socially dysfunctional, intolerant, alienating, polluted, and controlled. The urban body, whether human or architectural, becomes an anti-ecological, psychologically stupefying, and geographically disconnected entity that moves like a robot or a zombie. This world is a world only for the living dead.

In *Radiant City,* Burns and Brown are upholding the ideology of sustainability-conscious environmentalists and the new urbanists who want to retrofit suburbia into a walkable space. While *waydowntown* has no temporal signposts because of its abstract futurism, *Radiant City* carries a certain desire for the past, a nostalgia for what seemed more liveable in the filmmakers' own lifetimes. This knowledge of another urbanity that Burns enjoys in the century-old community of Sunnyside, which is an integral part of Calgary but is

never represented in his films, is the underpinning of his vision. That Calgary has generated its own prophet of urban doom is a sign of how far down the path of suburbanization his city has gone and how divided it is between preservationists and inner-city enthusiasts, on the one hand, and urban planners and developers, on the other. The multigenerational-family essence of *Radiant City* undermines Burns's universe of singular worlds and probably conspires to make it less effective than *waydowntown*. Burns's Gen-X interest in the slacker figure, the anti-heroic male hero, and the disenchanted dad trapped in suburban meaninglessness was confirmed when another Calgarian, Michael Dowse, made his slacker film about aimless white youth set in Calgary. *Fubar* (2001) developed a cult following because of its resonance with youth, resulting in a sequel, *Fubar II* (2010). It seems that Calgary's cinematic identity, at least the indigenous one, keeps it young, comic, and discontented.

That self-same youthful unhappiness is portrayed by Mina Shum in her Asian-themed film, *Double Happiness* (1992), in which the generational struggle in an immigrant family becomes a touchstone for Vancouver's transformed identity as a city that belongs more to the countries of the Pacific Ocean than to central Canada. Likewise, Vancouver's "youthful" and "playful" identity is also probed in a critical way by Bruce Sweeney's *Last Wedding* (2001) and is given both psychosocial and historical depth in Bruce McDonald's meditation on media and celebrity in *The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess* (2005), all of which are discussed in the next chapter. None of them creates a suburbia like that of Burns because so much of Vancouver's suburban identity has been offloaded to adjoining cities like Richmond and Surrey. Instead, Vancouver sees itself as a high-rise universe trapped on a tiny strip of land between the ocean and the mountains that rise from it. Vancouver is represented by diversity of perspectives far beyond Calgary's "slacker" counter-narrative and its suburban monotony.

A generational perspective and a white-male sensibility are the salient features of Burns's vision that migrate into various aspects of his films' visuality, spatiality, and orality. The visual treatment that predominates in both films is that of endless sameness, whether it be office cubicles or tracts of suburban housing. The spatiality of the films emphasizes enclosure and imprisonment in either a physical or a psychological space. A mood of sadness emanates from the tedium of a controlled existence. And the orality in both films is the English

of white-collar workers who are supposedly upwardly mobile: in short, the language of the middle classes, who claim to "own" Calgary. What a contrast to the orality of *Rude,* with its Caribbean inflection, or the *joual* of working-class Québecers. Burns's films make their mark by locating urban identity in a white middle-class universe that speaks of a North American stereotype rather than a Canadian particularity. That Calgary should carry such an identity is just another aspect of urban diversity in Canada.

8

THE CITY OF DYSFUNCTION

Race and Relations in Vancouver from Shum's Double
Happiness *(1994) to Sweeney's* Last Wedding *(2001)
and McDonald's* The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess *(2004)*

The white-male perspectives that inhabit the narratives of both Gary Burns
and Guy Maddin suggest that the cinematic cities of Western Canada are
entities in which racial and cultural minorities have marginal roles. But
Mina Shum, Canada's first and pre-eminent Asian Canadian filmmaker, has
been able to put her ethnicity and its culture front and centre in her feature
films, beginning with *Double Happiness* in 1994. She has gone on to make
subsequent auteur films that highlight her Chinese ancestry in a Vancouver
context.[1] She has positioned Vancouver as a multiracial and multicultural cin-
ematic entity, moving well beyond the heterosexual white-male perspectives
of her Western Canadian colleagues.

Shum's films are rooted in the historical presence of the Chinese on the West Coast of Canada, which was established during the 1880s, when Chinese labourers were imported to help build the transcontinental railway. In spite of a number of barriers created to prevent Chinese settlement, including an Act of Parliament that sought to exclude them and the imposition of the infamous "head tax," the community grew. Later in the twentieth century, immigrants from Hong Kong, who did not want to live under the communist control after the scheduled return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, swelled the community's numbers to make it the single largest minority in Vancouver.[2]

Shum's work is a combination of diasporic and postcolonial thinking that recognizes the importance of formerly marginalized voices representing oppressed communities in Canada, including First Nations, African Canadians, and Asians (Japanese, Chinese, and Indian). Mina Shum's films belong to the world of other minority-group films discussed in this book, such as *Rude* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*. In the case of the Chinese community, its social status evolved from early twentieth-century working-class poverty and racialized marginality to a centrality bolstered in the twenty-first century by the global economic power of a resurgent China and a new wave of mainland immigration. Born in Hong Kong in 1966, Shum came to Vancouver as a baby. But her family roots are on the mainland: she is the daughter of migrants who fled Maoist China to Hong Kong before finally immigrating to Canada.

In the early 1990s, as a young film graduate of the University of British Columbia, Shum was entering a local film industry that was dominated by American production. In the year she released *Double Happiness* (1994), the BC film industry was worth $400 million in total, of which 75 percent came from foreign productions.[3] Canadian indigenous production, worth about $100 million, was funded by government agencies such as Telefilm Canada, BC Film, and the CBC, as well as by various Canadian television funds. The subordinate role of indigenous Canadian filmmaking has been one of the key components contributing to the emergence of an original, director-driven Canadian cinema. Shum became a part of that component's Vancouver expression. Not having to indulge the generic fantasies and conventions of American made-for-TV and feature films allows Canadian filmmakers freedom for more esoteric statements. They can dream in a different colour.

One such colour, as has been evident throughout this book, is that of the city in which they live. Mike Gasher, in his book about filmmaking in British Columbia, makes the point that much of American film and television production in Vancouver transforms the city into American locations, which results in a "separation between narrative and environment."[4] Playing to American film audiences, who want to see films set in their own geographical and cultural realms, these hegemonic productions have "transnationalized" Vancouver.[5] Gasher suggests that for American film producers, Vancouver (and Canada) lacks the "signifying power" that New York, Miami, or Chicago have for American audiences.[6] Vancouver is not part of America's cultural imaginings. Because the dominant mode of the city's representation is as an American alter ego, Vancouver wears cinematic masks that hide its real identity. Cinematically, it is a city in disguise. But for Canadian audiences in which Vancouver plays itself, the city represents an important mythological identity, unknown to Americans, as the site of "Lotusland," a laid-back place of dreamy physical beauty protected from the country's harsh winters, as well as the location of some of Canada's toughest, most nightmarish, drug-ridden slums.

In a major essay on the Vancouver film industry that details the complex and contradictory relationships between indigenous and foreign production, Diane Burgess of Simon Fraser University explains that in indigenous Canadian productions, "the pristine beauty of the British Columbia landscape is increasingly displaced by a consideration of the complexities of Vancouver as an urban space."[7] Since the Vancouver film industry is the second-largest English-speaking production centre in Canada, its depiction of Vancouver is a major component in Canada's urban imaginary.

Of the three films discussed in this chapter, *Double Happiness* is the one that has drawn the most scholarly attention because of academe's interest in new voices from the margins. The film became part of the canon of a new Asian American–themed filmmaking that appeared in the 1990s. It brought Vancouver's Chinese fact onto the screen at the same time that Asian American literature and films were becoming popular. Mina Shum's film, slotted by both journalists and academics as a film about Asian diasporic identity, was not discussed in regard to its exploration of urban life. Like Burns's *waydowntown,* it was given a universal North American gloss. Shum used gender (female protagonist), generation (youthful protagonist), ethnicity (Chinese), and genre

(romantic comedy) to break new ground in defining Vancouver and its post-modern identity as a city far removed from its British white colonial pedigree.

In contrast, Bruce Sweeney's *Last Wedding* (2001) and Bruce McDonald's *The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess* (2004) represent a Vancouver created by a white-male perspective. Still, all three films have a strong comic component (romantic comedy in Shum, black comedy in Sweeney, and satirical comedy in McDonald), an emphasis on youth, and a cast of powerful female characters. Sweeney is a Vancouver auteur who has situated most of his films in his home city.[8] Bruce McDonald, however, is not a Vancouver filmmaker, nor is his film an auteur film like the other two. Associated with the Toronto New Wave, a group of young, iconoclastic filmmakers who emerged on the scene in the 1980s, McDonald represents an outsider's understanding of Vancouver. *Love Crimes,* which never had a theatrical release but made the film festival circuit, was authored by a Vancouver writer, Angus Fraser. It is based on a true Vancouver story about Gillian Guess, who was a juror for a 1995 murder trial. In 1998, she was convicted of obstructing justice because she carried on a love affair with the accused during the trial. Since the love affair was an interracial one, McDonald's campy film deals directly with the racialized communities of Vancouver that Shum also dealt with in an earlier form. While Mina Shum portrays life within her specific ethnic community, McDonald situates his narrative within a broader Vancouver population and its attitudes toward the South Asian community prominent in the city's suburban neighbourhood of Surrey. His film contextualizes race and sexuality as the union of the old and the new Vancouver.

Together, these three films create a critical dialectic, beginning with Shum's positing of an internalized Asian reality for the city, which is then confronted with Sweeney's non-Asian antithesis. McDonald synthesizes these two worlds, combining the spirit of Shum's internal community monologue with an external vision that gazes upon the city's racialized minorities. His protagonist is a rebellious female like Shum's protagonist, but she is a white single mother who lacks the diffidence characteristic of Asian culture. The male gaze of the director and his male screenwriter add to Guess's construction as a sexual object, which is what she became in the media.[9] While Shum's film is auto-biographically influenced, McDonald's is definitely that of a spectator, with Sweeney's somewhere in the middle.

Double Happiness offers a counternarrative to the patriarchal Confucian traditions embraced by an immigrant Chinese community in an effort to preserve its sense of self in an alien environment. The film features a young Canadianized Chinese female (based autobiographically on Shum) confronting a cultural legacy that she finds restrictive in relation to her life in Vancouver, the only place she has known. The film tells the story of Jade Li, a young woman in rebellion against a traditional father who seeks to impose his sense of duty upon her and the rest of his family. The film can be read as a feminist statement, but it also seeks to articulate a problematic ethnicity and heterosexual family life, while emphasizing the importance of a new, bolder, more liberated future.[10] It embraces the universal theme of youthful rebellion as a necessity for casting off family-imposed roles and achieving a self-determined adult identity. In his discussion of *Double Happiness,* Czech scholar Tomáš Pospišil highlights the universality of this theme: "In her debut feature Mina Shum successfully transcended the narrow confines of the experience of her immigrant community. Her message was far more universal and spoke to a wide variety of people of diverse backgrounds and generations."[11] The film garnered its lead, Sandra Oh, a Genie for Best Actress; it also won a Best First Feature award at the Berlin Film Festival and continued to gain an audience with a North America–wide DVD release in 2007 through a leading US film distributor.[12]

The issue of the ethnospecific versus universal dimensions of the film is an important one in determining whether Shum is a transnational filmmaker in the same way that Toronto's Deepa Mehta is. The main distinction between the two filmmakers is the age when they entered Canadian culture. Having lived in Vancouver since infanthood, Shum was formed by Canada, while Mehta came to Canada as a young adult, already formed by India. Shum's "Chinese" experience was mediated through her family as well as her gender and her Canadian experiences in school and university. Shum herself emphasized the universality of the film's theme when promoting the film. "Men and women of all ages have told me that this is their story," she said, "whether they're African Canadian, Russian or Italian."[13] In fact, the protagonist, Jade, addressing the audience at the beginning of the film, states that

the Chinese family story can be any family's story. Shum has self-identified as an "indie" director so as to escape the Chinese Canadian label.[14] This tension between subject matter and career identity is an issue that lies at the heart of *Double Happiness*.

The film immediately entered the canon of what is generally considered Asian American cinema, a phenomenon that was launched by the American Wayne Wang's film *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), based on the best-selling 1988 novel by Chinese American Amy Tan.[15] Shum's film is regularly discussed as part of Asian American cinema by American scholars. They tend, however, to ignore the film's role in Canada's national cinema, which is just one of the "double" roles the film plays out. The Canadian aspect of *Double Happiness* comes from its participation in what has come to be labelled "Pacific New Wave" cinema, based in Vancouver.[16] The name mimics the Toronto New Wave label of the 1980s, which references the emergence of a new phalanx of directorial talent. Shum is joined in the Pacific New Wave by Lynne Stopkewich, Bruce Sweeney, Carl Bessai, Greg Harkema, and Anne Wheeler, among numerous others. This doubling of the film as both a North American and a local phenomenon simply highlights the diasporic and hybrid nature of the film and the ease with which it can be read with a wider ethnic application and as part of a national cinema. It can be considered transnational in the same way one can consider Burns's *waydowntown* as transnational or transborder.

Critic Edward O'Neill argues that the protagonist in *Double Happiness* performs "her assigned ethnic and gender role" in such a way as to reveal it "to have been a performance."[17] This role playing or acting is a form of impersonation that the narrative of the film seeks to expose, while at the same time embracing the disguises that further survival. This is similar to the "doubling" or masking that Vancouver is known for in its cinematic guise. It is so seldom itself; rather, it becomes what is required of it to survive in the cinematic world. At minimum, hybrid and diasporic identities are dualistic, but they evolve (through marriage, for example) into multifaceted realities. In the process of accommodating cultural differences and integrating values in an unfamiliar world, new cultural entities and attitudes emerge that both deconstruct and recombine different aspects of an inherited or assumed identity. The process of acculturation is continuous and the identities generated by that process are provisional, always in flux.

The postcolonial interest in hybridity and diasporic studies around the time of the film's release meant that *Double Happiness* became a favoured text.[18] The film's hybridity is a complex one, involving both psychological and sociological dimensions. Likewise, the sense of diaspora in the film is problematic because those with singular identities, such as Jade's father's Hong Kong–based friend and a Chinese film producer looking for an Asian actress, are shown to have both liberating and restraining aspects. They live in and out of their singular cultural and linguistic reality, while the heroine and her family live in multiple realities, which they try to accommodate as best they can.[19] Little sense of longing, painful separation, or nostalgia for their birth home is exhibited by Jade or her parents, and Jade's younger sister is so acculturated to Canadian society that she sounds positively mainstream.

The main mood of the film, however, is a sense of entrapment. Eleanor Ty, in *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (2004), argues that Asian visibility is a racialized phenomenon that contributes, paradoxically, to its invisibility in the dominant culture. The theme of doubleness that permeates the film captures the paradoxes of generational and ethnic conflicts. The results are always uncertain. For example, when Jade seeks out a white boyfriend, who symbolizes her desire to embrace the dominant society, his understanding of who she is is limited and incorrect. While she uses him to break the bond with her family, she eventually ends up facing the world alone because the identity she creates is one that is different from his. Her identity as a Canadian is multicultural, while his is not.

Another contradictory duality in the film is its reading by non-Asian audiences, who are offered a glimpse of what may formerly have been for them a stereotypical conception of this specific Asian community. The film attempts to normalize the Orientalized Other through the strong autobiographical voice in the film. At the beginning, the film's protagonist addresses the putative viewers, asking them to treat her family as "white." By this, she means that her struggle against parental authority is a universal one, relevant outside the culture specific to a particular ethnicity. Speaking of her next film, *Drive, She Said,* Shum described it as "basically about how women conduct their lives in the late '90s," which is how she viewed *Double Happiness* in regard to the early 1990s.[20] Sandra Oh, who played Jade Li in *Double Happiness,* confirmed the feminism of the film when she said, "Any actor wants to play a character that is

relevant and truthful and big and important—especially for women. Especially for young women."[21] She is speaking of all young women living in a patriarchal society, not just those of Asian heritage. This strong drive for universality has to be sourced in Mina Shum's Canadian experience since the 1960s.

There is a partnership in the film between ethnic identity with its "constructed . . . codes of dress, setting and behaviour" and North American feminism and its claims to universal rights and aspirations for women.[22] Shum marries the two in the figure of Jade. This is the film's fundamental hybridity. Hybridity is an adaptive mechanism that accompanies diasporic living and allows a multifaceted expression that is both preservative and liberationist. The universal appeal of the film to young women, in particular, implies that coming of age, its rebellion and its search for an independent mature self beyond the projected desires of parents, is a constant across all nationalities and ethnicities. Shum claimed, "All you have to do is see my film and [you] get a real sense about where my heart is."[23] Her heart is in that space defined by the nonethnic, nonracial term "indie director."

"A person's identity is understood as shaped by the intersecting aspects of one's class, education, gender, age, ethnicity, race, sexuality and religion, as well as by one's relationship to the place where one is located," writes Tomáš Pospíšil in his comparative study of three major 1990s Canadian films about visible minorities: *Sam and Me, Masala,* and *Double Happiness*.[24] The character Jade Li's relationship to the space that is Shum's Vancouver is fundamental to an understanding of how an Asian Canadian constructs an urban environment out of her experience. Because of the strong autobiographical sources for this film, one can conclude that its representation has a strong degree of authenticity. The Li family home is working class, cramped, older, and rather ordinary. It is undistinguishable from much of the housing stock that makes up Vancouver, in contrast to its newer suburban surroundings, which form different cities (Burnaby, Westminster, Richmond, and Surrey). The locale of the film suggests an older Chinese immigration (pre-1980s) but one that exists outside the even older generation of immigrants who created downtown Chinatown and who experienced decades of official racism.[25] The film's focus on social class and the pressures on the Li family are reminiscent of the class construction of the family in *Léolo*. Because they are so confining, both families face rebellion from some of their members.

The domiciles in both *Léolo* and *Double Happiness* are crucial to the film-makers' discussion of interiority (the psyche) and exteriority (the physical). The immigrant self fits better inside the home than it does outside because it can be more authentic indoors than when interacting with the dominant, nonimmigrant society, where it faces a variety of stereotypes. Diasporic identity is about distance and distancing, about being in the midst and also being apart, about having to live a double life that demands accommodation within and without. The title *Double Happiness* plays on the Chinese characters that express a "wish for twice-blessed good fortune," but it also suggests duality in English.[26] This pastiche of wordplay is the postmodern bridge that links the film's serious intent and with its comedic patina.

A diasporic identity involves various levels of alienation both within and outside the home. Alienation for racial minorities results from conflict-ing cultural values inculcated during childhood, public acts of discrimination, a genuine nostalgia for a former life, or a frustrated desire to fit in. For those raised in an immigrant family, there are only three options: denying the rel-evance of the past, embracing that past identity as relevant and current, or returning anew to that past after having put it aside. According to Pospišil, this latter possibility occurs regularly because "identity is constantly in the making."[27] In the case of the fictional character Jade Li, there is a monu-mental difference between her father's diasporic sense and her own. Her sense of emplacement comes from Canada, while his sense of Canada is one of displacement. His sense of being displaced becomes constricting for his Canadian-raised daughter because of its emphasis on Confucian family values that do not make sense to her in terms of her future in the diaspora. As in most cases of intergenerational conflict, what is central to parental identity is mar-ginal to hers. His hybridity is a negative one, while hers is positive. She is open to an outside world that has been formed through peer identity, while he is closed to embracing the world around him other than in a utilitarian sense. He wants to live the success denied him through her, while she wants to deny him that pleasure.

Jade's country of origin is factually Canada but culturally binational. This binationality results in her country being Vancouver as an Asianized city. Her cultural self is framed by an internalized Chinese family universe, an externalized Chinese community and its institutions, and a multiracial and

multicultural public otherness ruled by an Anglo-European tradition. Her father's country of origin is China, and its cultural traditions and Confucian behavioural ideals ground him and give him a sense of self-worth and dignity. In contrast, Jade derives her sense of self-worth and dignity from imagining a positive career for herself in the broader society outside the strictures of parental demands. The struggle occurs in the present, where his past and her future battle for dominance.

Language plays a role in redefining a cultural milieu and expressing differing nuances of speech and understanding. *Double Happiness* contains both English and Cantonese, and this duality is part of the film's hybridity. The two languages co-exist, flowing into each other and defining the characters in the film as assimilated or not. Of all the family members, Jade's much younger sister is presented as the most assimilated and Canadian, a character who watches but feels no conflicts. She is the totally Canadianized side of the family, while Jade is pulled in two directions. Jade's hybridity is symbolized by her linguistic limitations: she can speak and understand her parents' native tongue but cannot read or write it, which is not uncommon in children of first-generation immigrants. Her limited skill in Cantonese produces a state of "in-betweenness," of liminality, that associates her with hybridity.[28] It also means that Jade prefers English. Her preference for the dominant language of the city in which she lives symbolizes her embracing of the non-Asian Other. The two languages operating in the film signify the two cultures and their oppositional values. In expressing her intentions for *Double Happiness,* Mina Shum captured her own experience of liminality: "Not only was I hoping to describe new lives in a new language and culture, but I was trying to offer a meaningful and compassionate portrait of what it means to live 'in between' and to move within the liminal spaces between Canadian and Chinese cultures."[29] Being in a liminal space, the natural home of hybridity, means that one is caught between two powerful entities that one is both attracted to and alienated from in various major and minor ways. This sense of displacement results in a desire to place the self in another context. When Jade Li leaves home and moves into her first apartment, it is symbolically empty. It is up to her to fill it. Shum suggests that creating a space in the city where one's hybridity is "at home" is the foundational act of adulthood. But in leaving home, Jade is actually imitating her father and mother, who gave up their ancestral identity to

move to a new, non-Chinese space where their language was a hindrance rather than a tool for socioeconomic advancement, at least in 1960s Vancouver.

Eleanor Ty's discussion of performativity and ethnic identity in *Double Happiness* stresses the importance of a woman from a minority culture creating a film that disrupts stereotypes, but in a way that appeals to audiences who are accustomed to stereotypical representations of that minority.[30] Making Jade a universal female figure while situating her in an ethnic milieu is an important resolution of duality. That Shum can take the fundamental ethical principles of Confucianism (*lǐ, yi,* and *rén*), which emphasize the primacy of an individual's responsibilities toward others and the need for social harmony, and marry them to a feminism that emphasizes individual self-fulfillment in an adversarial society is a perfect example of diasporic hybridity. But that does not make her a good example of transnationality in the way of Deepa Mehta, who was formed by living in India before coming to Canada.[31] Analyzing the various cultural aspects of the film and how they interact with each other clarifies the differences between *Double Happiness* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*. While Mehta's film suggests a positive outcome in which conflicts are resolved, Shum's film suggests that resolution is much more difficult to attain.

The plot of *Double Happiness*—the protagonist's rebellion in favour of individualism and self-definition—suggests that ethnicity is being subordinated to feminism, but in other respects the film suggests the opposite. The rebellion may be the linear driver of the film, but the context is almost totally ethnic: Chinese identity surrounds and envelops the characters. Although Shum seeks to expose Confucian values and their restrictive and patriarchal trajectories, she does so with a gentle hand. As Brenda Austin-Smith notes, "What could have been an overly earnest and predictable drama of intergenerational misunderstanding with a sentimental ethnic flavour is . . . refreshed by the filmmaker's ironic yet affectionate approach to Jade and her family."[32] In addition, the narrative closure of the film suggests a powerful sense of aloneness and loss, the price of a divorce from one's cultural roots. The film's theme of liberation may be its prime selling feature to contemporary Canadian audiences, but ethnicity and a comedic touch are paramount in the film itself.

The focus on living a double life is what gives *Double Happiness* its appeal. Everyone, to a certain degree, lives a double life in order to survive, and the necessity to act out expected roles results in much pretense and hiding. At the

same time, that doubleness is always performed within a cultural context that strongly determines its form. The Canadian film scholar Jacqueline Levitin remembers that when she met Mina Shum in 1991, the working title of the film was "Banana Split."[33] This whimsical title, which signified a split personality, made reference to the term "banana" as it is used pejoratively inside the Chinese community, to refer to someone who is yellow on the outside but white on the inside, a term applicable to both Shum herself and the Jade Li character. Shum's ability to turn a pejorative term into a comic and innocent delight confirms her power of hybrid representation.

Shum's representation of Vancouver involves the three elements of visuality, spatiality, and orality. The visuality of the film is expressed in colour saturation. "Each of the family members should have a [distinguishing] colour," Shum explains.[34] One of the key colours in the film is red, which she associates with being Chinese because it is considered a good luck colour. Another is a deep fluorescent blue, which she uses to associate with the non-Chinese aspects of Jade's personality. Likewise, the film is saturated in the wet dark light that is typical of Vancouver from late fall to late spring. Suggestive of Jade's duality is the strong contrast between the gritty night scenes when Jade is dating and the daylight scenes, which have more distance and perspective. A comic example of this visualizing of the city as a psychological palette is a scene in which the family poses outdoors for a photo for a visiting friend from Hong Kong. The postcard-type mountain backdrop for the photo is subsequently drenched in a downpour, implying that the "happy land" view of Vancouver is all wet.

The spatiality of the city framed by the film emphasizes interior shots of the family home, restaurants, and bar scenes. But the exterior scenes with Jade and her white boyfriend, Mark, are set in industrial backdrops. Jacqueline Levitin suggests that these cityscapes, which are lacking in domesticity, are "fringe" locations paralleling lives exiled from the home.[35] Jade's world is definitely on the fringe. Another aspect of Vancouver's space for Shum is the contrast between the interior (and so internalized) scenes, whether domestic or public, with their unkempt feeling, and the exterior (and so externalized) scenes, which represent the dominant society. In the daylight scenes, the lovers seem isolated and alone. In one area of Jade's life, a strong claustrophobic sense prevails; in another, there is room to move under her own steam whether

by car or on foot, but that movement means a departure into a certain isolation and aloneness.[36] Clearly, both the visuality and the spatiality of the city is one that fits the film's theme of doubleness.

Orality is also dualistic in *Double Happiness*. The film begins in English, with its protagonist speaking to the audience, and then switches to Cantonese in the first family scene. In that scene, set at dinner, the camera revolves in a circle following the family conversation in which the two daughters speak English while the parents speak Cantonese. The use of two languages through-out the film not only highlights the generational difference but also invites the audience into the family debates and discussions as "foreign" observers. The audience shares Jade's sense of alienation through translated subtitles. In this linguistic battle of wills, the hybridity of Chinese Canadian life is self-evident to the viewer. When the father's Hong Kong friend visits Vancouver, he speaks Cantonese with the parents, but he also speaks English and the father even responds in English, making the point that one can be Chinese while speak-ing English. The two identities are compatible, especially in a city like Hong Kong and, by extension, in Vancouver. Shum's impressive ability to highlight the genuine synthesizing power of a hybrid identity and the possibility of a diasporic sensibility that is not rooted in the past receives its due when Jade's African Canadian casting agent promotes her to a female Chinese producer looking for an actor who speaks Chinese. In this three-way female universe, it is the African Canadian woman who offers Jade, the aspiring actor, hope and encouragement. She serves as the symbol of the new life that every vis-ible minority aspires to—a universe where self-fulfillment is attainable. The African Canadian film agent is a sign of success for a woman from a visible minority community.

THE ARCHITECT OF FAILURE IN SWEENEY'S *LAST WEDDING*

Bruce Sweeney (b. 1962) is an Ontario native and a contemporary of Shum's who has made Vancouver his career home. He is an auteur director with half a dozen feature films to his credit, his first being *Live Bait* (1995) and his most recent *The Dick Knost Show* (2013). As a writer, director, and even producer of his films, he has created a cinematic representation of Vancouver peopled

with youthful, urbane characters of his own generation. *Last Wedding* (2001) was produced by BrightLight Pictures Inc., which was co-founded by his fellow University of British Columbia graduate Stephen Hegyes, who had earlier produced Shum's *Double Happiness*.

Sweeney is part of what the *Globe and Mail*'s Mark Peranson in 2001 labelled the "Pacific New Wave" when he described Sweeney's film as depicting "the Vancouver left out of tourist brochures."[37] What the Pacific New Wave represents stylistically is a neorealist urbanity that is clearly part of independent, indigenous filmmaking. Using ensemble casts and offering themes and styles that appeal to a youthful, urban audience, the films of the Pacific New Wave portray a city of emotional energy and social dynamism emanating from a generation on the make, forging an identity for themselves and for the city.[38] One of the distinguishing sociological features of Vancouver is its ability to attract Canadian migrants, many of them young. Almost one in five Greater Vancouver residents was born in another province, which is a higher proportion than in Toronto, itself a mecca for youthful talent.[39] This makes Vancouver a city with a dual attraction, first for non-Canadian immigrants and second for Canadian migrants. Sweeney—one of those aspiring, young, male migrants—came to Vancouver and developed his professional film credentials there, just as Arcand did in Montréal and Egoyan in Toronto. Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver are the key players in the Canadian film industry, allowing each of these filmmakers to engage with their adopted cities. Sweeney's migration from industrial Sarnia, Ontario, to the West Coast to attend university allowed him to become an astute, external observer of his new surroundings: he had something with which to compare them. Mina Shum, in contrast, grew up in Vancouver. Sweeney and Shum belong to the same generation, but the world of a white Anglo-Canadian male from industrial Ontario is poles apart from the world of an Asian-born, nonwhite female. His is a different Vancouver.

Sweeney made a splash in Canadian film circles when his first feature, *Live Bait,* won the Best Canadian Feature Film award at the Toronto International Film Festival in 1995. *Last Wedding* represents his third auteur effort. It deals with three white, heterosexual, childless couples and their disintegrating interpersonal relationships. These are the faces of Sweeney's migrant generation seeking success and fun in Lotusland. But the personal bonds

they have created unravel in Sweeney's imagination in a chaotic and humorous manner. "I thought I should make a film about something I don't totally understand." Sweeney said, referring to relationship breakdown. "I wanted to have *a person kind of like me* suddenly thrown into a crisis."[40] The connection between his Vancouver and the film is evident in both the actors he chose and the sets he used. Sweeney used his own house as a set, and Tom Scholte, who plays a CanLit professor, is a University of British Columbia drama graduate who wrote the one-act play on which Sweeney's earlier film *Dirty* is based on; as an actor, Scholte has been a regular in Sweeney's films.[41] Drawing on his own observations and the verisimilitude of an urban setting he has adopted, Sweeney offers a Vancouver that mainstream Canadian audiences can recognize as fitting their image of the city.

When Sweeney was asked how he would characterize Vancouverites, he answered, "After living in Vancouver for 20 years, I think I've learned the rhythms. We're famously unfriendly people. . . . I think that's why there's so much door knocking in my films."[42] The Vancouver space that Sweeney represents in *Last Wedding* is one that is highly internalized and not easily broken into. These inner domestic spaces are the sites of conflicts and neuroses where individuals seek to affirm their personal identities and career paths. They are not the typical retreats from a hectic public sphere. They are psychological dungeons where external dramas are internalized. Whatever the causes of Sweeney's view of personal dysfunction, the situations and characters he has created in the film offer plenty of scope for black comedy.

The acclaimed Canadian film critic Geoff Pevere notes how *Last Wedding* reverses "the traditional trajectory of the Hollywood romantic comedy in which people work their way through . . . to attain a sunny nuptial state of happy-ever-afterness."[43] Instead, the film begins with a wedding that goes downhill almost from the start. The newly married couple's problems infect their friends, causing those relationships to fall apart as well. "Sweeney is obviously engaging with his own people here," writes Pevere; he is sticking to what he "knows and cares about."[44] His characters are a compilation of experiences and people he has met, brushed against, and known as he established himself in the city's film industry. *Last Wedding* is very much in touch with the give and take of a thirty-something generation finding its feet in a stressful urban milieu. Sweeney was thirty-eight when he made the film.

Last Wedding, at \$1.3 million, continued Sweeney's low-budget approach.[45] Working with low-cost, local actors in a familiar urban setting, he has been able to achieve "final cut" incorruptibility in this film by preserving certain disturbing scenes, such as a sexual encounter next to a dumpster. He sees himself as following in the footsteps of Egoyan and Cronenberg, two auteurs whom he admires for forging distinct cinematic identities.[46] Although he has not achieved anywhere near the stature of these two directorial stars, he has been completely true to his vision and subject matter. Unlike Shum, who can feature her ethnicity and build a personal brand on it, and Maddin, who can offer his distinctive retro style, Sweeney's films have to fight to rise above the crowd. Initially, this lack of distinctiveness made it difficult to find funding for the film from the usual Canadian sources, but eventually, he was able to make a film that characterizes Vancouver from the perspective of a white male Canadian migrant.

David Spanner, reviewing the film for Vancouver's *The Province,* made the startling claim that "*Last Wedding* is the best movie ever made in Vancouver."[47] While the film itself has a problematic narrative structure with characters who are difficult to bond with, there must be something in it that raises the bar on urban authenticity for a Vancouver reviewer to make this claim. The film revolves around the drive to build new downtown accommodation to house the constant in-flow of migrants, who have made the city a place with the highest residential real estate costs in the country. At the time the film was being made, high-rise condo living in Vancouver made national headlines because numerous newly built condos were found to be leaking and full of mould. One of the male protagonists in the film manages a waterproofing business, a characterization that Vancouver audiences could relate to, and Vancouver reviewer Malcolm Parry remarked that the film is "so city-rooted it is set in a leaky condo."[48] Vancouver audiences would understand this film, and the local appeal of the film was evident in the attendance in the city. The film played on seven screens in Vancouver but only a few in Toronto, where it opened the Toronto International Film Festival.[49] It won Best Canadian Film in 2001 from the Toronto Critics Association.

Among reviewers both inside and outside Vancouver, the specificity of place in the film garnered its share of comment. A film reviewer in neighbouring Victoria pinpointed the film's "regional humour" as bound "to coax

chuckles of recognition from British Columbians."[50] Glen Schaefer, writing about Sweeney's depictions of his hometown in Vancouver's *The Province,* claimed that Sweeney makes "Vancouver a recurring character"; Schaefer quotes Sweeney as saying, "Everything I do gets processed through this lens of Vancouver life."[51] But that lens is provided by the experiences of a married, middle-class, professional, white male whose acerbic wit on heterosexual relations is far from the ethnic family dramas favoured by Mina Shum. Both are speaking from their own confinements.

The desire to grasp Vancouver and its people as real entities rather than as stand-ins for an American city is rooted in the goals of Pacific New Wave filmmakers. The city's cinematic history as a facade in which it gets passed off as one American place after another demands an authentic response. In fact, Vancouver's major contemporary literary and cultural icon, *Generation X* author Douglas Coupland, wrote the screenplay for a film about the city titled *Everything's Gone Green* (2006), in which he ties the city's identity to fakeness and the superficial makeovers of consumer culture. Sweeney, too, plays with the concept of Vancouver as a facade by exposing what he sees as the hidden, raw emotions of its inhabitants, who are driven by jealousy, lust, and contrivance. For example, in one scene, the architect intern played by Molly Parker is at a party high in an office tower, where she works for a mainstream firm. Behind the cocktail crowd bubbling with conversation is a superb mountainscape that is postcard Vancouver, but the nasty interaction between the partygoers exposes the struggle between glitz and honesty, between upward mobility and personal integrity. The contrast between image and reality that Sweeney accentuates also appears in the personality of the young bride, Zipporah (played by Frida Betrani), an aspiring country-and-western singer who fills her condo with thematic kitsch. Her new husband, Noah (Benjamin Ratner), finally flees the place because of the triviality and absurdity of her aspirations. Sweeney paints a Vancouver filled with characters out of tune with their cultural and physical environment. Noah, who manages a waterproofing firm, may be able to fix leaky condos, but his own condo is beyond his power to alter since his wife is lost in her country-and-western fantasies and doesn't care what is happening to her world. She has barricaded herself with make-believe. This could be Sweeney's comment on the fantasies of those in the Vancouver film industry, who play minor roles in American productions.

Sweeney creates a dialectical movement between three couples who represent the three basic units of Freudian psychology—the libidinous couple, the superego or rational couple, and the couple that is the ego seeking to balance the rational and the irrational. All three couples operate in a secular universe where professional advancement and success is paramount. These couples typically spend a great deal of time in restaurants eating out. They also spend most of their time indoors in rooms and hallways, which represent their interior psychological space. This is where urbanites build their identities—in small, private living spaces. The external world of public space—streets and sidewalks—plays a small part in their existence. Only in the final scenes when the rampaging women in cars chase their former partners does one see Vancouver streetscapes. The closing scene has the three males sitting silent, unhappy, and naked in a hot tub, soaking their battered egos. Whether in frantic motion or utter stillness, Vancouver is an emotional cesspool.

Because of the proximity of the mountains that co-exist with urban space (West and North Vancouver) and of the ocean that penetrates part of the urban space (False Creek and English Bay, for example), the city can be viewed as a facade or an illusory presence, hanging like a paper-thin mask over the face of nature. Most often, the city is presented in postcards with either a mountain or an ocean backdrop. In addition to the concept of a facade (linked to performance), a very strong water theme permeates the film, but the water theme is not archetypal (Jungian), as it is in *Léolo*. Instead, it represents a rainforest sense of deluge, of a threatening flood, against which the built city must defend itself. That Sweeney uses water as a grounding metaphor only adds to the film's Vancouver identity with the city's own garrison mentality, surrounded as it is by either oceanic or mountain majesty. Sweeney uses water as a metaphor for the mould and decay that destroys the protective walls of the psyche.

More importantly, Sweeney treats the built space of the city—its buildings, its roads, its sidewalks—as a symbol of orderliness and outward facade that is meant to contrast with human disorder and deceit. Beneath the city's approved superficial identity, which is built on a glance and nothing more, lies another city—the one whose inhabitants have sex next to a back lane dumpster or offer fellatio to a deviant academic carrying on the pretense of professional duties. The theme of hiding and exposure that Sweeney plays with relates to

his quip, quoted earlier, that because of the hidden side of Vancouver, his films are filled with door knocking. It could be that as an "outsider," he senses the hiding of Vancouverites behind cultural and economic walls. This impenetrability, however, is overcome through the persistence of nature and rain, which expose the decay that is actually there.

While Shum exposes the generational tensions in a normal immigrant Chinese family in her film, Sweeney exposes the dysfunction in the lives of childless, white, professional couples who are caught up in a certain viciousness that he associates with a hedonistic, secular city like Vancouver. For example, he makes a point of having Noah, the new husband, forsake his Jewish ancestry for a secular wedding to fit the norms of the wider society. Noah's turning his back on his heritage mirrors Shum's protagonist, Jade Li, turning her back on her family roots. Jade wants to succeed in precisely the world that Sweeney paints in such a negative light. One can see her becoming a character in a Sweeney film, where all the hope and promise of personal and professional success turns into a false ambition. The generic differences between romantic comedy (Shum) and black comedy (Sweeney) mark a progression from Shum's feminist hope to Sweeney's despair. What these films share is their spirit of critique, of exposure, and of indeterminate narrative closures.

THE MULTIRACIAL WORLD OF MCDONALD'S *THE LOVE CRIMES OF GILLIAN GUESS*

Torontonian Bruce McDonald uses a media-laden story for his explanation of Vancouver's dynamics. He takes Shum's ethnic theme and Sweeney's sexual focus and shows how a racialized South Asian persona involved in interracial sex is portrayed in a white-dominated media. *The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess* (2004) is a statement on gender politics, race, media, celebrity, and public discourse as hypocrisy. The theme of facades is probed even more deeply in this film than in Sweeney's or Shum's. McDonald is the ultimate outsider, whose experience or knowledge of Vancouver is primarily media-based. His critique and construction of Vancouver becomes a deconstruction of that media and its purveying of images.

In 1995, Gillian Guess, a juror for a murder trial, had an affair with one of the defendants, Peter Gill, who was subsequently acquitted. Three years later, she and the freed defendant were convicted of obstructing justice because of their liaison and its impact on the verdict. In the process, her case became a *cause célèbre* and garnered her copious attention on talk shows. This story became the focal point of Bruce McDonald's surreal treatment of her life and the infamous episode itself. McDonald is a Toronto director who had only worked on one previous film on the West Coast, the acclaimed cult mockumentary *Hard Core Logo* (1996).

Love Crimes represents a nonauteurist understanding, in contrast with the auteurs discussed throughout this book. Vancouverite Angus Fraser—who had shared screenwriting credit for Lynne Stopkewich's debut sensation, *Kissed* (1996)—wrote the original screenplay, but McDonald made the film his own by raising it to the level of a satirical surrealist romp.[52] His portrayal of the city has parallels with *Desperanto,* Patricia Rozema's short film about Montréal discussed earlier in this book, but while Rozema gave her film a generic happy ending, McDonald's satirical tone sinks and never lifts.

In an interview with Vancouver film critic Katherine Monk, McDonald praised the freedom that the Vancouver film scene offered him as director compared to his Toronto experience. "You can feel the freedom . . . the freedom to re-invent yourself," he said. "That's not something you readily find in Toronto . . . and that's so refreshing and liberating."[53] The film represents McDonald's interpretation of Vancouver in the grip of sensationalism. He includes a dysfunctional family à la Shum and the dysfunctional psychology of relationships represented by Sweeney. To those dysfunctions, he adds the dual dysfunctions of the law and the media. In a sense, he builds a pyramid of neurotic, abusive, and ever-hypocritical attitudes fostered by the media's construction of scandal as entertainment. The whole film pursues this theme of mediated existences proffered for public entertainment.

The film stars Joely Collins, a Vancouver-born actor, as the notorious Gillian Guess; Hugh Dillon, a McDonald favourite from *Hard Core Logo,* as Bobby Tomahawk, a devilish late-night television talk-show host; and Ben Bass as the accused Peter Gill, an Indo-Canadian from the Sikh community. Sexual and racial politics are deeply intertwined in the film. McDonald is able to produce a narrative that is disconcerting for Hollywood-attuned (read Canadian)

audiences because of its conflicting genres and styles (animation to musical to drama) and its undermining of narrative as a completely imagined construction; the film contains every mode of cinematic storytelling from naturalistic realism (flashbacks to Guess's childhood) to comic representations of serious crime shows and courtroom dramas. The film is a series of discontinuous and conflicting fragments that challenge the integrative power of the audience. He uses different colour schemes to establish various periods and events in Guess's life and different genres to express emotions and destabilize the viewer. This is a film that wears cinematic modes on its sleeve. And whereas hybridity is a prominent theme in *Double Happiness* and nonexistent in *Last Wedding,* in *Love Crimes* it becomes a parade of mismatched elements masquerading as pseudo-unity. There is no integrative factor. For McDonald, the case of Gillian Guess shows Vancouver to be a deeply divided city that not even love can overcome. While Shum and Sweeney speak out of a personal authenticity, McDonald speaks the way media speak—as a fabricator of acceptable narrative filled with simplistic stereotypes. His film does not allow the normal suspension of disbelief for the audience because of its emphasis on artifice in every scene dealing with the way the story was reported.

The film emphasizes the clichéd nature of media representations and the ways in which media stereotype people and situations. The courtroom is shown to be a movie set and the planting of listening devices in Guess's home by the police is accompanied by the replay of an old police television series, *Dragnet,* which serves as a satirical commentary on their actions. The film is so media saturated in its imagery that viewers cannot escape the overpowering mediation they are watching. They are unable to suspend disbelief to engage with the narrative. McDonald has tried to subvert the audience's dependence on various forms of media, but this only leads to the audience's alienation. By being shown the constructed nature of their media-generated imaginings, viewers are left emotionally disengaged and therefore alienated. McDonald himself claims that his reading of Guess is that she is a woman who "imagines herself in a movie."[54]

McDonald wants us to disidentify, to stand back and acknowledge our alienation from the story as it unfolds, which also represents his own stance as an outside filmmaker who cannot identify himself with Vancouver or its stories. His reference point is always Toronto. His positioning of the viewer

as a self-conscious spectator rather than as a participant identifying with the action of the film is meant to make us critical of how the world is created for our consumption rather than as some pathway to truth. *Love Crimes* is presented as a mediated universe whose narratives alienate us from the truth.

The Gillian Guess character represents both a feminist and an anti-feminist figure. Her eroticization is both confirmed and challenged by the actor Joely Collins, who reads Guess as a person "very much in control and confident in her sexuality."[55] That McDonald played up this aspect of the character suggests that a female protagonist as both vamp and cougar (prey and hunter) fits the male directorial gaze. When Guess appears on "The Bobby Tomahawk Show" (with distant echoes of David Cronenberg's celebrated scene in his 1982 auteur film *Videodrome*), Tomahawk goes after her in a salacious manner in order to titillate his audience, a significant number of whom are matronly Indo-Canadian women in saris, and she rises to the occasion with her expert verbal sparring. The debate continued in real life when Collins praised Guess's "strength" while Hugh Dillon, who plays Tomahawk, claimed that Guess had a diva complex that "people couldn't believe."[56] McDonald turned the Guess character into a sex goddess figure because he felt that Guess "leaps out because most Canadians like to keep their heads low on the radar screen."[57] Her provocative attire (red dress, red shoes), her driving around in a fantasy white convertible wearing sunglasses like our image of a doomed Hollywood celebrity actress, and her constant display of ankle and limb make her seem truly American. At one point, Tomahawk introduces his show with a fake American accent, which he immediately drops, calling the accent "American shit." It is clear that the extravagant persona of the "fallen woman" (Tomahawk calls her a nymphomaniac) that McDonald constructs for us is meant to be non-Canadian, but this persona is nevertheless in harmony with our contemporary postmodern urban fantasies driven by the media. McDonald is saying that Guess, as the American cinematic femme fatale, is a figure who is us and not us at the same time.

In satirizing the courtroom drama genre, McDonald turns the stock figures of American courtroom dramas into salivating male bumpkins; the proper Vancouver Anglo Guess family home of the 1960s into a site of alcoholism, deceit, and bitterness; and public discourse about crime and morality into a system of coded language that hides racism and hypocrisy. How the

media-saturated imagery that we grow up with feeds prejudices with stock characters is the bull's eye of his satire. By exposing that imagery for what it is—a facade (a female villain who is a scandalous affront to public virtue)—he takes the film in the direction of martyrdom for St. Gillian of Vancouver.

McDonald's satirical sophistication is so intense that the film never received theatrical release. His overintellectualized construction of cinematic art and the film's carnival of contrapuntal genres and flippant mood is simply too postmodern for mainstream audiences, who become overwhelmed with McDonald's buffet of film styles, from Bollywood song-and-dance numbers to emotionally drenched, dramatic dialogue about suicide. The Bobby Tomahawk character as a kind of tempting devil and Guess as a conflicted Barbie doll, manipulative and innocent at the same time, are recognizable only as campy constructs without emotional attachment. All of the film's characters are presented not as "real" but rather as figments of the media's, and therefore our, imagination. Vancouver becomes an obvious film set, a facade where dramas are re-enacted and where certain generic formulas replace reality. For McDonald, the mediated image is a false image and the presentation of its absurdity is meant to offend rather than attract the "everyman" audience.[58]

To highlight how a city becomes a film image that can be manipulated, enhanced, and reconstituted to fit whatever message its creator wishes, McDonald juxtaposes external shots of leafy streets or Edenic forests to internalized human cruelty hidden behind the walls of homes and television studios. The basic contrast is between idyllic landscapes and dysfunctional psyches, a contrast that has overtones of Sweeney's representation of Vancouver. When the voice-over announcement introducing The Bobby Tomahawk Show comes on, it uses the province's licence plate cliché, "Beautiful British Columbia," as the location of the show, but the ads that appear later refer to the studio's location as "Hastings and Main," which audiences will recognize as the centre of Vancouver's drug-ridden and impoverished East Side. McDonald also uses the real facade of the former Vancouver courthouse stairs to imitate the stereotypical courthouse images of American cinema and television. This blending of the real and the imagined into a single emblematic representation expresses the lack of distinction between the mediated image and reality that is now an integral part of public consciousness. For McDonald, as for Sweeney, Vancouver is an arena of false roles, delusionary

games, and destroyed personalities. This negativity fits with the satirical genre, but it also turns Vancouver into a caricature, a comic-book city.

Of the three films discussed in this chapter, McDonald's is the most postmodern. His protagonists are thoroughly different from his own identity: he is not a woman and he is not South Asian, nor is he a Vancouverite. So he has to treat these identities as separate and distinct from himself. He does so by mediating them through the stereotypes created by the media, thereby removing himself from the film's characterization. *Love Crimes* is a meditation on how we live in media-constructed narratives, which is not an issue for Shum and Sweeney, to whom Vancouver is a real entity in which they live and work. Of the three films, only *Double Happiness* has received significant scholarly study. This suggests that the films are not distinctive enough to warrant scholarly comment. Shum's identity as a female filmmaker of Asian descent fits the postcolonial interest more than the creative work of two white heterosexual male directors does. McDonald's construction of Guess, while trying to be sympathetic, is so over the top and so mired in sexual imagery that it cannot escape its male gaze. The lack of subtlety in his film may be why it has not been studied. Another possible reason is its lack of theatrical release: it may simply be too obscure to be worth analyzing.[59]

All three films contain a strong theme of alienation and of life roles as performance. While Vancouver's identity is highly differentiated as an imagined entity in the three films, they retain some linkages. Whether it is a woman wanting to escape her traditional home (Shum), or a woman dreaming of a singing career (Sweeney), or a woman performing to the media (McDonald), Vancouver is represented as a female psyche torn by having so much natural beauty that she is forced to live life as a facade that hides her real self. The contrast between the imagined, the desired, and the real creates a schizophrenic city. The conflict between Vancouver's Edenic natural beauty, on the one hand, and its constructed concrete jungle, on the other, makes the designation of being a facade poignant. When one puts the ocean sunsets of English Bay, the dense high-rise jungle of the West End that borders it, and the rain-fed forests of Stanley Park into one entity, one can sense the conflict within Vancouver's urban psyche about what the city really is.

Mike Gasher, author of *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia,* deserves the last word on the role of the indigenous

filmmaker in British Columbia: "Indigenous films . . . render the province a distinct historical, political, social and cultural entity," a place "where filmmakers and audiences can work through the various meanings this place evokes for the people who make their lives there."[60] The same applies, of course, to films set specifically in Vancouver. That films such as *Double Happiness, Last Wedding,* and *The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess* are so poorly known to Canadian cinema audiences represents the perennial marginality of Canadian film in English-speaking Canada. If these audiences were to see the three Vancouvers represented in these films, they would realize that Vancouver's urbanity is as diverse and complex as that of Montréal or Toronto and is filled with an equal amount of dramatic tension.

CONCLUSION

National Identity and the Urban Imagination

This book is an exploration of Canadian identity through the lens of cinema. It highlights the creation of that cinema in what I generally identify as "the postmodern period" in order to contrast this cinema with that of an earlier nationalist-realist tradition. Anne Friedberg argued, some twenty years ago, against the usage of "the adjective *postmodern* to describe contemporary cinematic styles."[1] The only postmodern aspect of contemporary cinema, according to her, is "metareferentiality," that is, an ironic parody of former film content and styles rather than nostalgia for them.[2] Since her comments were made, postmodernism as a concept has come to embrace other academic theories and ideologies, from postcolonial theories of hybridity to postfeminism. I have used the term *postmodern* to describe a cinema that has differentiated itself from its national-realist roots. Robert Stam, in his study of film theory published in 2000, summarizes how postmodern ideology created a language of "counter-hegemonic resistances based on such categories as race, gender, and sexuality." Stam goes on to say that postmodernism as a discourse "has by now been 'stretched' to the breaking point."[3] I agree that postmodernism as an ideological construct is fading. This text is based on the application of some of the key concepts of postmodernism to Canadian cinema in the 1990 to 2010 period, but I am prepared to state that the importance of these characteristics is historical and that the technology of the digital age is generating a significant new cinematic practice for which the older postmodern categories are losing their relevance. While the digitalized media has been around for several decades, beginning with the Internet of the 1990s, it is the wireless technology of the twenty-first century that is generating a new intellectual paradigm.

The expansion of the cinematic image from a theatrical site to other venues—first to television half a century ago and now, through digitalization, to other screened platforms such as computers, smartphones, and home theatres—suggests that the postmodern was a transitional phase of cinema.

POSTMODERNITY AND THE URBAN IMAGINARY IN CANADIAN CINEMA

The films studied in this text projected a certain discourse that was mirrored in the postmodern categories mentioned by Stam and adopted here, but the technological world in which they were formed was associated with celluloid. The end of "film" in the production of cinema points to a radical new departure for the medium, equivalent to the birth of talkies or of technicolour. The daily uploading of countless photographic images and video clips to social networking websites like Facebook and YouTube has undermined the exclusivity of the film and image production modes. Capturing innumerable narratives (real and fictional) and uploading them to websites in order to "share" them has created a discourse that both challenges and transforms traditional film production. The language of the new digital "cinema" and where and how it is viewed may still be rooted in a language of an earlier era, but the digital transformation is becoming as significant as the transformation of the earlier languages of vaudeville and the stage as they migrated to early silent cinema a century ago.

As important as the transitional nature of the urban imaginary moment in Canadian cinema is the way in which the urban imaginary subverted iconic or stereotypical representations of a specific city, an example being a red Toronto streetcar, which can bring a film closer to viewers who are aware of that icon. The overall impact of a film set in Toronto is really much more complex and fragmented than the perception of one or two iconic associations. What an angry film like *Rude* means to a young African Canadian male from the Caribbean who has regularly been stopped by Toronto police and what it means to a white male academic from Calgary visiting Toronto are different because their experiences of Toronto are worlds apart. They walk its streets with a markedly different footprint. This differentiation goes even further in the case of a filmmaker like Atom Egoyan. He can say of his film *Chloe* (2009), "I really love the idea of [Toronto] playing itself. I love the idea of hearing

the streetcars and actually setting it [the film] on the main arteries of Queen, College and Dundas, and Yorkville of course."[4] His idea of Toronto "playing itself" is ironic. On the one hand, *Chloe* liberates Toronto from its being dubbed into an American city, but, on the other hand, the film is a cheeky translation from a French thriller that is not set in Toronto. Egoyan's setting the film in Toronto and in recognizable locations such as the Windsor Arms Hotel, the Allen Gardens, and so on is a conceit that may appeal to Torontonians wanting to see the story in a familiar and thereby self-valorizing locale (and also to Canadian funders), but it is no different an interpretation and translation than that which American producers perform when using Toronto as a substitute for an American city. As a postmodern film, it uses Toronto performatively to be something else.

The transmutability of urban settings and the ability of the camera to awaken subliminal associations in viewers who have certain perceptions of a particular city allow cities to be transformed into the familiar. When Egoyan was asked why he set *Chloe* in Toronto, he responded: "Because it's my city and I think honestly there's a huge erotic life in this town."[5] This projection of Toronto as a site of eroticism rather than of immigration or economic muscle fits Egoyan's own film legacy and shows how a narrative can be adapted to numerous urban guises. Egoyan is Canadianizing a foreign narrative.

Egoyan's fellow Torontonian and public intellectual, philosopher Mark Kingwell, has written extensively about city life. In *Concrete Reveries: Consciousness and the City* (2008), he discusses how a city embodies human consciousness and how it reciprocates this embodiment by having its presence influence human consciousness. This feedback loop has an ideological dimension, as certain classes control the process of city building and also generate the public discourse that serves as its ideological framing. Urban studies scholar Richard Florida, author of *Who's Your City?* (2008), argues that human psychology can give a city a specific character depending on the attitudes of those who guide the city's identity. In short, a city can have personality traits. "Places really do have different personalities," he writes, meaning that cities can be viewed as reflecting a certain part of a psychological spectrum.[6] While conferring consciousness on a conglomerate of animate and inanimate entities that is a city and giving this conglomeration a psychological profile is intriguing and even provocative, it does not necessarily help us to understand a

filmmaker, a city, and an urban film, unless, of course, the psychological profile attributed to a city is reflected in the film. What this current study reveals is how the spatiality, visuality, and orality attributed to a city's collective consciousness is radically different from film to film. Distinct authorship means multiple cities rather than the essentialist cities that Florida proposes.

Because cities have a history, an economy, a social structure, and a proliferation of cultures, they cannot be essentialist other than as a simplified caricature. The life cycle of cities also means that they are constantly evolving. The economic and social forces, from immigration to war, ensure that a city is never stagnant but behaves like an organic entity in constant flux—growing, dying, transforming. A film about a city represents a particular cultural moment as experienced and expressed by the class, generation, ethnicity, and gender of filmmaker. This means that every film creates a different urban representation. While subverting any single overriding narrative about Toronto or Winnipeg, the postmodern moment in Canadian cinema did signal the emergence of the urban imaginary as a broad characteristic of that cinema.

CULTURAL GRAMMARS IN AUTEUR FILMMAKING

In describing the operation of the urban imaginary in cinema, I have emphasized the agency of the author and the role of various cultural elements that influence the film. My argument that the cinematic representation of a city has its roots in the auteurial imagination privileges the role of the creative self over that of the industrial production system. This does not mean, of course, that issues pertaining to film production and audience are not crucial to our understanding of how a film is constructed, nor do I dispute the validity of anti-authorial interpretations of cinematic creation. But my own emphasis falls on authorship as an important, though not exclusive, foundation of a work of art. I also acknowledge that the influences on the author belong as much, if not more, to the collectivity and its generation of meaning as they do to the self. I believe the term *cultural grammar* is useful in identifying these cultural influences and how they construct identities that the filmmaker is attempting to present to the film's audience. Ordinarily, *grammar* refers to the largely subconscious system of rules that enables speakers of a language to create

structures that generate meaning in their language. The term can, however, be used more broadly to refer to any combination of elements that generates meaning. According to linguist Anna Wierzbicka, a cultural grammar is "a set of subconscious rules that shape a people's ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and interacting."[7] Similarly, the editors of *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada* (2012) describe their study as "an attempt to make discernible the language rules governing our critical choices and the conceptual frameworks we mobilize, consciously or not."[8] A culture's "grammar" consists of the ideas and practices concerning a variety of identities that are standard within that culture and that allow for shared understanding and communication. In a manner analogous to the operation of language, this system of cultural rules structures the way in which we interpret our experience and thereby make sense of the world. There is no single cultural grammar as such for any society but rather a multiplicity of grammars that structure how concepts of race, gender, nationality, religion, and so on express meaning. Our view of our own and others' various identities is formed through our upbringing, the social messages we encounter over time about those identities, and how we ourselves relate to those identities. As a society evolves, the normative reading of a specific identity changes, and our individual sense of how to read an identity likewise shifts over time.

A cultural grammar gives us is an understanding of certain fundamental aspects of our identity; that understanding is then modified by our personal experience and applied to our reading of our own identity as well as that of others. But these culturally transmitted aspects of identity must not be considered "attributes" that are embedded in individuals and so define them. Instead, they should be thought of as architectural building blocks that individuals, including artists, acquire over time and that they can manipulate into different shapes. Authorship presupposes a self formed by the cultural grammars of the society in which the author lives. When that self expresses its vision of urban life, it does so with both individual style and personal authenticity. It is the combination of a filmmaker's unique and shared experiences of a city that allows each cinematic city studied here to be different from that of any other filmmaker's city, even when it is physically the "same" city.

Cultural grammars are diverse expressions of historically evolving sensibilities and norms that contribute to the evolutionary nature of the art created

by filmmakers. The cultural grammars that inform a filmmaker's work are portals that open us to the interpretive richness and depth of his or her work. Because cultural grammars influence every filmmaker's awareness of his or her society and its issues, auteur films ordinarily resonate with this awareness. We should think of cultural grammars as performative. What we have as a result is a constant process of "becoming" through the interweaving of the sources of inspiration for individual filmmakers, the evolution of cultural grammars in society, and the audience's experiences in their reading of the film. In this way, a film is constantly changing in its subsequent viewing, even as it remains unchanged as a work. The meaning imparted to a 1970s film in its own day is different from the meaning imparted today, because the cultural and historical context is so different. It is the dynamic and interactive nature of cultural grammars that generates a constantly differentiated world of meanings. Cultural grammars of identity are intrinsically social, and because urban societies are so complicated—layered with numerous subcultures, each of which has its own discourse that evolves with time—the readings of a film are potentially infinite.

As framers of identities understood by a filmmaker and his audience, cultural grammars are portals to a culture that operate in four ways. First, in the broadest and most diffuse sense they emerge as *public discourse* communicated to a person through various forms of public media. Second, they come from *social discourse,* a narrower category, in which a person's constantly evolving social and professional circles create influences, interpretations, and codes that are peculiar to that circle. Third, they operate in the more intimate arena of *domestic discourse,* especially formative in childhood; the stories, religious and political orientation, and relationships within that arena create a distillation of broader cultural grammars. Finally, by integrating these three types of discourse, one creates around oneself an *individual discourse* as a statement of individuality. This book argues that the Canadian urban imaginary film displays a diversity of cultural grammars rooted in the language, gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, generation, national identity, ideology, and religion of its auteurs.

Identifying the cultural grammars at work in a film does not promote essentialism, reductionism, or categorization. Essentializing an author would imply that a particular director has a specific quality that he or she cannot escape. Reductionism refers to using a cultural grammar like nationality: that

is, reducing the director to one aspect and thus excluding other aspects. Finally, categorization involves highlighting a certain element of a person's identity or history, which may not be normative, to the detriment of other aspects.

Cultural grammars are contingent, not essential, features of all our lives. Just as one can acquire a new language (a linguistic grammar), one can acquire new cultural grammars. A filmmaker may have begun life in the working class and then moved into a different class as a result of professional success. A filmmaker (or anyone) may have started my life in one gender and then changed to another and with that change gained a new understanding of gender. Our cultural grammars are generated by personal histories, by evolving social environments, by cultural revolutions, by technological change, and by the formative power of any subcultures through which we migrate. The cultural grammars that we inherit through the exigencies of birth and history may or may not inform our consciousness or ideology, and even if they do, these influences may be minor or subtle. The problem with reading any one cultural grammar as an essentialist identity comes from a misunderstanding of a cultural grammar as something that is possessed rather than articulated. In the words of philosopher Marya Schechtman, "The psychological forces constituting identity are dynamic and active—things a person *does*—rather than static and passive features she *has*."[9] This is especially true of a work of art. Cultural grammars, as framers of meaning gleaned from society and culture, as well as from personal experience, are evolving codes. A cultural grammar is not something that any work of art or artist can be reduced to or categorized as being. There are simply too many cultural grammars influencing us to focus on any one of them. We all work in numerous languages and cultures constantly. A filmmaker's agency is a multifaceted expression of identity.

I believe that an in-depth study of even one of the filmmakers discussed in this book would reveal many more cultural grammars than are discussed here. Because cultural grammars give us certain languages of coherent expression and certain symbols of identity that are used in the creation of art, the communication between the filmmaker, the film, and its audience is always in a state of flux. One of the balancing elements in the communication between the author and the audience is the genre of the film, which is its own cultural grammar based on articulated codes and conventions that the audience, the film, and the filmmaker share. In terms of auteur cinema, the generic factor in the

articulation of any single film ebbs and flows. Sometimes it is central; at other times, it is marginal.

CINEMATIC URBANITY

I see three main factors at play in the construction of urbanity in Canadian film during the age of the urban imaginary. First, the personal urban experiences and evolving identities of the filmmakers, expressed through their cultural grammars, are critical to constructing urbanity. Second, the specific urban environments in which the filmmakers live and work, and which they acknowledge as formative contribute to that construction. The interplay between the filmmaker's urban self and the city's characteristics and qualities results in a film's imagined spatiality, visuality, and orality. Third, the boundaries of film genres and the structure of the Canadian film industry serve as the contemporary drivers of the filmmaker's urban imaginary. One aspect of this latter factor is related to audience reception. In the case of English-language Canadian cinema, the age of the absent audience coincides with the period of the urban imaginary. Canadian cinema of the postmodern era is appreciated only by a tiny intellectual and artistic elite. In contrast, Québec cinema has developed a wider range of urbanity than has English Canadian cinema. Because narrative film is both pitched and read in terms of genre-related labels, and because the state-supported approval and funding system remained more or less unchanged during the period considered in this study (1990 to 2010), the urban imaginary has been expressive of certain filmmaking imperatives associated with the orientation of agencies like Telefilm Canada toward certain genres and certain filmmakers. In the elusive quest for popular material to entice the absent Canadian audience, the Canadian system has given various signals about what should or should not be made. The films in this study are those that attracted funding because they met the criteria and the mandate of the moment. Clearly, films that express a strong urban imaginary are films that have resonated with decision makers in the industry. Otherwise, they would not exist.

While the tripartite structure of individual filmmaker, distinct city, and different genre may seem obvious, it does not mean that the integration of these three elements into a theoretical whole is itself obvious. The wholeness

comes from the construction of a conceptual hierarchy on which the theory of cinematic urbanity rests. This involves three distinct layers. First, the theory rests on the proposition that a break occurred in Canadian film history that resulted in two distinct periods: (1) the modernist period, with emphasis on nationalist realism that the Canadian feature film industry adopted from the National Film Board tradition and used until the end of the tax-break era in the early 1980s and (2) the postmodern period, with emphasis on the urban imaginary.

Second, cinematic urbanity is interpreted as being informed by the language of the cultural grammars through which films speak. These cultural grammars, while not necessarily urban in themselves, are experienced by the author of the film through his or her life in a specific Canadian urban context. While so many theorists of late (Giuliana Bruno, Anne Friedberg, Will Straw, and David James, for example) have moved away from auteurism and nationalism in their discourses on the city in cinema, I have resisted this tide. I have done so because the films discussed here evidence the birth of a new sense of Canadian identity that needs to be acknowledged. I want to give voice to this birth by discussing a wide range of urban entities and a wide range of film directors and still concluding that there exists in Canadian cinema a pan-urban sensibility that expresses Canada's contemporary social reality.

Third, cinematic urbanity is rooted in the cinematic representation of a specific city visually, spatially and orally. This is the language of film. Locating these three modalities in each film allows the personal style of the auteur to be acknowledged. The result is a personalized city that has an imaginary construction to which spectators can relate by calling up their own experiences, their own prejudices and stereotypes, and by situating themselves in that particular filmic universe with some degree of comfort.

City/filmmaker/urban film is a causal trinity, but the theory of cultural grammars brings in a fourth causality—the identity of the spectator. By including the spectator in the process of applying cultural grammars, a hermeneutic circle is formed. Interpretation becomes the core of communicating the film's visual images, its spatial codes, and, of course, its distinct speech and music. Through shared or disparate cultural grammars, the hermeneutic circle turns authorship into another face of spectatorship.[10] The filmmaker is a viewer as well and, as a viewer of films, can be spurred toward creativity by shared

cultural grammars. As a Canadian, I am instantly aware of a Canadian discourse being aimed at me when I watch these films, and I revel in that. My pleasure is doubled in watching Canadian films that interpret an urban milieu when I have some level of identification with that particular city. Because I am surrounded by the spectre of the absent audience in my own country (English Canada), the pleasure of seeing a Canadian urban film should not be underestimated. Nor should the impact of cinematic urbanity be trivialized even though its audience is limited. Nationalist-realist rhetoric in Canadian cinema created a baseline for expressing national identity in film. Its successor, the urban imaginary, must be acknowledged as the salient feature of Canadian cinema during the final phase of celluloid filmmaking.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1   Mark Shiel, "Cinema and the City in History and Theory," 2.
2   Ibid., 3.
3   Rob Shields, "The True North Strong and Free," 280.
4   The state-funded NFB was not the only factor that undermined fictional film production in Canada, but its philosophy and practice both reflected and reinforced a cultural atmosphere that remained fundamentally colonial and was dominated by Anglo-Canadian elites, for whom the project of manufacturing a sense of national unity was paramount. In this atmosphere, the notion that narrative film might contribute to the development of cultural identity was discounted. Narrative films were assumed to be, at best, trivial and largely harmless entertainment. Insofar as such films relied on the free exercise of imagination, however, and thus offered scope for diverse and possibly dissenting voices, their content was potentially subversive and not readily subject to control. Moreover, because such films appealed primarily to the emotions, they were incapable of promoting social advancement the way the documentary could, with its appeal to the faculties of reason and its aim of educating, and thus bettering, the world. The documentary was thus perceived to exert a salutary influence on the young, whereas narrative films, which often contained violence and adult subject matter, were deemed to lack both moral and educational value.
5   Jim Leach, *Film in Canada,* 12.
6   For a discussion of the NFB, its alliance with the state, and its role in nation building, especially during World War II, see Peter Morris, ed., *The National Film Board of Canada: The War Years,* and Jim Leach and Jeanette Sloniowski, eds., *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries.*
7   W. H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing,* 5, 10.
8   Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison, eds., *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities,* 6.
9   Edwards and Ivison, *Downtown Canada,* 7.
10 Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature,* 5. Atwood goes on to explain: "I said I thought the English had quite a lot of urban life themselves, and that they didn't need to hear about it from me." The assumption would seem to be that urban experience is essentially uniform—that urban life in Canada is fundamentally indistinguishable from urban life in England (or anywhere else).
11 Regarding the term *postmodern,* I refer to Fredric Jameson's warning: "As for *postmodernism* itself, I have not tried to systematize a usage or to impose any conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning, for the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory." *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural*

Logic of Late Capitalism, xxii. I use *postmodern* as a general descriptor of the historical period that I will be discussing. The distinction between modernism and postmodernism seems to me to dovetail well with the shift from the mid-twentieth century nationalist-realist documentaries of the NFB to the narrative film of the late twentieth century, with its focus on urban settings and culture.

12 Allan Siegel, "After the Sixties: Changing Paradigms in the Representation of Urban Space," 143.

13 Frye discusses the prevalence of the garrison mentality in early Canadian literature in his well-known essay "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada.*" The essay originally appeared as the conclusion to Carl F. Klinck's three-volume *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 821–49.

14 This opposition underscores the status of Euro-Canadians as invaders of territory not their own. The "outside" was inhabited by Aboriginal peoples, who, when they visited trading posts, generally set up camp beyond the fortress walls. In Euro-Canadian eyes, they were an element of nature, and hence not part of the civilized world. At the same time, like nature itself, the "Indians" were romanticized: they were "noble savages," at once intriguingly exotic and potentially dangerous. They therefore needed to be tamed and subdued, just as the wilderness itself cried out for cultivation. The history of First Nations under Canadian colonialism attests to the horrific consequences of this attitude.

15 Leach, *Film in Canada,* 2.

16 In 1966, the figure stood at 74 percent; by 1971, it had risen to 76 percent. Today, a little over 80 percent of Canadians are urban dwellers. Statistics Canada, "Population, Urban and Rural, by Province and Territory," http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm.

17 The "tax shelter" era refers to the period following the 1974 introduction of the Capital Cost Allowance (CCA), which allowed investors to deduct 100 percent of the capital they invested in Canadian films from their taxable income and to avoid paying taxes until a film began to turn a profit. The CCA created a boom in Canadian film production, which lasted until 1982, when the tax laws were revised.

18 For a discussion of the low penetration of theatrical releases for Canadian feature films, see Charles R. Acland, "From the Absent Audience to Expo-Mentality: Popular Film in Canada." The most often quoted figure for both English and Québec film is a total of 3 percent. According to "The Canadian Feature Film Distribution Sector in Review," a report prepared by Maria De Rosa in September 2012 for the Canadian Association of Film Distributors and Exporters, "Canadian films' share of the box office in Canada's French-language market was 13.4%, well ahead of the market share of Canadian films in the English-language market at 1%" (7). In spite of its marginal position, however, the influence of English Canadian cinema on the articulation of identity is an issue that warrants further exploration.

19 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema,* 78.

20 Burton Pike, "The City as Image," quoted in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds., *The City Reader,* 246. ("The City as Image" is an excerpt from Pike's *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* [1981].)

21 Siegel, "After the Sixties," 142.

22 The term *gaze,* which derives from Lacanian psychoanalysis, can also be under-
stood in a Foucauldian sense, as referring to the power relations inherent in the
way that the camera frames a character, event, or space. Much has also been writ-
ten about the gendered aspects of gaze. In her influential essay "Visual Pleasure
and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey argued that, owing to the traditional
domination of the film industry by heterosexual men, the default subjectivity in
films is male. The camera captures the action from the perspective of the (typi-
cally male) protagonist, with whom the audience naturally identifies, and women
are presented chiefly as objects to be gazed upon by the (male) spectator.

23 Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space,* 181, 188.

24 Anton C. Zijderveld, *A Theory of Urbanity: The Economic and Civic Culture of
Cities,* xiii.

25 Ibid., 128, 139.

26 Zijderveld, *Theory of Urbanity,* 141.

27 Patrick H. Hutton, "Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self," 122.

28 R. Bruce Elder makes his point in *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian
Film and Culture,* 11–14.

29 John Clement Ball, "Duelling and Dwelling in Toronto and London:
Transnational Urbanism in Catherine Bush's *The Rules of Engagement,"* 192.

30 Marc Eli Blanchard, *In Search of the City: Engels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud,* 30.

1 THE CITY OF FAITH

1 Bill Marshall, "Cinemas of Minor Frenchness," 94.

2 Ibid., 89, 91.

3 Ibid. Jameson's article appeared in *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 65–88.

4 I am thinking here of Hollywood epics like *The Ten Commandments* or *Ben Hur*.
Later works like the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* carried on this culture of his-
torical realism. One European example is Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo
Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*) from 1964. The latest version of the
historical Christ is *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), an independent production
by Mel Gibson using a script written by Gibson in English and translated into
Latin, Hebrew, and reconstructed Aramaic.

5 The historical and ideological context for the Quiet Revolution and the separat-
ist movement for Québec independence was national liberation, a struggle and a
rhetoric that overthrew European colonialism in the post–World War II period.

6 Réal La Rochelle, *Denys Arcand: A Life in Film,* 44.

7 Scott MacKenzie argues that both *Le déclin de l'empire américain* and *Jésus de
Montréal* are examples of the internationalization of Québec cinema and identity.
Le déclin was the first Québec film to be nominated for an Oscar, giving it an
international profile. Arcand's new reputation meant that *Jésus* also attracted
international attention, when, for example, it was screened at Cannes. See Scott
MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and
the Public Sphere,* 173.

8   Bill Marshall, "Montréal Between Strangeness, Home, and Flow," 208.

9   Quoted in MacKenzie, *Screening Québec,* 64.

10 Marshall acknowledges the power of the film when he comments that *Jésus de Montreal* is characterized by "the raising of a specific urban place to the status of mythological space." Marshall, "Montréal Between Strangeness, Home, and Flow," 208.

11 Quoted in ibid., 66.

12 La Rochelle, *Denys Arcand,* 192.

13 Ibid., 190.

14 I make the argument for considering the three films a trilogy in *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (142). La Rochelle also believes that *Jésus de Montréal* forms a diptych with *Le déclin*—and a triptych with *Les invasions* (*Denys Arcand,* 190). The initial script for *Les invasions* was written in 1991, a year after the release of *Jésus de Montréal.* Ibid., 200.

15 La Rochelle, *Denys Arcand,* 192.

16 Quoted in ibid., 274.

17 Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema,* 294.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 297.

20 "Montréal isn't everything, but it may be the image of everything." Pierre Nepveu and Gilles Marcotte, eds., *Montréal imaginaire: Ville et littérature,* 7; my translation.

21 Ibid.

22 MacKenzie, *Screening Québec,* 5.

23 Simon Harel, "La parole orpheline de l'écrivain migrant," 389.

24 Harel claims that the immigrant writer creates a space of potentiality in order to deal with being a stranger. It is the place where conflicting identities are resolved (398). The ironic reality is that this idealized resolution for place—a dreamed place of happiness—is only a dream, a fantasy.

25 Quoted in La Rochelle, *Denys Arcand,* 273.

26 Jim Leach, *Film in Canada,* 114.

27 Leach considers Arcand's trademark approach as being one of a "double vision," or presenting things in a dual way. Ibid., 118.

28 Guy Hennebelle, *Les cinémas nationaux contre Hollywood,* 183.

29 La Rochelle, *Denys Arcand,* 281.

30 Marshall, "Montréal Between Strangeness," 210.

31 My Canadian-film students in Calgary continue to be moved by the film twenty years later, and that includes those without a Christian background.

32 Kevin Pask, "Late Nationalism: The Case of Quebec," 289.

33 Leach, *Film in Canada,* 114.

2   THE CITY OF DREAMS

1   See, for instance, Mathew Ogonoski, "Queering the Heterosexual Male in Canadian Cinema: An Analysis of Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo,*" and Alain

Chouinard, "Queering the Québécois and Canadian Child in Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*." Both argue for a queer interpretation of the figure of Léo Lozeau/Lauzon.

2 C. G. Jung, *Dreams,* 120.

3 Ibid., 39.

4 I quote here from the English-language version of the film released by Alliance in 1993.

5 The rational act of meaning begins on a superficial level but descends from there. The date of 1909 means something to an audience in the 1990s. It implies old. That can represent the positiveness of tradition or the negativity of decrepitude. The building can be read as a ghetto or tenement or as an example of pregentrified working-class Montréal. The list goes on. To those who see the date, the precision of dates is irrelevant to their meaning.

6 There appears to be some confusion about the Léolo character's original name. In the English-narrated version of the video released soon after the film itself, the narrator seems to be saying that his name is "Léo Lozeau," but in the French-narrated version of the DVD, the English subtitle states that the narrator is saying in French that his name is "Léo Lauzon."

   I have researched the English language reviews from 1992, and they refer to Léo Lozeau. So does a French-language interview with Jean-Claude Lauzon: the interviewer, Claude Racine, uses the name "Léo Lozeau," which Lauzon evidently accepts, and one of the photo stills in the article is captioned "La famille Lozeau . . ." (Racine, "Entretien avec Jean-Claude Lauzon," 6, 9). However, as late as 2012, a Montréal journalist, writing about a new release of the film on its twentieth anniversary, refers to "12-year-old Léo Lauzon." Jeff Heinrich, "A Cinemative Treasure Restored: After 20 Years, *Léolo* Is Available on TV in a New Digital Version," *Montreal Gazette,* August 31, 2012. This confusion, based on various versions of the film, is "resolved" in an article in *Revista medicina y cine,* in which the author identifies "a kind of phonetic anagram made up by the triad 'Lauzon-Lozeau-Lozone.'" Miguel Abad Vila, "*Léolo* (1992): An Insane Family Portrait," 93. The author means that whichever name is used, it always references Jean-Claude Lauzon himself. I leave the last word to Lauzon, whose original screenplay reads "Léo Lozeau" and "Léolo Lozoné." The screenplay is reproduced in full in Isabelle Hébert, *Lauzon Lauzone: Portrait du cineaste Jean-Claude Lauzon.*

7 This image is in stark contrast to the liberating waters in which he swims earlier in the film. He is now entombed in waters that freeze his "fevered brow" and its libidinous urges. He cannot swim; he cannot move; he is comatose in a universe parallel with the toilet bowl of his potty-training phase or the useless blow-up swimming ring for which he is too big (shown earlier in the film). The water of his dreams is liberating, while the waters of reality are imprisoning.

8 "Je voulais que mon film soit une sorte d'hommage au rêve. . . . Aussi, je voulais faire un film qui rende hommage à la créativité." Quoted in Claude Racine, "Entretien avec Jean-Claude Lauzon," 6; translation courtesy of Jim Leach.

9 Lauzon died tragically and unexpectedly on August 10, 1997, while flying his small plane in northern Québec. Since August 10 is my birthday, I feel a certain connectedness to him.

10 Mark Kingwell, *The World We Want: Restoring Citizenship in a Fractured Age,* 7.

11 See André Petrowski and Nathalie Petrowski, *Jean-Claude Lauzon: Le poète,* 12. The autobiographical nature of *Léolo* is confirmed by André Petrowski, who says in an interview that the "gross pathology" of the family is represented in the film in a "very, very personal" way. Ibid., 18.

12 The theme of love is explored in great depth by George Toles in "Drowning for Love: Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo.*"

13 The film is dedicated to André Petrowski, and the Word/Worm Tamer may be a representation of Petrowski, who was Lauzon's mentor and friend. Petrowski was the first person to read the script after Lauzon wrote it, so one might say it was Petrowski who saved it from the garbage can.

14 In a 1992 interview with Claude Racine about *Léolo,* Lauzon likens art to a sacred calling. Two years earlier, he had told Racine that because (at the time) he had made only a single full-length film, he didn't consider himself a filmmaker: "Je n'ai fait qu'un long métrage, je ne me considère pas comme un cinéaste." Enlarging on this remark, Lauzon commented: "Je ne me considère toujours pas comme un cinéaste. Ce n'est pas que je nie une réalité, c'est simplement que le statut d'artiste est un statut extrêmement fragile que tu peux perdre en 24 heures. . . . Pour moi, un artiste c'est quelqu'un . . . qui comme un prêtre, consacre sa vie à son art" ("I still don't consider myself a filmmaker. It's not that I'm in denial; it's simply that the status of artist is an extremely fragile status, one that can be lost in 24 hours. . . . For me, an artist is someone . . . who, like a priest, consecrates his life to his art"). Quoted in Claude Racine, "Entretien avec Jean-Claude Lauzon," 11; translation courtesy of Jim Leach.

15 There has been an ongoing debate about the proper description of the Worm or Word Tamer. Most English-language critics call him the "Word Tamer" but in the film, he is described as the Worm Tamer and is so named in the interview referenced in the previous note. In the remainder of this chapter, he will be referred to as the Tamer. The Tamer appears in the "historical" narrative as a figure who interacts with the boy's mother and teacher. He also appears in a dream sequence, when he takes the boy fishing and then builds a campfire fed with burning books. Lauzon is saying in this sequence that words that turn to ash have first kept us warm and illuminated the darkness of existence.

16 For an extensive discussion of the concept of a Christ-figure in this film, see Bill Scalia, "Refiguring Jesus: Christ and Christ-Figures in *Jesus of Montreal.*" Scalia sees Arcand's Christ-figure, in the actor-character Daniel Coulumbe, as suited to "a modern, rationalist era" (85). By the end of the film, Daniel becomes transcendent: he is no longer an actor playing Christ but a Christ-figure.

17 Toles, "Drowning for Love," 275.

18 Ibid., 276.

19 The boy's name is Lozeau—*l'eau* meaning "water."

20 Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema,* 299, 300.

21 Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and the Public Sphere,* 183, 185.

22 Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema,* 297.

23 Lauzon's mother was of Abenaki descent, giving him a window on Québec's Aboriginal history.

24 Jenny Burman, "Divergent Diversities: Pluralizing Toronto and Montreal," 257.

25 Petrowski and Petrowski, *Jean-Claude Lauzon,* 120.

26 Toles, "Drowning for Love," 290.

27 Lauzon's father had only a grade two education and worked as a labourer. Various members of his family were institutionalized for mental illness. And it was during Lauzon's attendance at a film festival in Sicily that he began writing the script for this film. The imaginative potential of his own life and experience is the grounding on which the magical realism of the film rests. André Petrowski claims that Jean-Claude's mother told him that her husband once tried to gas the whole family while they slept. Petrowski and Petrowski, *Jean-Claude Lauzon,* 18–19.

28 Marcel Jean, "Jean-Claude Lauzon," 21.

29 When, for example, I interviewed filmmaker Guy Maddin in 2006 for my book *The Young, the Restless, and the Dead: Interviews with Canadian Filmmakers* (2008), he described *Léolo* as fundamental.

30 Alain Chouinard, "Queering the Québécois and Canadian Child in Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*."

31 Quoted in Heinrich, "A Cinemative Treasure Restored."

3   THE GENDERED CITY

1 See George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema,* 174–77, 182.

2 *Desperanto* was written and directed by Patricia Rozema, and *Rispondetemi* was written and directed by Léa Pool, while the films directed by Michel Brault and Jacques Leduc were co-written with female screenwriters, and Denys Arcand directed a story by Paule Baillargeon.

3 In one of the film's intertextual postmodernist touches, the Ann Stewart character watches Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* before she decides to go out; she then discovers the same types of people at the party as she saw in *Le déclin,* and of course, Arcand himself plays the role of a paramedic who comes to save her.

4 It is not a great stretch to suggest that Rozema's negative treatment of the cultural elite in the party scene copies Arcand's treatment of the academic elite in *Le déclin*. His appearance as a paramedic in the film raises this possibility of linkages between the two films. The insider identity of francophone Québecers who have no use for those outside their circles is something that Rozema can take a jab at, being an anglophone Ontario filmmaker who does not belong to the francophone community.

5 The fact that paramedics play crucial roles in both films is worth noting. The ambulance and the siren are integral parts of street scenes in urban centres, and the appearance of paramedics as "salvatory" figures in both Rozema's and Pool's films is part of urban culture.

6 For the term "urban non-spaces," I am grateful to Florian Grandena, who uses the term in her essay "Léa Pool: The Art of Elusiveness."

7   Bill Marshall, "Montréal Between Strangeness, Home, and Flow," 213.

8   The English title of the film is *32nd Day of August on Earth*.

9   Cynthia Amsdem, "Denis Villeneuve's Maelstrom: Much Ado About a Fish."

10 Ibid.

11 Maurie Alioff, "Denis Villeneuve's *Un 32 août sur terre*: Lost in the Desert."

12 Brenda Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives, Class Politics and Metropolitan Dystopias: Representations of Globalization in *Maelström, waydowntown* and *La Moitié gauche du frigo*," 71.

13 Stephen Holden, "Fathoming Meaning from a Talking Fish," *New York Times,* January 25, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/25/movies/film-review-fathoming-meaning-from-a-talking-fish.html.

14 Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives," 71, 77, 72.

15 "When I first read the script, I didn't understand it," she said. "Then I reread it, and I didn't want to do it. I felt she was completely spoiled, and I thought if I have no sympathy for this character, I can't do it." Quoted in Peter Kobel, "From a Canadian Filmmaker, a Tale Told by a Fish," *New York Times,* February 3, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/movies/film-from-a-canadian-filmmaker-a-tale-told-by-a-fish.html.

16 Ibid.

17 I am reminded of the gender and sexual pedigree of the contemporary film *Brokeback Mountain*, based on a short story by Annie Proulx and directed by Ang Lee, which portrayed a love affair between two male "cowboys" in the 1950s. The film was heralded by the media as a breakthrough for mainstream cinema's portrayal of homosexuality. However, as a straight viewer of the film, I found the construction of the two protagonists, their relationship and dialogue, to be primarily expressive of social forces at play in the period rather than something distinct and self-determining. The characters seemed suspended in their time.

18 Alioff, "Denis Villeneuve's *Un 32 août sur ter*re."

19 Amsden, "Denis Villeneuve's Maelstrom."

20 Ibid.

21 "I see this film as a dark comedy," said Villeneuve. "A dark comedy that is not funny." Ibid.

22 See Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives," 74.

23 Among Léa Pool's significant films that foreground lesbian desire are *Strass Café* (1979), *Anne Trister* (1985), and *Set Me Free* (1999).

24 Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston, eds., *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures,* 5.

4   THE CITY MADE FLESH

1   Monique Tschofen, "Le Confessionnal/The Confessional," 210.

2   Bill Marshall, Q*uebec National Cinema,* 306.

3   Donato Totaro, "*Le Confessionnal* Ten Years Later: A Québec Classic Revisited."

4   The best discussion of the innovative acting style that Egoyan encouraged in the film can be found in Peter Harcourt, "Imaginary Images: An Examination of Atom Egoyan's Films." Harcourt argues that this style was meant to distance the audience from the characters and disconnect them from the film so that they would not suspend their disbelief.

5   Peter Dickinson, "Double Take: Adaptation, Remediation, and Doubleness in the Films of Robert Lepage," 175.

6   Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and the Public Sphere,* 175.

7   I use the term *philosophical* as a reference to Lepage's consciousness of cinema's languages, especially in relationship to colour and how its omnipresence in contemporary cinema (one exception being the work of Guy Maddin, discussed in chapter 6) has changed cinematic language.

8   MacKenzie, *Screening Québec,* 176.

9   Kevin Pask, "Late Nationalism: The Case of Quebec," 301.

10 Lepage was born in 1957, and Egoyan in 1960. They share the same generational but different national spaces.

11 Quoted in Katherine Monk, *Weird Sex and Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena,* 177.

12 Christopher Gittings makes the point that in Lepage's film "the cinema screen . . . becomes a field of doubled representation where an anterior [modernist] cultural text is re-evaluated" through the filmmaker's own postmodern deconstruction. *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation,* 133.

13 Jim Leach, *Film in Canada,* 151.

14 Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema,* 134.

15 Tschofen, "Le Confessionnal/The Confessional," 209.

16 Quoted in Leach, *Film in Canada,* 153.

17 Tschofen states that Lepage "turns blindness into its opposite." "Le Confessionnal/The Confessional," 213.

18 Aleksandar Dunđerović, *The Cinema of Robert Lepage: The Poetics of Memory,* 10–16.

19 Ibid., 11, 13, 55.

20 I am indebted for this insight to Katlin James, a student in my senior seminar in film studies at the University of Calgary.

21 The film won the FIPRESCI award (International Critics Prize) at Cannes in 1994 and Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Original Screenplay at the Genies. Catherine Russell describes *Exotica* as "probably the most extensively reported Canadian film of all time." "Role Playing and the White Male Imaginary in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica,*" 341.

22 William Beard, "Atom Egoyan: Unnatural Relations," 112.

23 *Exotica* grossed US$5 million in worldwide sales by 2000. Monk, *Weird Sex and Snowshoes,* 115.

24 Egoyan authored and directed two films specifically about being Armenian: *Calendar* (1993) and *Ararat* (2002).

25 In describing Egoyan, I prefer the term *ethnicity* to *transnationality* because Egoyan has stayed close to "home" in his filmmaking and often speaks in

nationalist terms about the Canadian film community to which he belongs. In contrast, the peripatetic filmmaker Deepa Mehta, also of Toronto, who came to Canada as an adult, sees herself as primarily transnational because of her Indian films and the lack of Canadian state funding for these films (*Water* and *Earth,* for example). Ethnicity is an identity that is both self- and other-generated. It suggests an acknowledgement of otherness in a particular community to which one is bound, while transnationality suggests a greater sense of bicultural formation and holistic identity. The term *ethnicity* has an overtone of subordination within a national framework, which *transnationality*, with its implied equality, does not. I believe it is important to acknowledge hierarchy within nationality and the power that it gives to ethnicity to develop an outsider's critique of the dominant culture. Transnationality is a concept associated with globalization and its importance to postmodernism, while ethnicity is an older concept associated with nationality.

26 Naficy, "Accented Style," 189.

27 Ibid., 186, 195.

28 Ibid., 182, 183.

29 I use the term *persona* in a particular way. I see it as one aspect of a tripartite designation of the self, consisting of person, personality, and persona. The person is the equivalent of Freud's id, or the emotional self; the personality is the equivalent of his concept of the ego, which tries to balance inner and outer selves; and the persona is the equivalent of the superego. Our persona is our public face, role, or identity, constructed by ourselves and others to fit stereotypes or the attributes associated with certain roles. Personas are encoded by social norms and attitudes. Personality is our balancing of our emotional private selves with our public personas, while the person is the secret self that includes all the hidden aspects of one's thinking and doing. Egoyan works to expose the faces behind the personas and the biographies that give rise to the person and personality.

30 Beard, "Atom Egoyan," 114.

31 Emma Wilson, *Atom Egoyan,* 85.

32 Beard, "Atom Egoyan," 102.

33 The otherness in *Le Confessionnal* is symbolized by the exotic places (China and Japan) where the two brothers originate or travel to.

34 Cynthia Fuchs, "Exotica," http://mith.umd.edu/WomensStudies/FilmReviews/exotica-fuchs, n.d.

35 The interview with Egoyan in Naficy, "Accented Style," is highly revealing of the identity conflicts that Egoyan (as of the mid-1990s) had to negotiate within himself.

36 See William Beard, "Exotica," 199.

37 Russell, "Role Playing," 322–23.

38 Peter Harcourt, "Imaginary Images: An Examination of Atom Egoyan's Films," 14.

39 Beard, "Exotica," 202.

40 Jennifer Burwell and Monique Tschofen, "Mobile Subjectivity and Micro-Territories: Placing the Diaspora," 126.

41 Nellie Hogikyan, "Atom Egoyan's Post-Exilic Imaginary: Representing Homeland, Imagining Family," 214.

42 Ibid.

43 Luc Dupont, "Sur la représentation de la communauté gaie dans la publicité du magazine Têtu," 183; the translation is mine.

44 Atom Egoyan, "Surface Tension," 25.

45 Dickinson, "Double Take," 176.

46 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* 153.

5 THE DIASPORIC CITY

1 For a discussion of the African sources of migration to Canada and the community's socioeconomic identity, see Korbla P. Puplampu and Wisdom J. Tettey, eds., *The African Diaspora in Canada: Negotiating Identity and Belonging.*

2 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing,* 129.

3 See Christina Stojanova, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity: The Transnational Universe of Deepa Mehta," 213, for a discussion of the concept of transnationality and its relation to Mehta's "Indian" films and her "Indo-Canadian" films.

4 Johanne Sloan, "Introduction," 3.

5 Rinaldo Walcott, ed., *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism,* 7.

6 Rinaldo Walcott, "'Who Is She and What Is She to You?' Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian Studies," 44.

7 Ibid., 37.

8 David Sealy, "'Canadianizing' Blackness: Resisting the Political," 91.

9 Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging,* 71.

10 Sheila J. Petty, *Contact Zones: Memory, Origin, and Discourses in Black Diasporic Cinemas,* 228.

11 Renuka Sooknanan, "The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking 'Black Community,'" 148.

12 Brand, *Map to the Door,* 36.

13 There is no common national Caribbean identity since the Caribbean is a geographic space with numerous national identities tied to certain islands. Nevertheless, all of its inhabitants share a common history of slavery and colonialism, which is part of the Caribbean's regional identity.

14 Beverley Daurio, "Writing It: Dionne Brand," 37.

15 Robyn Gillam, "Holding onto the Core: Althea Prince," 129.

16 Jeffrey Canton, "All Those Selves and Experiences: Makeda Silvera," 174.

17 Cecil Foster, *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada,* 5.

18 John McCullough, "*Rude* and the Representation of Class Relations in Canadian Film," 246.

19 Paula J. Massood, "Mapping the Hood: The Genealogy of City Space in *Boyz N the Hood* and *Menace II Society*."

20 Katherine Monk, *Weird Sex and Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomenon,* 207.

21 Ibid.

22 Quoted in Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation,* 256–57.

23 McCullough, "*Rude* and the Representation of Class Relations," 263.

24 Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema,* 255.

25 The metaphoric power of that phrase is confirmed by Marc Glassman's use of the phrase as the title for his article on the film: "Where Zulus Meet Mohawks," *Take One* (Fall 1995): 16–21.

26 For a more detailed discussion of the Rude figure, see Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema,* 258–60.

27 Ibid., 257.

28 Ibid., 258.

29 Petty, "Contact Zones," 234.

30 Stephen Holden, "In Projects, Deejay Calls the Tune," *New York Times,* April 12, 1996, http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/12/movies/film-review-in-projects-deejay-calls-the-tune.html.

31 Jenny Burman, "Divergent Diversities: Pluralizing Toronto and Montreal," 266.

32 Ibid., 257. Regarding diaspora communities, Burman argues that, in the 1990s, Toronto had a more fundamentally diasporic character than Montréal. Whereas Montréal's ethnic and racial minorities maintained a strong sense of a common history rooted in the city, Toronto's communities tended to identify more with their original nationalities than with the city itself (Virgo's comment notwithstanding) (ibid., 258).

33 Lysandra Woods, "Srinivas Krishna and the New Canadian Cinema," 207.

34 A typical example of this attitude can be found in Christina Stojanova's appraisal of Mehta's North American films as "artistically less successful." Stojanova, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity," 225.

35 Amy Fung, "Deepa Mehta's Canadian, American, Indian Bollywood Musical: Showing Canadians Their Country in *Bollywood/Hollywood,*" 72.

36 Ibid., 75.

37 Cathy Dunphy, "Exposing Canada's Polite Veneer of Racism," *Toronto Star,* September 1, 1991.

38 Ibid.

39 Jacqueline Levitin, "Deepa Mehta as Transnational Filmmaker, or You Can't Go Home Again," 286.

40 Ibid.

41 Craig MacInnis, "*Sam and Me* See a Different Toronto," *Toronto Star,* September 20, 1991.

42 M. G. Vassanji, "Am I a Canadian Writer?" 10.

43 Ibid., 11.

44 Ibid., 12.

45 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Saibal Chatterjee and Anwar Jamal, eds., *Hollywood Bollywood: The Politics of Crossover Films.*

46 Derek Elley, "Bollywood/Hollywood," 34.

47 Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film,* 18.

48 Geoff Pevere, "T. O. Masala: Deepa Mehta's Mix of Indian and U.S. Cultural Influences Capture Spirit of Life in Polyglot Toronto," *Toronto Star,* October 25, 2002.

49 Ibid.

50 Quoted in Alan Kellogg, "Director Dares to Be Light and Silly: Shooting in Canada Much Less Stressful Than in India," *Edmonton Journal,* October 25, 2002.

51 Quoted in Aparita Bhandari, "Hoorah for *Bollywood/Hollywood*: Lisa Ray and Rahul Khanna Were Both Excited to Work with Deepa Mehta," *Toronto Star,* September 6, 2002.

52 Fung, "Deepa Mehta's Canadian, American, Indian Bollywood Musical," 78.

53 Desai, *Beyond Bollywood,* 46.

54 Ibid., 113.

55 Ibid., 165.

56 Ibid., 184.

6 THE CITY OF TRANSGRESSIVE DESIRES

1 Jason Woloski, "Guy Maddin."

2 A curious parody of Maddin's work is the crudely imitative *East of Euclid* (2006) by Jeff Solyko, who worked on Maddin's earlier films. This black-and-white film is set in Winnipeg in the 1970s but is done in a retro film-noir style.

3 Quoted in Robert K. Elder, *The Film That Changed My Life: Thirty Directors on Their Epiphanies in the Dark,* 134.

4 William Beard, *Into the Past: The Cinema of Guy Maddin,* 11.

5 Quoted in Jason McBride, "The Secret Sharer: Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*."

6 A good example of a documentarist's sensibility can be found in the work of the Winnipeg filmmaker John Paskievich, particularly in his autobiographical film about stuttering, *Unspeakable* (2006). In the film, Paskievich presents his growing up in Winnipeg in a more sociological way than does Maddin in his fantasy-documentary *My Winnipeg,* which engages with truth in a mythological way.

7 Woloski, "Guy Maddin."

8 Will Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages: Guy Maddin's *Careful,*" 309.

9 After Maddin's success with *My Winnipeg,* the television network CTV announced, in 2008, that it was commissioning Canadian filmmakers Atom Egoyan, Gary Burns, Don McKellar, Patricia Rozema, and Thom Fitzgerald to do something similar for their own cities. The project never went ahead because of the recession in 2009. This made Maddin the undisputed king of the pseudo-documentary urban genre in Canada.

10 Caelum Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium: The Films of Guy Maddin,* 17; Liam Lacey, "The Best Thirties Musical of 2004," *Globe and Mail,* April 30, 2004.

11 Quoted in Elder, *The Film That Changed My Life,* 141.

12 Beard, *Into the Past,* 232.

13 Quoted in Denis Seguin, "Winnipeg, Mon Amour: Guy Maddin's Hometown Homage."

14 William Beard makes the point that George Toles wrote all the dialogue for *Saddest Music* and that the film must be considered a "serious warm-up" to *My Winnipeg*. Beard, *Into the Past,* 234.

15 Geoff Pevere, "Foreword," xii; "Guy Maddin: True to Form," 53.

16 Anthony Lane, "Looney Tunes: 'The Saddest Music in the World' and 'Mean Girls,'" 107.

17 A contemporary example of this glamorization of the nondescript and banal is the endless postings of video clips on YouTube, where fame can happen on any day. These postings are primarily by regular people outside the film or entertainment industry.

18 Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages," 314.

19 Darren Wershler, *Guy Maddin's* My Winnipeg, 3.

20 Ibid., 60.

21 Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida,* 7.

22 Wershler, *Guy Maddin's* My Winnipeg, 103.

23 Woloski, "Guy Maddin."

24 Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages," 314.

25 Wershler, *Guy Maddin's* My Winnipeg, 52–57.

26 David Church, "Bark Fish Appreciation: An Introduction," 2.

27 David L. Pike, "Thoroughly Modern Maddin," 103.

28 Maddin used Rossellini again in his noir gangster thriller *Keyhole,* released at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2011.

29 Guy Maddin, "Bully for Bollywood's Musical Melodramas!" 76.

30 Guy Maddin, "Death in Winnipeg," 66.

31 Beard, *Into the Past*, 256.

32 Graeme Smith, "It's a Mad, Mad, Maddin World," *Globe and Mail,* April 17, 2004.

33 Guy Maddin, My Winnipeg, 9.

34 Lacey, "The Best Thirties Musical of 2,005."

35 Church, "Bark Fish Appreciation," 4.

36 George Toles, "From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin," 157.

37 William Beard, "Conversations with Guy Maddin," 243.

38 William Beard calls the film Maddin's "funniest." Beard, *Into the Past,* 251.

39 Maddin used the term "docu-fantasy" to describe the genre of *My Winnipeg*. Such a genre is not common, although the mockumentary is recognized. The docu-fantasy is a Maddin creation. Matthew Coutts, "Winnipeg Captured in 'Docu-fantasia,'" *National Post,* August 12, 2,009. The other films in Maddin's trilogy are *Brand upon the Brain* (2,007) and *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2,004).

40 Beard, *Into the Past,* 356.

41 Ibid., 315.

42 The script is available in Guy Maddin, *My Winnipeg*. This excerpt appears on page 10. The film was made around the time of Maddin's fiftieth birthday, which Maddin took to be an omen of entrapment. In a 2,007 interview, he expressed the desire to move to Toronto, to leave his mother behind (meaning both maternal city and his aged mother). See George Melnyk, "'I'm Shockingly Unchanged Since I Picked Up a Camera': Guy Maddin Interviewed by George Melnyk,".

43 Seguin, "Winnipeg, Mon Amour." In a pleasant irony of postmodernism, *My Winnipeg* opened the International Forum on New Cinema at the 2,009 Berlin Film Festival. Retro was now avant-garde, just as Ruttman's film was hailed as an expressionist statement of urban speed and drone life existence.

44 Ibid.

45 Coutts, "Winnipeg Captured in 'Docu-fantasia.'"

46 Eric Volmers, "A Glimpse Inside Maddin's Brain," *Calgary Herald,* March 4, 2,010. The comment was made about his 2,007 autobiographical film *Brand upon the Brain,* but it also fits *My Winnipeg.*

47 Mark Medley, "Maddin's Manual," *National Post,* May 20, 2,010.

48 Geoff Pevere, "Winnipeg as Dreamscape, a Place Not on Any Map," *Toronto Star,* May 11, 2,010.

49 Katherine Monk, "Maddin's Intimate Winnipeg a Funny Place," *Ottawa Citizen,* September 13, 2,009.

50 Ibid.

51 Peter O'Neil, "Mon Amour, Winnipeg Wows Them in Paris," *Edmonton Journal,* October 25, 2,010. The French version was retitled "Mon Amour, Winnipeg" in reference to the iconic French New Wave film from the 1950s *Hiroshima Mon Amour.*

52 Jay Stone, "This Winnipeg's Got Ultra-Vixens: Guy Maddin's Latest Film Brings Mythology to City," *Calgary Herald,* September 6, 2,009.

53 Quoted in Joe Friesen, "His Own Private Winnipeg," *Globe and Mail,* September 9, 2,008.

54 Rick Groen, "Maddin Draws Us In to the Bareback Months of Winnipeg," *Globe and Mail,* June 21, 2,009.

55 Rodney LaTourelle, "The Lap, the Fur: In *My Winnipeg* (2,008) Guy Maddin Takes Autobiographical Film to a Whole New Level of Uncertainty," 1.

56 Melnyk, "I'm Shockingly Unchanged," 53.

57 John Semley, "Still Mining His Winnipeg: An Interview with Guy Maddin," 70.

58 Guy Maddin, "My (Other) Winnipeg: Excerpts from a Phantom Film," 106, 107.

59 Notes taken by the author during the presentation.

60 This term is used by La Tourelle in "The Lap, the Fur."

61 Maddin, *My Winnipeg,* 70.

62 Winnipeg's contemporary inner core is very much in the hands of First Nations people, who occupy it and are a significant urban minority. The older European immigration as migrated to the suburbs. So Winnipeg became the first major Canadian city to serious consider an "urban reserve" structure because of the ghettoization of the Aboriginal population.

63 I must confess à la Maddin that as a young man I worked as a clerk in the mighty Eaton's store in Winnipeg and that before that, as a child, I attended the Eaton's Santa Claus parade through downtown Winnipeg and waited in line to tell Santa what I wanted for Christmas. Obviously, this experience has Maddinized me.

64 Beard, *Into the Past,* 358.

65 There is also a fourth river (adding up to Maddin's mythic four rivers) named the La Salle, but it enters the Red River in St. Norbert, a southern community that only recently was amalgamated into the city boundaries.

66 The great struggle over the Centennial statue of a naked and twisted Louis Riel could have been fodder for his satirical mind.

67 Umberto Eco, *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism,* 77, 84.

1   Mark Peranson, "Review: Waydowntown," 74.

2   Craig MacInnis, "Kitchen Party: Gary Burns Returns to Suburbia," 13.

3   Quoted in James Muretich, "Suburban Wasteland," *Calgary Herald,* November 4, 1995.

4   MacInnis, "Kitchen Party," 16.

5   Alison Mayes, "Calgary Director Finds Teen Angst Hasn't Changed," *Calgary Herald,* September 25, 1998.

6   Marc Horton, "Director Delves into Suburbia," *Edmonton Journal,* March 14, 1998.

7   Mayes, "Calgary Director."

8   It is not surprising that after George Bush Jr. ended his two-term presidency in 2008, the first city outside the United States that he visited on the lecture circuit was Calgary. The links between Stephen Harper, the Calgarian (prime minister from 2006 to the time of writing), and Bush, the Texan, were close and fraternal.

9   Brenda Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives, Class Politics and Metropolitan Dystopias: Representations of Globalization in *Maelström, waydowntown* and *La Moitié gauche du frigo,*" 79.

10 Karen Virag, "From West Edmonton Mall to West End Shopping Centre: Canadians and Hungarians Shop Till They Drop."

11 Jon Harding, "It's Always Mild in Downtown Calgary," *National Post,* July 13, 2006.

12 Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives," 79.

13 Ibid., 83.

14 Ibid., 71, 72.

15 Ibid., 78.

16 Don McKellar, "A Calgary Kind of Film," *National Post,* September 11, 2000 (emphasis added).

17 Gary Burns was quoted as saying that the downtown shopping mall where the film was shot is "a pretty sterile, weird environment." Heath Jon McCoy, "Filmmaker Feared the Big 4-0," *Calgary Herald,* September 26, 2000.

18 Rick Groen, "It's an Urban Jungle in There," *Globe and Mail,* November 17, 2000.

19 Peranson forgives viewers for mistaking the film for "a sociological study of a vaguely familiar world stunted by technological change." "Review: waydownton," 74.

20 Bob Blakey, "'Interesting World' of Corporate Calgary Inspired Writer to Work on Screenplay," *Calgary Herald,* November 17, 2000.

21 John Griffin, "Waydowntown Is Worth the Trip," *The Gazette* (Montréal), February 23, 2001.

22 Jay Stone, "waydowntown Way Out There," *Kingston Whig-Standard,* March 30, 2001.

23 Patricia Gruben, "A Problem with Rules: Gary Burns," 298.

24 Ibid., 299.

25 Daniel Steinhart, "Waydowntown," 83.

26 George Melnyk, "'It's a Job and You Have to Do It Every Day': Gary Burns Interviewed by George Melnyk," 91.

27 Sharon Corder and Jack Blum, "Waydowntown: The Subversive Charm of Gary Burns," 9.

28 This redeemer theme is alluded to in the Bradley character, who staples slogans on his body and bleeds from his wounds, evoking the idea of crucifixion. The allusion is further accentuated when Tom offers the suicidal and sweating Bradley a cooling cloth, just as the Roman soldier offered Christ a balm for his thirst.

29 Randall King, "Filmmaker Fires Back at Calgary's 'Burbs," *Winnipeg Free Press,* May 4, 2007.

30 Ibid.

31 Geoff Pevere, "Dragged Through Mud by an SUV," *Toronto Star,* September 13, 2006.

32 Stephen Hunt, "Burns Turns Focus to Suburbia," *Calgary Herald,* September 28, 2006.

33 Quoted in ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Eva Ferguson, "EnCana Adds to Plus-15 Maze," *Calgary Herald,* October 14, 2006.

36 Quoted in Shawn Conner, "Calgary Filmmakers Explore the 'Burbs," *Vancouver Courier,* April 6, 2007.

37 Quoted in ibid.

38 Katherine Monk, "Burns Takes a Poke at the Suburban Dream," *Edmonton Journal,* April 27, 2007.

39 Ibid.

8 THE CITY OF DYSFUNCTION

1 These include *Drive She Said* (1997), *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity* (2002), and *Mob Princess* (2003).

2 The rapid evolution of the Asian reality in Vancouver's population is evidenced by the increase of people of Chinese descent from 25 percent in 1996 to 30 percent in 2001. Jacqueline Levitin, "Mina Shum: The 'Chinese' Films and Identities," 273.

3 See the graph of foreign versus Canadian production spending from 1990 to 2000 in Mike Gasher, *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia,* 92.

4 Ibid., 118.

5 Ibid.; for a partial list of such films, see pages 116–17.

6 Ibid., 118.

7 Diane Burgess, "Air Bud and Stickgirl Share Leaky Condo: The Changing Landscape of B.C. Cinema Since the 1980s," 157.

8 Sweeney's Vancouver films include *Live Bait* (1995), *Dirty* (1998), and *Excited* (2009).

9 McDonald has developed a penchant for female leads, including *Picture Claire* (2002) and *The Tracey Fragments* (2005). It should be noted that Angus Fraser

was also the screenwriter on Lynne Stopkewich's acclaimed *Kissed* (1996), which was a strong feminist statement based on the work of Barbara Gowdy. Fraser simply adapted Gowdy's short story for the screen. It was Stopkewich and Gowdy who were responsible for its feminist ideology.

10 The film's trajectory is mimicked in the title of Mina Shum's 2004 inaugural UBC Lecture on Multiculturalism, titled "New Day Rising: The Journey of a Hyphenated Girl."

11 Tomáš Pospišil, "Identity, Liminality and Difference in Mina Shum's *Double Happiness*," 177.

12 Glen Schaefer, "Mina Shum Seeing Double: Cast, Crew Celebrate Film's Continued Success," *The Province,* May 31, 2007.

13 Quoted in Steven Mazey, "Double Happiness: Director and Star Are Thoroughly Tickled by Their Comedy-Drama's Warm Reception," *The Record* (Kitchener, ON), November 9, 1995.

14 Shum said that she broke down in tears when she saw herself described as the first Chinese Canadian filmmaker. "I didn't go to film school to learn how to become Chinese," she commented. Chris Dafoe, "Happiness Hasn't Spoiled Mina Shum," *Globe and Mail,* October 6, 1994.

15 Peter Fend, the pre-eminent Asian American scholar of the Asian American film phenomenon, includes *Double Happiness* in that category, alongside such American examples as *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Wedding Banquet*. He considers these films thematically centred on generational conflict. See Peter Fend, "Decentering the Middle Kingdom."

16 For a detailed discussion of the term and its history, see Burgess, "Air Bud and Stickgirl," esp. 149–57.

17 Edward R. O'Neill, "Identity, Mimicry and Transtextuality in Mina Shum's *Double Happiness* and Quentin Lee and Justin Lin's *Shopping for Fangs*. Asian American Filmmakers: The Next Generation?" 56.

18 For an example of postmodern criticism that was contemporary with the release of the film, see Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," and Laura Marks, "A Deleuzian Politics of Hybrid Cinema."

19 Hong Kong is curiously bilingual and bicultural because of its British colonial history, in which the English language played an important role.

20 Quoted in Rob Salem, "The Director and Star of *Double Happiness* Are Entirely in Sync," *Toronto Star,* July 30, 1995.

21 Quoted in Elizabeth Renzetti, "Double Vision Toronto Film Festival," *Globe and Mail,* September 16, 1994.

22 Kay Armatage, "Fetish and Fashion in Canadian Film," 69.

23 Quoted in Marc Horton, "Double Happiness Takes Triple Effort: Mina Shum's Path to Success Was Steep," *Edmonton Journal,* August 28, 1995.

24 Tomàš Pospišil, "*Sam and Me, Masala* and *Double Happiness*: Multicultural Experience in Canadian Film of the Early 1990s," 186.

25 The post-1980s Chinese immigration has made the suburb of Richmond the focal point of Chinese Canadian identity in Vancouver. Toronto now contains multiple "Chinatowns," including distant new suburbs. The racism that the Chinese

migrants faced in Canada after their employment in the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s was tied to such racist laws as the Exclusion Act and the payment of an exorbitant "head tax" in order to be allowed in the country. The head tax was not repealed until after World War II.

26 See Eleanor Ty, *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives,* 70.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 195.

29 Quoted in Pospišil, "*Sam and Me, Masala* and *Double Happiness,*" 195.

30 Ty, *Politics of the Visible,* 81.

31 Brenda Austin-Smith refers to Hamid Naficy's emphasis on the transnational filmmaker's creation of an "independent genre" emphasizing hybridity. Brenda Austin-Smith, "Women, Liminality, and 'Unhomeliness' in the Films of Mina Shum," 203–5.

32 Ibid., 206.

33 Levitin, "Mina Shum," 275.

34 Quoted in Jacqueline Levitin, "Your Secrets Shouldn't Be So Secret: Mina Shum Interviewed by Jacqueline Levitin," 66.

35 Levitin, "Mina Shum," 282.

36 Austin-Smith links these contrasting "phobic" spaces with the "unhomeliness" of the outside in Homi Bhabha's theories of transnational filmmaking. Austin-Smith, "Women, Liminality, and 'Unhomeliness,'" 209.

37 Mark Peranson, "Riding the Pacific New Wave," *Globe and Mail,* September 3, 2001.

38 For a description of the differences between Toronto New Wave and Pacific New Wave, see Burgess, "Air Bud and Stickgirl," 150–53.

39 Chad Skelton, "Segregated City," *Vancouver Sun,* May 24, 2004.

40 Quoted in Peranson, "Riding the Pacific New Wave" (emphasis added).

41 Ibid.

42 Quoted in ibid.

43 Quoted in Geoff Pevere, "Romance in Reverse: Bruce Sweeney's *Last Wedding* Is a Date Move That Dreads the Morning After," *Toronto Star,* September 6, 2001.

44 Ibid.

45 Jay Stone, "Last Wedding a Clearly Canadian Comedy," *Edmonton Journal,* September 7, 2001.

46 Ibid.

47 David Spanner, "*Wedding* a Brilliant Blend of Comedy, Drama," *The Province,* October 12, 2001.

48 Malcolm Parry, "*Last Wedding* a Hogtown First," *Vancouver Sun,* July 28, 2001.

49 Peter Howell, "Empty Seat Blues: Critically Acclaimed, Highly Publicized Canadian Feature *Last Wedding* Has Everything Going for It, Except an Audience," *Toronto Star,* November 23, 2001.

50 Michael D. Reid, "Last Rites: *Last Wedding* Neatly Dissects Ill-fated Relationships," *Times Colonist* (Victoria, BC), October 19, 2001.

51 Glen Schaefer, "An American in Vancouver: City Has Played a Role in Each of Director's Movies," *The Province,* October 11, 2001.

52 In an extensive interview with McDonald about the film, Greg Burliuk quotes McDonald as taking credit for some of the more outlandish parts of the film, including the Bollywood dance sequence in a McDonald's restaurant, the replaying of the original murder as a comic-book animation, and the driving sequences shot in a studio as they were done in older films. See Greg Burliuk, "Bruce McDonald's Shot," *Kingston Whig-Standard,* March 12, 2005.

53 Quoted in Katherine Monk, "On the Edge: The West Coast Is the World's New Hotspot for Indie Film," *Vancouver Sun,* September 24, 2004. Katherine Monk eventually penned three major journalistic pieces on the film, more than any other film critic in Canada.

54 Burliuk, "Bruce McDonald's Shot."

55 Quoted in Katherine Monk, "Actress 'Liberated' by Being Gillian Guess," *Vancouver Sun,* October 4, 2005.

56 Angela Pacienza, "Movie Based on Gillian Guess 'Kooky,'" *Prince George Citizen,* September 22, 2004.

57 Quoted in Burliuk, "Bruce McDonald's Shot."

58 Tomahawk claims in the film that he is "the everyman" as he pursues his inquisitorial attack on Guess and makes a mockery of the public's right to know. See George Melnyk, "Bruce McDonald on the West Coast: The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess (Canada 2004)," 56–58.

59 When I tried to get a DVD of the film in 2011 for a course I was teaching, the producer had to make a special individual copy.

60 Gasher, *Hollywood North,* 132–33.

CONCLUSION

1 Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern,* 157.

2 Ibid., 174.

3 Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction,* 299, 300.

4 Quoted in Kania Lou, "A Love Affair with Toronto."

5 Quoted in ibid.

6 Richard Florida, "Charting the Future Through a 'Geography of Personality': An Excerpt from *Who's Your City?*" *Globe and Mail,* March 15, 2008.

7 Anna Wierzbicka, "Japanese Cultural Scripts: Cultural Psychology and 'Cultural Grammar,'" 527.

8 Christine Kim, Sophie McCall, and Melina Baum Singer, eds., *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada,* 9.

9 Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves,* 117 (emphasis in original).

10 The argument for a director-driven cinema is made in the editorial introduction to George Melnyk, ed., *Great Canadian Film Directors*.

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