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Perversion and National Subjectivity in English Canadian Cinema

by

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Abstract

In the last decade, English Canadian film-makers have tended to utilize perversion as a central image in their narratives. This speaks to the fundamental *in-betweenness* that characterizes the condition of national subjectivity in this country. The English Canadian national body finds itself positioned between the competing discourses of homogeneity and plurality, colonizer and colonized, centre and margin. This innate division is rooted in the psychological structures that underpin subjectivity, ones which work within a counter-hegemonic and masochistic model of understanding. The national narrative that is consequently produced by this 'perversion chic' cinema is one that subverts binary systems of identification and articulates a new, *queer* positionality in the formation of a national fantasmatic. Through the examination of five representative films from this group, it will be demonstrated that English Canada is a nation that fails to adhere to the hegemonic national archetype precisely because of its always already queer nature.

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This is dedicated to the memory of my mom, Marianne Ilse Morgan.

You always were and always will be my greatest inspiration.

My life is a testament to you.

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Chapter One:
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English Canadian Cinema and the Construction of a Queer National Subject

English Canadian films of the last decade or so have demonstrated a propensity for narratives that elucidate the darker sides of the national body, the margins of our nation. Necrophiliacs, pedophiles, and homosexuals populate these films, their images being used to tell stories that are strikingly different from most of those told by big-budget Hollywood films. Their absence in the latter is certainly telling, but what is by far a more interesting question is why do Canadian film-makers insist on utilizing perversion as a central trope in the cinema they ostensibly produce about the Canadian way of life? Lee Parpart describes this trend in English Canadian cinema as 'perversion chic' (a term lifted from Brian D. Johnson's [1997] article on several prominent films in this cycle). She argues that since about 1992, many Canadian films have been produced that incorporate "an overt concern with desire, sexuality, and the inscription of the body" and which "investigate the strange carnalities of desire and take part in an inflationary trend that seems to be constantly upping the ante of allowable (perhaps even mandatory) eroticism in English-Canadian cinema" (1999: 259). Perverse desire would thus seem to have some deep resonance with the creative minds in this country. The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to explain why this is so, and through such an exploration, to examine the ramifications of perversion on the construction of a unique (or perhaps, not so unique) English Canadian subjectivity. Through a close reading of five films selected from among the perversion chic oeuvre, and their subjection to a cultural and psychoanalytic analysis, it will be shown that perversion functions to produce and reflect a national subject that is always already *in between* hegemonic categories of identification, a fact that serves to disrupt these systems of knowing and to speak to the innate *queerness* of the nation in Canada.

Public Fantasies and National Cinema(s)

Film is inextricable from the formation of subjectivity in the late twentieth century. The power of cinema in this respect derives from its role as the purveyor of fantasy. Teresa de Lauretis describes fantasy as "the psychic mechanism that governs the translation of social representations into subjectivity and self-representation by a sort of adaptation or reworking of the social imaginary into individual fantasies" (1998: 865-866). In short, the individual internalizes the archetypes present in cultural representations of reality and then shapes his or her consciousness in order to play out an identification with these images. This fantasy involvement with narrative is amplified to the level of *public fantasies* when the representations are rooted in a group mythology, and are hence consumed and emulated by the masses. Film, as de Lauretis explains, falls into this category of fantasy:

> What I mean by public fantasies is dominant cultural narratives and scenarios of the popular imagination that have been expressed in myths, sacred texts, medieval sagas, Renaissance epics and their modern equivalents -- novels, films, television, the internet, and so forth. As they contribute to the shaping of the social imaginary, public fantasies provide material and scripts, or forms of content and expression, to the subjective activity of fantasizing. (866)

Fantasy is thus a cyclical process, one where the subject is both formed by and informs the shape of the public imagining that he or she uses in order to define a meaningful relationship within the matrix of social belonging. An understanding of the fantasy images of film is thus essential in any work that purports to explain the relationality between this particular manifestation of cultural representation and the nation. For English Canada, the role of fantasy takes on an almost desperate significance in the examination of national identification. Mike Gasher argues that "[i]f popular culture is the site of the iteration and re-iteration of a society's dominant values, then the struggle for a voice through cultural expression becomes a vehicle for self-discovery, particularly in a colonial condition which

obstructs cultural affirmation" (1993: 96).[1] Narrative film, in particular, fulfills this task effectively as it "is a form of social intelligibility wherein the film text and the extra-text (the 'real' and conflicting social environments of day-to-day living; the imagined community; even the critical discourse on the text) are negotiated together" (Ramsay 1993: 32). In Canada, however, any examination of cinema comes with an especially national set of difficulties.

Precisely, English Canadian film is marginalized within Canada, particularly in terms of audience reception. The fact that Canadian films make up less than two percent of screen time in this country accounts, to some degree, for the lack of audience awareness of English Canadian films (the situation is somewhat better in Quebec). These factors have led Charles R. Acland to claim that "[a] seat in a Canadian movie theater is essentially a seat on international territory; it offers the experience of being 'anywhere' and of cosmopolitan connection to other world movie audiences" (1997: 283). This apparent lack of uniquely English Canadian images (itself a deeply problematic notion -- what precisely *are* English Canadian images?) presents obvious difficulties for the construction of an English Canadian subject-nation. How can we conceive ourselves as Canadians if we cannot fantasize ourselves through our own particular set of cultural mirrors? This lack of images of our own 'experience' on screen results, according to Gasher, in an inability for the nation to imagine itself.

A popular strategy when articulating this problem is to turn the finger of blame upon our American neighbours. In so doing, it is argued that the domination of the Canadian media by American sources renders the English Canadian experience largely invisible and is the cause of "cultural displacement," "a fission in the relationship between a people and the cultural production... which emerges from its particular way of life" (Gasher 96). Gasher

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[1]It is not my intention, here, to argue that popular cultural expression stands as the only, or even the most powerful, venue through which national identity is expressed. Ferguson makes this clear in her discussion of Canadian television, where she states: "the pervasive power of electronic media to shape culture can be overstated. The ubiquity of electronic media does not answer the questions related to and arising from the issue of identity complexity" (1993: 43).

emphasizes the unifying nature of film as art, stating that "the purpose of art is to connect the individual to the community; art reinforces the human collective" (97). Without Canadian films being viewed on Canadian screens, whose community are we being fantasized into? The national narrative, especially one which attempts to combine vast plurality into a single conception of the nation, requires a recognition by subjects. Canadian film, unfortunately, suffers from a lack of recognition, one exemplified by the commonly held truism that Canadian film is somehow lacking in terms of its American counterpart. While it may be argued that the Canadian nation exists despite its lack of representation in popular culture, this leaves open a gap inasmuch as we then need to account for the place of films that are made within the national symbolic. What is their role if not to interpellate a national audience? And, perhaps more importantly, can there be said to be an English Canadian cinema? This question informs not only how we study Canadian popular culture, but also the ways in which we understand the *nation* of an English Canadian *national* identity.

Andrew Higson explains that there is no single, universally accepted discourse on national cinema; the term has been appropriated in a number of different ways, depending on the circumstances. He outlines four major directions in which this concept has been mobilized: an economic approach which insists on "a conceptual correspondence between 'national cinema' and 'the domestic film industry'" (1989: 36); a text-based, thematic approach (i.e. do these films speak to a particular national sensibility?); a consumption-based approach where viewership is given precedence; and "a criticism-led approach, which tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema" (37)[2]. What all four perspectives hold in common is a propensity to mobilize the concept "prescriptively rather

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[2]Criticism, particularly in the last decade, has moved towards a conception of an English Canadian cinema rooted in a quality art cinema, one which explores themes unique to the Canadian context, an approach that neatly avoids the question of audience entirely. Higson explains that "art cinemas have rarely achieved a national popular success, partly because of their modes of address, and partly because of the international hegemony of Hollywood at the level of distribution, exhibition and marketing" (41).

than descriptively, citing what *ought* to be national cinema, rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences" (37). To do so, according to Higson, is to presuppose a unity to the national body which is virtually impossible. What can be said to be the sole property of the 'national' in an age of increasing globalization?[3] The use of a conceptual national cinema employs a "process of identification [which] is thus invariably a hegemonizing, mythologizing process, involving both production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings" (Higson 37). Hence, the notion of an English Canadian national cinema attempts to reinstate a homogenous national imaginary, one which artificially sutures over a rampant internal plurality.

While the latter will be taken up at length throughout this thesis, there remains the problematic question of consumption, especially in light of the fantasy workings of cinema in the construction of national subjectivity. Higson emphasizes audience in looking at a national cinematic narratives, explaining that "the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as at the site of production of films" (36). In fact, he concludes with the clearly suggestive question: "For what is a national cinema if it doesn't have a national audience?" (46). Teresa de Lauretis finds a similar urgency in considering the role of the viewer:

> The film's construction of a narrative space, a field of vision and meaning that is perceived to originate in those who watch it, produces the spectator as the point of its coherence; it thus contributes to the production of subject-positions and the

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[3]Brenda Longfellow argues that, in Canada, "globalization can hardly be considered a startlingly new phenomenon given the long history of American domination of our theaters and television screens and the even longer history of colonial ownership and control of our major economic resources" (1996: 4). In Canadian film-making, this is manifest in the common phenomena of co-productions. Manjunath Pendakur (1990) explains: "[g]iven the uncertainties of access to capital and markets compounded by the relatively small domestic market, Canadian producers loo[k] outside the country to compete in the international financing game of feature film production" (qtd. in Longfellow 5). This reflects the inherent difficulty in establishing "some sort of balance between the 'apparently incompatible objectives of a national cinema – to be economically viable but culturally motivated,' 'to be "national" in what is essentially an international industry'" (Higson 41).

> construction -- more rarely, the deconstruction -- of social, gendered identities for its viewers in the very process of viewing (a process that film theory calls spectatorship). (867)

To contradict a claim I made earlier then, is cinema at all relevant in the consideration of national identity in Canada if no one is watching? Acland writes that "Canadian cinema has rarely been part of a popular theater-going practice, and when it has, the films have been treated disparagingly and rejected by critics" (Acland 290).[4] This suggests, at least by Higson's estimation, that an English Canadian national cinema is an impossibility. This is, however, a rather short-sighted view, one which restricts national cinemas to only one of Higson's four articulations of the term. Chris Berry argues that this

> downplays consideration of the ways in which these texts usually attempt to solicit recognition of membership in a collectivity and to signify that this collectivity extends to include both the audience and the filmmakers... *For whether or not such cinematic efforts to participate in the construction of collective agency are effective, this is their aim.* (1998: 142, emphasis added)

Thus the intention to represent English Canada in a cinematic text cannot be foreclosed in the face of a lack of a significant national audience. Whether or not they are successful, their interpellative intention is one that references the Canadian spectator. Higson seems to acknowledge this point when he states that, in the context of the innate heterogeneity of the domestic market, these films need "to be seen as actively working to construct subjectivity as well as simply expressing a pre-given identity" (44). This also speaks to the fact that, in terms of de Lauretis's contention about the functioning of fantasy, these films are produced through a direct relationality with the cultural narratives and mythologies that distinguish

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[4]Acland is quick to point out, however, that "the problem with the cinema audience in Canada is not one of absence; it seems, rather, that we promoted certain kinds of cinema-going practices over others" (291-292). Among several examples, he cites the fact that Canadian films do seem to demonstrate a degree of popularity among domestic consumers in the context of film festivals and when they are shown on television.

them from their Hollywood competitors. Audience cannot, then, be employed as a factor in the dismissal of a national cinema in English Canada.

This is not, however, an argument for a unified English Canadian national cinema, one which performs the homogenizing functions of Higson's cinema of "internal cultural colonialism" (44). In his examination of Chinese national film, Berry argues for the "recasting [of] national cinema as a multiplicity of projects, authored by different individuals, groups, and institutions with various purposes, but bound together by the politics of national agency and collective subjectivity as constructed entities" (132). Instead of Higson's model of a homogenous and homogenizing national cinema, Berry suggests that we speak of national cinema*s*, each of which is connected by a general adherence to the larger frame of the nation. The nation is recognized as being multivalent and pluralistic, but it is still acknowledged as being at least one referent from which the text emanates. In this way, the national audience is not arbitrarily condensed into a single point of address and is instead recognized as being varied in its identification with the nation. English Canadian cinema is thus re-casted as a shifting and diverse series of English Canadian cinemas, ones which all confront the issues surrounding a particular form of belonging without manufacturing a single, hegemonically-driven viewpoint. In this way, the national cinema of the English Canada, and the public fantasies that it strives to engender, may be termed *queer*.

Queer Desire in a Northern Landscape

The perversion chic cycle of English Canadian film showcases the range of marginal or queer desire, from the sadomasochistic pleasures of sex/death in David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) and Denys Arcand's *Love and Human Remains* (1993), the implied incestual desire of Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994) and *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997), and the traumatic homosexuality of films such as Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden* (1997), Patricia Rozema's *When Night is Falling* (1995), and John Greyson's *Lilies* (1996) to the spiritually-inflected necrophilia of Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* (1996). While these sensationalistic

representations tend to centre the media-defined thematics of this particular facet of national cinema, perversion works in these films outside of its immediately apparent and scandalous queer content. In fact, their function within the fantasy structure of an English Canadian national subjectivity reflects the complexity of the term I have used to describe them. On the one hand, queer signifies a particular community, one defined by its lack of definition within the mainstream, one that references most often a gay and lesbian perspective. On the other hand, however, it stands as a methodological proposition for the examination of almost any phenomenon. Queer analysis forces the issues of sexuality and transgression into the centre, and from there attempts to rearticulate the hegemonic structures of knowing that necessitate such a conceptual action in the first place. In this thesis, I am aligning (somewhat uneasily) the notions of queerness and perversion, at least inasmuch as they both exist in English Canadian cinema. Perversion allows the inherently queer nature of the nation to be elaborated, and in so doing, begins the task of reconceptualizing the fantasy constructs that suture the subject into place within a hegemony of national belonging.

'Perversion chic,' which centres on a reconsideration of the role of difference in the current model of English Canadian nationalism, emerges

> out of a moment in which the increasingly fractured and heterogeneous character of Canadian social life (along with the current popularity of theories stressing Canada's inherent postmodernity and its refusal of a 'monolithic meta-narrative of nationhood') are coinciding with a broadly based rediscovery of the male body's erotic potential and a simultaneous rethinking of once taken-for-granted ideas about what it means to 'be a man' in any particular setting or historical period. (Parpart 1999: 268)

The use of perversion in national cinema both allegorizes and displaces difference within a nationalist hegemony, working paradoxically to uphold and undermine the discursive foundations of the nation. If, as Christine Ramsay has pointed out, "[b]etween the modern [and hegemonic] nation and dominant masculine gender identity there exists a common metaphoric impulse to power and mastery" (1993: 45), then masculinity must be seen as

equally imagined as the nation inasmuch as both seek "the ideal, ordered stability of the centre in order to contain the threats of difference, disorder and death from the margins" (46). This correlation between a dominant and phallically-empowered gender and the conditions of belonging in modern nationalism has led to a particular view of the prominent situation of perversion, and especially homosexuality, in English Canadian cinema. This 'loser paradigm' contends that Canada is a nation grounded in lack, a space of missing culture and power that produces the Canadian hero as a feminized male.[5] The connotation for the perversion chic canon is obvious when it is subjected to the critical eye of the loser paradigm: Canada simply fails to adhere to a dominant, masculine conception of the nation. But as Lee Parpart correctly observes, "in an English-Canadian setting, where the narrative Canada tells about itself is increasingly one of margins triumphing over centre, traditional scripts of empowered masculinity lack interpellating power" (268-269). In other words, these films cannot be evaluated within a theoretical scope that insists upon the nation as configured through an ineffectual model of centre-periphery relations. The binary constructions of difference that underpin the national narrative (male/female, insider/outsider, heterosexual/homosexual) are representationally inadequate, forcing a new model of Canadian nationalism.

Several obvious questions emerge from such a contention: How can the nation maintain a productive marginality if it is embodied by those excluded from the mainstream? Can Canada represent itself as marginal on the international stage yet position difference in alternate ways in terms of the internal politics of belonging? Policies such as multiculturalism have attempted to answer these questions in the affirmative but, as will be

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[5]Although this conceptual matrix deals with issues of gender as its primary concern, the loser paradigm suffers from a theoretical flaw that stems from a more broadly conceived idea of Canadian nationalism. In short, this paradigm argues for a nation which is defined strictly from a spatial perspective, or more precisely, from the belief that the temporal is fundamentally lacking in the Canadian national mythology. In this way, the male protagonist is associated solely with his physical environment (which is always situated as inherently feminine), one that he is ultimately unable to control, thus producing his feminized positionality. This concept is dealt with at length in the following chapter.

demonstrated, fail to adequately account for the difference they claim to organize and define. A queerly remembered nationalism, as championed by the perverse protagonist in a cinema of the nation, works to incorporate this paradox without eliding the central difference that makes it an obstacle to homogeneity. The perverse body becomes the nexus of difference, negotiating contradictory identifications in an attempt to (re)member the nation queerly and reconfigure our understandings of its roots in history and society.

Films within the perversion chic cycle work counter-hegemonically through their rearticulation of national norms of allegorical representation. Kaja Silverman explains this as the function of *perversion*:

> perversion turns aside from both biology and the social order, and it does so through the improper deployment or negation of the binarisms upon which each regime depends -- binarisms that reinforce each other in the case of gender, if not that of class. The "truth" or "right" which is thus subverted is the principle of hierarchy. (1992: 185)

While perversion is figured most often (at least in Canadian cinema) as deriving from the sexual, Silverman argues that its significance exceeds these somewhat arbitrary boundaries and instead suggests "that it turns aside not only from hierarchy and genital sexuality, but from the paternal signifier, the ultimate 'truth' or 'right'" (187). This situates perversity potently within the national narrative. Rather than simply signaling the lack upon which English Canadian nationalism is built, the feminized male hero stands as a destabilizing tactic of this narrative, a symbol that might be employed within a wholesale resignification of the nation. By stripping sexuality of its protective normativity and functionality within the nation, perversion "puts the body and the world of objects to uses that have nothing whatever to do with any kind of 'immanent' design or purpose" (Silverman 187), throwing the entire symbolic order on which it is predicated into chaos. It is from the wreckage of (in this case) the nation, that new meanings and understandings of difference emerge.

Perversion, thus stamped with a strategically subversive motivation, is inscribed in the perversion chic films, a fact that makes these cultural texts ultimately queer in their understanding of a national reality. If perversion forces an exceptional meaning upon the structures that are undermined, put to uses which are not immediately related to their hegemonic definitions, then their function is queer inasmuch as queerness denotes that which cannot be contained within normative categories of knowledge. This is reflected in the films that will be examined in this thesis both in terms of their explicit content and their narrative formation, or how they tell their stories. Ultimately, the perversion chic canon works to mirror the psychological configuration that produces the English Canadian national subject as inherently divided and consequently masochistic in his or her orientation to the hegemony of the nation. Through a varied discourse, one that incorporates not only sexuality, but death, traumatic history, and a concern with the body and memory (all of which are especially temporal figures), perversion in English Canadian cinema establishes a terminology that both subverts and perverts hegemonic knowing. The latent queerness of the nation is thus demonstrated and engaged as an integral part of national representation, one with significant impact on the use of these films within the fantasy construction of national identification. In this way, it is shown that the perversity of these films emerges from a context which facilitates their subversive and perversive functioning, one in which the nation cannot escape from its own, horrifying queer nature. In short, the nation is written, in the perversion chic films, as an always already queer structure, one that must be accessed on that level in order to generate a subject that is not caught up in a masochistic cycle of failure in the quest to adhere to something which can only ever be said to be illusionary.

(Re)defining the Hero

All the films discussed in this thesis fit into the broad category of the 'Canadian mainstream,' either through relative box office success, prestige on the festival circuit, domestic awards, or the critical reputation of the director. Often, their place within this

cycle of films is the result of some combination of said factors. To begin with, all the directors mentioned here tend to be considered among the best this country has to offer (with the exceptions, perhaps, of Lynne Stopkewich and Thom Fitzgerald, both of whom are first-time film-makers). Between them, they have won 23 Genies, have won or been nominated for three awards at Cannes, and have taken home a number of other prizes from prestigious film festivals (including, prominently, the Toronto International Film Festival). The task of placing all these films within a discourse of the 'mainstream,' overcomes an important critical obstacle in the definition of an overall pattern that they are held to illustrate in terms of the national narrative: the discrepancy between the movies that are made and popular taste. In defense of the perversion chic cycle of films, Robert Lantos, CEO of Alliance, has argued that rather than compete with the aesthetic and narrative strategies of (an admittedly essentialized) Hollywood: "There's only one direction we can go in, and that is with film-makers who have powerful visions. There's a handful of them in Canada. They tend to make dark movies, movies that are counter-Hollywood and anti-television..." (qtd. in Johnson 45). The directors under examination here tend in this direction, away from 'popcorn movies' and towards what Higson has termed "an art cinema, a nationally-based (and in various ways state-subsidized) cinema of quality" (41).

Lantos's statement is echoed by Higson through his explanation that "[t]he discourses of 'art,' 'culture' and 'quality,' and of 'national identity' and 'nationhood,' have historically been mobilized against Hollywood's mass entertainment film, and used to justify various nationally specific economic systems of support and protection" (41), a strategy which serves to define national film through its inherent stylistic and narrative *difference* with the film of Others, namely Americans and their (apparent) popular culture of mass-consumption. An idealized 'art cinema' distinguishes itself from Hollywood film through the very fact of its lack of popularity in the national mainstream (a situation that arguably has as much to do with content as it does with the American monopoly of distribution and exhibition in Canada) and its reliance on the critical acceptance of the global audience and its

distinction in international film festivals. Thus, as Acland has explained, "the 'foreignness' of Canadian cinema concerns its affinity with an international art cinema. Here, 'foreignness' does not designate a geographical distance from the country, but a distance from popular taste" (284).[6]

The primary difficulty with this argument, however, is that it positions essentialized notions of one nation's cinema and of 'popular taste' in order to elucidate the particularities of Canada's film-making, a fact that serves, in turn, to detract from the queer and pluralistic nature of any nationally produced representation. To echo de Lauretis, a clear picture of national culture cannot be attained through the false assumption of a homogenous national audience. In fact, it can be argued that the marginality of English Canadian cinema within its own domestic market radically queers these so-called 'mainstream' films. In a nation that is always already queer, perversion chic is, queerly, even marginal to this construction of the subject-nation (a situation that effectively argues against the imposition of the term 'mainstream' in the first place). Thus, both the perversity of their subject matter and their oddly marginal cultural position are functions, or reflections, of the queerness of English Canadian cinema and the national symbolic more generally.[7] One purpose of this thesis, then, will be to construct a counter-argument, one that works to define the perversion chic

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[6]This opens up a space for the exploration of several other important paradoxes of the Canadian film canon. If Higson is correct in his assertion that a national cinema must necessarily include that which the national audience is watching, how can we define, on a purely quantitative level, an English Canadian film canon that does not incorporate American movies? Acland hints at this in his exploration of the 'absent' audience in Canada. He argues that American films do have to be considered, but only inasmuch as their semiotic meaning is read as polysemic. The Canadian audience reads these films differently than an audience south of the border. Where, then, do films of a Canadian origin fit? Acland argues that the audience for Canadian films lies within an 'expo mentality,' one which orients itself to special venues, such as the art house theater and the film festival. English Canadian films find their most enthusiastic viewers at local exhibitions, such as the Toronto International Film Festival, rather than at the general 'night out at the movies.' This may be expanded to argue the place of national awards such as the Genies in a definition of a mainstream Canadian film. The development of a national art cinema forces the redefinition of the national audience in order to position English Canadian film within the national narrative. It is with this in mind that Acland argues for a redefinition of 'audience' that might better fit the Canadian reality. In short, Canadian films cannot be criticized for their lack of popular viewership as their functions lies outside of this most Hollywood of indicators of worth.

[7]For this insight, I am indebted to Eric Savoy.

films using criteria that moves away from simplistic binary relations towards a more ambiguous, but arguably more representative, view of film production and reception in English Canada.

In the chapters that follow, I will elaborate a new manner in which an abstract and admittedly idealized English Canadian cinema might be understood within the confines of a postmodern notion of subjectivity and identification. Chapter two will begin this process by exploring some of the previous models that have been forwarded in order to explain the queerness of the Canadian nation. In particular, I will delve into ideas about the 'imagined community' and their relation to the portrayal of the English Canada national body as both inherently plural and essentially unified. Both literary strategies (such as the garrison mentality) and political endeavours (such as multiculturalism) to account for the radical difference of English Canada shall be described. I will then turn towards a critique of these models, one that relies upon the amalgamation of several postmodern theories about identity, narrativity, and post-coloniality in order to highlight the difficulties of the exclusive reliance upon spatial conceptualization present in each. The pitfalls in defining a coherent English Canadian identity stem from the broader discourses surrounding identification and the subject. By situating the English Canadian subject within a constant performative *process* of self-definition, the temporality that is lacking in the 'imagined community' archetypes of the nation will be highlighted. In short, I am arguing in this chapter that English Canada must be re-defined as both fragmented and fluid, temporal *and* spatial, a shifting category that attempts to account for a perverse excess of meaning, yet always fails. This failure is productive inasmuch as it signals the state of the nation as a site of profound remembering and forgetting, a temporal locus that is caught between knowing and not knowing, between illusionary coherence and horrific fragmentation. In the end, I will suggest that a means by which we can overcome the conceptual difficulties that I have laid out is to turn to the notion of a queer memory, one that can suture over the inadequacies of the national label without rupturing it in its entirety.

From this broad speculation about the nature of nationalism and subjectivity, I will, in chapter three, move the discussion to the more specific level of English Canadian film and its fantasy role in the production and reflection of the national subject. Here, I begin with the elaboration of the 'loser paradigm,' a conceptual frame that contends that the Canadian male holds a feminized relationship with geography and Nature (which is argued to be always already feminine), one that impacts the cultural representation of our heroes (and, to a lesser degree, heroines). In short, the theorists of the loser paradigm believe that a psychic condition of castration plagues the English Canadian subject, and use this claim in order to bolster their argument as to the relationality between our inability to adhere to a hegemonic nationalism and the resultant ephemeral nature of Canada as it is conceived in the popular consciousness. This needlessly pessimistic view of Canadian cinema will be counteracted through the queering of the loser paradigm. My argument against the statements of these scholars stems from the belief that the English Canadian psyche is far more complex than previously articulated (although, ironically, it is their introduction of the psychic nature of Canadian representation that fuels this line of reasoning). Importantly, English Canadian subjectivity is rooted in a masochistic cycle of repression and return. Using David Savran's similar model of the American male psyche, I will speculate as to the connections between these two forms of national consciousness, one based in a melancholic internalization of the failure of the performative process, and from there make specific overtures as to an English Canadian masochism. This will set up the frame that I carry over into the analysis of the five selected perversion chic films.

In chapter four, I re-introduce the concept of memory in the national construction of the subject. Through the reading of Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden* and John Greyson's *Lilies*, I elaborate the role of trauma in the definition of an English Canadian historical consciousness, a model that reflects the masochistic positionality of the national subject. *The Hanging Garden* is used to illustrate the relationality of the temporal to the spatial in the consideration of the nation as a site of memory and trauma. Throughout the

film, the memories of the characters are actualized in the titular space, a fact that thus implicates not only the story, but the narrative structures in the creation of a unique approach to English Canadian national narration. Significantly, I explore the ambiguous nature of the narrative, one that signals the force of trauma not in its initial occurrence, but in its *return*. In short, trauma grounds the national narrative not as an explosive intrusion of the Lacanian real[8] into the psyche, but as an echo of that event, one that structures the relationality of history (as a necessary forgetting of the trauma) to the matrix of national belonging. The theme of trauma is carried into the discussion of *Lilies*, but with an important distinction: the spatial is here constructed as the corporeal, memory being thus argued to be especially *physical* in its intersection with national understanding. The trope of drag that is featured heavily in this film is employed as a means of reconciling the perverse body with history. The contradictory nature of identification is paralleled with the temporal relations of trauma and history. Bluntly, *history is memory in drag*, an elaborate masquerade that seeks to cover over the traumatic inconsistencies of the past with the illusionary coherence of a 'stable' history. The body, as it is situated in history, hence becomes a scandalous category, one that is fundamentally *in-between*.

This in-betweenness that marks the cinematic body in the perversion chic films is argued, in chapter five, to be allegorical of the queer national body in English Canada. I begin by elaborating both the subversive and *perversive* functions of the perversion chic films. Not only do these films undermine the notion of a binaristic structure to the understanding of difference (one that is characteristic of hegemony), they work to articulate the inherently perverse nature of the nation that allows for such a critique to be made in the first place. Here, the links between English Canada and a queer nationalism are made

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[8]The real is a concept that will be defined at length in chapter five. At this point, suffice it to say that the real stands as that which characterizes and, in fact, defines the traumatic, historical event. It is that which reaches towards signification within the terminology of the symbolic, but which always fails due to its sheer excessiveness. The symbolic is consequently conceptualized as that which seeks to contain the real yet also finds itself contained, or restricted, by it.

explicit, an argument that involves a description of the theoretical basis of Queer Nation, a radical American activist group that emerged out of ACT UP in the late eighties, and its applicability in the framework of Canada. If Queer Nation strove both to queer and to highlight the innate queerness of modern society and culture, then English Canada can (through a circular line of reasoning) be viewed as being, at its root, a paradoxically queer nation that the perversion so evident in the films that emerge from this country only seeks to demonstrate and make explicit. The nation is thus a scandalous category, one that straddles contradictory positionalities simultaneously and therefore speaks to the inherent 'dirtiness' of the hegemonic boundaries that pre-suppose a distinction between them. This is illustrated through the analysis of Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*. Like in the previous chapter, the relationality of the body to trauma is argued, but is taken to the next level by way of the position that the scandalous body is one that not only straddles multiple subjectivities within the present, but moves easily between various temporal points in the articulation of history. The national body is hence always already queer, a fact that speaks volumes about the usage of perversion in our queer national cinema.

Finally, in chapter six, I will argue that the queerness evident in the temporal construction of the nation is symptomatic of a deeper psychological condition than the masochistic impulse that fuels the performative cycle of failure consistent with the repression and return to trauma. In order to do so, I introduce the concept of the death drive and elaborate this through an analysis of necrophilic desire in Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* and David Cronenberg's *Crash*. The death impulse is masochistic in its orientation, but speaks to a primordial condition by which the imaginary ego of the subject attempts to control and ultimately disavow the unbounded psychic energies of the real. In *Kissed*, this is evident through the consideration of the perverse necrophile body, a corporeality that perverts the masochistic cycle by transforming the desire for self-destruction (of the ego) into sexual desire for the dead. The protagonist's acts of perversion signify an attempt to recapture the experience of the real, to acknowledge her own inadequacies in the face of the impossibility

of hegemony. She flees, however, from the real once she has made contact with it, a fact that speaks to the suturing nature of scandal and of the nation and to the masochistic cycle that prompts both to repeat the performative circuit in the attempt to define a national belonging. This repetition is also evident in *Crash*, a film that dares to reference the inter-connections between sexuality and death. The masochistic national narrative is here inscribed upon the bodies of the actors as they perform the obviously masochistic perversion of their sexual arousal through the near encounter with the real. Like in *Kissed*, the protagonists continually strive both to connect with and to disavow the impossibility of their identities within the hegemonic system, speaking to the scandalous nature of the suture that the nation represents. Thus, trauma becomes again a process of repression and return (or rather, return and repression), one that perverts any notion that the structures of the hegemonic nation can ever be read as stable or 'clean.' In the end, then, the death drive is shown to be at the root of national subjectivity, a fact that produces the English Canadian subject-nation as masochistic and therefore queer.

Ultimately, this thesis is more speculative than explanatory. The model I propose is one that is more concerned in dealing with the inconsistencies of previous theorizing on the subject of the English Canadian nation than it is with suggesting the primacy of this particular frame over any others. By way of the chapters that follow, I seek to provide tentative answers to the questions of why perversion figures so prominently in English Canadian cinema, what is the impact that perversion has on an understanding of the contemporary subject-nation, and what this says, if anything, about the condition of national subjectivity in English Canada as we enter the new millennium. To state my general position in view of these questions precisely, I believe that English Canada is inherently queer. The perversion chic films function subversively to highlight this perverse condition of the nation, and through this attempt to fantasmatically construct an alternative national subject, one that emerges through the paradox of a national hegemony that is *always already* queer.

Chapter Two:
Locating Difference:
Negotiating an English Canadian National Narrative in the Postmodern Age

English Canada has most often been theorized as being the embodiment of lack: a lack of historical consciousness, a lack of unity, a lack of desire to strive towards the ideals of hegemonic nationalism. This lack, in turn, has been characterized as inherently temporal in nature, leaving open a space in which the spatial aspects of the nation are given precedence. In this chapter, I will present a brief overview of this narrative of lack and explain how it is manifest in terms of the Canadian national body (figured both temporally and spatially), followed by the examination and application of several postmodern and post-colonial theories of national identification to the problematics inherent in such a perspective. Central to this project is the idea that English Canada somehow falls *in between* hegemonic discourses of nationalism, a fact that forces the rearticulation of the nation and the structures that serve to produce and maintain it. In short, if Canada has been a country that is usually referenced through the spatial relations of landscape and geography, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that a subversive response to this requires a return to the temporal.

In order to accomplish this return, I present a number of postmodern (a term that necessarily denotes a temporality) perspectives on nation and identification. Performativity, the model of identification forwarded by Judith Butler, is employed to access the national subject through lines that are firmly distanced (yet not inextricable) from a spatially-conceived hierarchy of positionalities. From here, the nation may be viewed as an identity category that is processional and fluid. This allows me to explore nationalism through the frame of narrativity, a concept that speaks strongly to the queer nature of nation-ness and its fantasy creation by way of the cinematic apparatus. In the end, I will elaborate a particularly Canadian take on narration and subjectivity, one grounded in Kieran Keohane's notion of ironic conceit. This masochistic oscillation between positions of centre and periphery is emblematic of the innate in-betweenness of the English Canadian subject-nation. It is also a temporal means for representing the national subject inasmuch as it works to reconfigure the

nation as a site of profound remembering and forgetting, a space in which memory works to highlight the inherent queerness of national identification.

English Canadian Nationalism: In Between Spatiality and Temporality

English Canada stands as a nation *in-between*. Caught between competing and often contradictory narratives of history, culture, and identity, Canada finds itself situated in a productive site of difference, that locus described by Homi Bhabha as the "space of liminality" (1990: 300) and by Russell Brown as the borderland, "a place that draws things into it, a place identified with the middle ground, with the union of opposites, and with mediation" (1990: 44). Peter Dickinson explains this peculiar Canadian situation by defining the nation as a community

> *in between* (1) a not-so-distant imperial past and an increasingly corporate future (hence 'post,' a prefix I understand to mean here both 'posterior' to, that is, coming after or later in a temporal or serial sense... *and* 'anterior' to, that is, coming before or prior in a more spatial sense...); and (2) theories of identity, citizenship, power, and art that project evaluative criteria based on notions of belonging, truth, authority, convention, and fact (hence 'national'...). (1999: 37)

Dickinson, then, argues for a rearticulation of the nation in the Canadian context through the explicit elaboration of the paradoxical ambiguities and the inherent difference contained within the national narrative. Although particularity functions as an integral part in the construction of any national identity, Canada features an exceptional plurality of difference, a situation that by its very excess ruptures attempts to define it utilizing the stable, binaristic models associated with dominant, hegemonic definitions. As a result, Canada finds itself serving as a theoretical articulation of the postmodern nation.[1] This position has worked to

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[1]Peter Harcourt has suggested that "[i]f through a curious concatenation of events, Canada by-passed the Enlightenment (as Northrop Frye has suggested) and then managed to skip Modernism (as Bruce Elder has claimed), perhaps Canada has been hanging in there, dormant but not dead, waiting to lead the developed world into the New Age of the Twenty-First Century" (1993: 18).

situate the English Canadian narrative within a complex understanding of national time and space.

Benedict Anderson explains that 'nation' must be understood as "an *imagined* political community... because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1983: 15, emphasis added). To this I would add that the nation is also imagined inasmuch as fantasy plays a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of the subject-nation. As such, Anderson claims that 'nation-states' merely function as the concrete expression of nations, or rather, of individual national narratives and fantasies, and that consequently, "nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that precede it, out of which -- as well as against which -- it came into being" (19). Peter Alter articulates this through his belief that the imagined community is perpetuated through the existence of a common *national consciousness* (as opposed to a 'naturally' existing culture) in which social groups emphasize their various commonalities while consciously downplaying local variation. This is the process of hegemony. While the political system maintains a relative homogeneity through the regulation of difference and the creation of a power structure to be internalized as a hegemony of the state, the dominant culture of a nation (usually that expressed through the political) works to homogenize 'the people' that it recognizes as its own through hegemonic structures that it claims have preceded and will outlast these structures, both spatially and temporally. Those who cannot be contained within this system are abjected, which lends an illusion of unity to the nation-state and masks what tends to be a much more complicated process of identification on the part of those who belong to a 'nation.' This is often articulated through the image of the 'border,' the separating line between us and the Other, an imagined belonging which excludes those unlike ourselves and extends across both temporal and spatial axes.

Regis Debray (1977) articulates the temporal dimension of the nation by arguing that nations tend to narratively construct a knowable past, a fantasmatic or imagined history, which functions as a reference point for the recognition of those being interpellated to the imagined community.[2] Notions of national time, however, rely upon a linear narrative in which the nation is positioned teleologically as that which is destined to continue into future. Thus the future is made manifest in the present through the invocation of the past, but a past which may be made malleable to the concerns of the nation and/or state. This implies that nations are not necessarily coterminous with states, allowing for situations where nations are divided between multiple states, or where a plurality of nations exist within a single state. The latter is exemplified by the nationhood of Quebec and of various aboriginal peoples within the borders of the Canadian state. These examples illustrate a potential difficulty in the conceptualization of a single temporal border for the imagined community. A potential solution to this dilemma has been the suggestion that the temporal dimension of national consciousness is ineffective without its manifestation in spatial terms.

The spatial conception of the border is one which is most often articulated through a specific correspondence with the actual political boundaries of a given nation-state. The border is thus literalized. When considering the English Canadian equation, however, space is granted a greater complexity. Simply put, the fundamental lack that has seemed to plague earlier attempts to define English Canadian nationalism stems from a supposed lack of the temporal (of history, of culture) in this country, an unusual situation that consequently tends to favour an exclusivist reliance upon the spatial in order to define the boundaries of national subjectivity. Peter Harcourt argues that "Canadian ontology has always been bound up with a dialectics of space" (1995: 3-4), national texts being more prone to ponder the question

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[2]He explains that "a delimitation in time, or the assignation of origins... [which] means that society does not derive from an infinite regression of cause and effect... A point of origin is fixed... This zero point or starting point is what allows for ritual repetition, the ritualization of memory, celebration, commemoration -- in short, all those forms of magical behaviour signifying defeat of the irreversibility of time" (qtd. in Brennan 1990: 51).

"Where is here?" rather than "Who am I?" (a question lifted directly from Northrop Frye). This exploration is often manifest in national narratives of isolation, powerlessness, and difference.[3] Ian Angus explains that this in turn stems from a lack of temporal resources in this country, or the fact that Canada cannot turn to history in order to define itself:

> [we] can indulge neither in the myth of an ancient nation from time out of mind (as in Europe) nor in a revolutionary founding that might forge a new nation in an act of radical institution of a new order (as in post-revolutionary New World nations). The two main temporal rhetorics of nationhood are denied to us. (1997: 142-143)

He concludes that, as a result, "geography becomes important for identity where history has failed to provide it" (114). This line of reasoning has had significant impact of theorizing about English Canadian identity.

The primary effect that this has had is to produce the idea that Canada can only ever define itself oppositionally, a state which has been linked with an inability to escape the colonial mentality, to the fact that we are still suffering from "inclinations towards a postcolonial escape" (Harcourt 1995: 3). Angus, for instance, argues that "[a]ll concern with English Canadian identity, formulated abstractly, is engaged in maintaining a *border* between us and the United States" (47).[4] This supported by William Beard, who explains that the "great problem with Canadian culture... is of course the terrible contrast between these waif-like self-imaginings and the trumpeting self-confident mythology of mastery emanating from the United States..." (1994: 119). In short, our apparent lack of (temporal) culture and history, a symptom of our colonial past and the missing revolutionary trauma

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[3]Beard argues that "[t]his Canadian emotional paradigm is one of solitude and isolation: of an ever-present looming sense of the immense surrounding wilderness which can never be physically or even mentally encompassed; of a Nature which is treacherous, violent and unknowable; of self-repressive passivity and caution; of feelings of impotence and hopelessness and marginalization" (1994: 118-119).

[4]This reflects Janice Kaye's suggestion that "certain recurring cultural definitions imply that 'Canadianness' is so tentative as to be constructed in the negative, i.e. not American, not British," a fact which tends to reinforce an image that "Canada continues to understand itself partly in terms of what it is not, having difficulty deciding what or who it is, or what it wants to be when and if it grows up" (1994: 65).

that would signal its end, forces us to rely upon (spatial) geography in order to delimit the 'borders' of English Canada. This, however, positions us as symbolically inferior to those who possess both spatial and temporal referents (a sign of adherence to a 'true' hegemonic nationalism), countries such as the United States (an obvious target for our insecurities) or Great Britain (our supposed colonial oppressors from whom we never rebelled). Although this particular formulation has taken many names (mappism, the Garrison Mentality, the Wacousta Syndrome), its effects are unanimously the same: the Canadian subject-nation works as the subaltern term within an international binary, producing the nation as a category of identification that is always already marginal. This model, however, ignores the fact that temporality does *not* disappear from the field of the nation, even in Canada.

If we define ourselves oppositionally through our relation to the United States (or Quebec, or the First Nations), how can this relation be expressed through geography alone? The lack of a traumatic historical break with the colonial past in English Canada would seem to be consistent with the inherent problematics of the temporal border, not justification for the wholesale rejection of it. A much more radical conclusion must be drawn. Brenda Longfellow acknowledges the prevalence of such a trope in English Canadian narratives of identity, but argues that it stands as an impetus for a significant redefinition of Canadian identity, one which is situated both spatially and temporally "as a place in between Old and New Worlds, a place of transnational, transsexual and transcultural movement, a negotiation between spaces of difference" (1996: 15). This call, one which situates a hybrid English Canadian subject *in between* narratives of the nation, has been met with some acceptance, at least on the political stage, through the construction of ***biculturalism*** and ***multiculturalism***. Both stand as models which attempt to incorporate an internalized plurality into the conception of the nation.

Richard Collins suggests that Canada "exemplifies a pre-echo of a new form of human community in which polity and culture are decoupled rather than an imperfect realization of an old style nation state to the condition of which it is assumed Canada must

struggle to aspire" (1991: 234). This has been the result of the difficulty that Canada has experienced in containing its internal plurality within the imagined homogeneity of the nation, both on the level of culture and of politics. Pierre Trudeau, in his book *Federalism and the French Canadians* (1968), explains that "[i]f a political unity is legitimate insofar as it contains no minorities who do not recognize themselves and their experience in the unit," then there are, for him, "no possibilities of political coherence or of stable states" (Collins 234). Trudeau attempted to articulate (and implement) a more inclusive model of nationalism: biculturalism. This model, capitalizing on "the historical accident of Canada" (Collins 234), works to define the nation on terms which exceed those rooted in national consciousness. This opens up the possibility for a reality in which, echoing Jean-Pierre Desaulniers, "in terms of nationality a person is either Canadian or not, but culturally one may be Canadian in varying degrees" (1987: 151).

The primary political difficulty encountered by biculturalism is that it is premised on the mythology of two founding peoples: French and English. Not only does this deny the existence of previous nations in North America (the aboriginal peoples), it fails to recognize the extent of the diversity in the contemporary Canadian situation. Biculturalism also failed to satisfy the demands emanating from Quebec for autonomy based on the distinctiveness of their culture within the national framework. In order to address these issues, various pieces of legislation, from the 1960 Bill of Rights to the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 have worked to replace the utopian ideal of a bicultural society with the more representative policy of multiculturalism.

Frank E. Manning claims that "Canada is a multicultural society -- a social dogma that has virtually become the basis of a Canadian civil religion" (1993: 6). Specifically, Angus argues that "[t]he multicultural issue says something very important about what English Canada has come to be in fact and, even more significant, about who we *want* to be" (138). In terms of the Canadian state, multiculturalism is a narrative strategy in which "Canadian culture is ethnicity in its plural expression, the symbolic total of what the

country's ethnic collectivities choose to reveal about themselves..." (Manning 6). In essence, multiculturalism stands as an attempt at the articulation of particularity and difference within a universalizing discourse, one which simultaneously encompasses and surpasses biculturalism. This attempt, however, finds itself marred on several fronts. First, it continues the search for origins that characterizes the hegemonic model of the nation, and which tends to limit the ways in which Canada has been imagined into the category of lack. Angus positions multiculturalism within a historicist discourse, hinging on the fact that Canada is not a postcolony born of revolution. What we are left with is "a rhetoric of the multiple origins of presently coexisting ethno-cultures" (143). Not only does this deny Canada as a nation articulation of a temporal border, it forecloses on the specific histories of the diverse peoples that constitute it. Instead, we see that both biculturalism and multiculturalism work primarily within the confines of an English Canadian perspective, one which continues to exhibit "a national talent for self-inflicted wounds" (Ferguson 1993: 46) and which embraces a white Anglo conception of the national past.

Second, both models are fundamentally flawed in their attempts to deal with national difference. The radical separation of culture from the national equation is problematic inasmuch as difference, while given considerable lip-service, is in fact not made central to the construction of a new model of nationalism, but rather is side-stepped in favour of a new subjectivity based entirely upon a reconfigured homogeneity: geographical citizenship.[5] To be Canadian now simply means that you exist within the spatial boundaries of the nation. This would almost seem to signal a return to the Garrison Mentality. While the highlighting of internal diversity does seem to destabilize the hegemonic imagined community, it in fact only rearticulates the quality of this model's inclusiveness. More than this, the nation is repositioned as an exclusive category, one which precedes all other identity categories

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[5]Ironically, this new inclusiveness is applied specifically only to the various ethno-cultures mentioned by Angus, leaving various other subcultures within the nation (gay men and lesbians in particular) on the outside of this new nationalism.

because it denies their importance within the nation's interpellative call. What results is a virtual white-washing of culture, one which effectively reinstates the English Canadian hegemony, albeit couched in different terms. The only significant difference is now that which is present outside the nation, namely, the "alleged monoculturalism of the United States" (Manning 6). Manning argues that "[t]he 'mosaic' symbolizes a national ideal and a rather self-righteous identity precisely because it contrasts with the cultural sterility and vulgarity that Canadians impute to the American 'melting-pot'" (6). While Manning sees this as an example of a Canadian form of resistance to American cultural imperialism, the fact that internal plurality has not been contained within Trudeau's "peaceable kingdom" (both in terms of the territorial ambitions of Quebec and the First Nations, and in the increased racial tensions across the country in recent years) indicates that these policies cannot accomplish their goals in the terms in which they are currently articulated.

This is addressed indirectly by Angus who claims that multiculturalism "represents a strong internal plurality that can only appear and be accepted if there is no strong external unity to oppose it" (143). This also positions Canada within the context of lack (i.e. lacking a strong sense of national identity). While this might certainly adhere to a certain reality within this nation, Angus's embracing of our lack continues the stream of thought which positions Canadians as impotent to forge our own national destiny. Multiculturalism is not seen as a potential basis for the reconceptualization of Canada into a nation which does not lack, but rather as an inevitable consequence of this fundamental characteristic. This point is amplified through Angus's conclusion that multiculturalism rests entirely upon a recognition of "one's own particularity and moving outward to its abjection in respect for the Other" (163). In other words, multiculturalism functions at the level of individual subjectivity only through a process which is inherently self-defeating. Michael Ignatieff states this succinctly when he claims that "we are only likely to be more tolerant of other identities if we also learn to love our own a little less" (1995: 21). It is clear, then, that multiculturalism works only to perpetuate the image of the Canadian nation as suffering from a continued 'postcolonial

inferiority complex,' one which functions on lack and impotence. It is these terms which limit the ability for the policies of multiculturalism to function outside of a liberal pluralist discourse, one which always already characterizes an English Canadian hegemony.

As suggested earlier, Canada stands as a nation which may come to be the model for a new kind of national community, one which incorporates the very forces that often seem to drive it to the edge of destruction. English Canada exists between worlds, between diversity that threatens to rupture it from both inside and out. Often, as illustrated above, it attempts to define itself through the plurality that it cannot contain. While the models it has employed have been demonstrated to be both practically and theoretically flawed, this does not work to deny its potential. English Canada, and perhaps even Canada as a whole, functions within the confines of a postmodern age, and must be understood along those lines. In the section that follows, I will explore the quality of the postmodern subject, and the manner in which English Canada adheres to this new model of identity.

Performing the Postmodern Subject

The imagined community is inherently a structure of belonging that is produced through the very production of its own narrative of legitimacy. Explaining that identification serves as the fundamental basis for any understanding of identity, Stuart Hall contrasts a 'naturalistic' definition of the concept[6] with one which speaks more accurately to the 'postmodern' condition, namely, that "the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed -- always 'in process'... a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little' -- an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality" (2-3). Zygmunt Bauman poses this as a disjuncture between modern and postmodern conceptions of

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[6]This notion, according to Hall, adheres to a 'common-sense' discourse on identity: "identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (1996: 2).

identity: "if the *modern* 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (1996: 18). This might also be characterized as the rupture of the temporal from the confines of the spatial. Hence, the nation might be much more effectively imagined as a process rather than an object of interpellative appeal, a temporality that is manifest in narrative rather than a mere spatiality, a site which functions dynamically in order to produce a homogeneity which is transitory rather than transcendent.

Judith Butler tackles this issue when she argues, in the context of sexual identification, that "identity may be less a function of knowledge than performance, or, in Foucaultian terms, less a matter of final discovery than perpetual reinvention" (1991: 7). Relying heavily upon the Nietzchean critique of the 'metaphysics of substance,' she argues that "any claim to identity involves an imposition of false unity upon what is in fact multiple and inexpressible, an imposition of order upon what is in fact not at all orderly" (Weir 1996: 115). For Butler, identity "appears within hegemonic language as a *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical being. This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that 'being' a sex or gender [or national subject] is fundamentally impossible" (1990a: 18-19). One cannot *be* an identity because the nominations or categories of identity are mere illusions of language, an organizational frame which seeks to regulate subjectivity through the imposition of hegemonic 'knowledge.' Thus, language effectively masks the possibility of difference within any structures that it constructs (such as the nation).

Butler asserts that if subjectivity is discursively constructed -- and that, as a result, identity "does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (1990a: 10) -- then "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (17). This intelligibility demands that identity be enforced through binaristic oppositions. Here we clearly see where her

theory speaks to issues of nationalism. National identity can be effectively conceived as originating in an oppositional relationship with an Other (as in Angus's belief that Canada exists only in a binary with the United States). This, however, elides the inherently *fragmented* nature of the nation, a fact that requires an emphasis on the multiplicity of possible identities within single subjects. It also functions to negate the possibility of difference within the nationalist terminology and parallels Butler's assertion that, within sex and gender binaries, "certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'" (17). Hall explains this in more general terms:

> identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside,' abjected. Every identity has at its 'margin,' and excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks.' (5)

Hall argues that identities are constructed through a binary relation to that which they claim not to be. This fundamental lack, this *constitutive outside*, positions all subject positions as fundamentally schizophrenic.

Incorporating fragmentation with difference in this instance forces the recognition that the latter "describes a particular constitutive relation of a negativity in which the subordinate term (the marginalized other or subaltern) is a necessary and *internal* force of destabilization existing *within* the identity of the dominant term" (Grossberg 1996: 90, emphasis added). In other words, the subaltern term is constitutive of the dominant term not from the outside, but instead from a terrifying inside position, one which points to the fact that there can never be a constituted whole that does not incorporate opposition within itself, a fact which "is the result of the very nature of language and signification" (Grossberg 90). In terms of nationalism, this reality insists that an inherent ambiguity exists within the structure of the nation, one which consistently undermines the state's ability to linguistically

construct a unified, stable, terminology. In this light, the modern epistemological assumptions surrounding Anderson's statement that "in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (14) seem to be thrown into question.[7] Instead, a radical in-betweenness for identity must be understood, one which works to reconfigure our understanding of the border of national consciousness through the incorporation of difference into the very structures that hold the nation in place. In order to overcome this imperialist treatment of dissonant attributes, Butler argues that we must understand identity as *performatively* produced. Identity "is always a *doing* [as opposed to an ontological *being*], though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (1990a: 25, emphasis added).

This performance of identity derives from the fact that subjectivity is essentially imitative and citational, a fact that produces the subject as a temporal category of representation. Identity "*is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself" (1991: 21). Butler elaborates by explaining that identity "is constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations. [It] is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself -- *and failing*. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavours to succeed, the project of ... identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself" (1991:

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[7]Elspeth Probyn suggests that nationhood is not an identity position equal to the specificities of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or class, but instead must be articulated as a *singularity* which functions under the logic of an "inclusive disjunction" (1994: 30). This concept speaks to the impossibility of maintaining a single identitary position, one which reflects the fragmentary notion of identity described above. It incorporates difference through a radical rearticulation of the notion of naming, one in which representation hinges upon a relation of 'being-called' rather than 'being.' The parallels to performativity are obvious. If identity is a perpetual linguistic 'doing' which can only imitate unsuccessfully the categories that it aspires to inhabit, then it is less important to be a specific identity than it is to be recognized as pursuing it. Difference thus takes on the limitation of naming, limits which "then constitute the conditions of possibility of belonging as well as the conditions for calling into question the inscription of belonging: 'Being-called -- the property that establishes all possible belongings... -- is also what can bring them all back radically into question'" (Probyn 7, using Agamben 1993: 10). Singularity, then, positions relations of belonging to a group identity, such as the nation, as a juncture of various representations which 'add to' without 'adding up.'

21). It is here, with the full elaboration of a temporal basis for identification, that nation as process comes into play. The nation itself may be positioned as a performative ideal, propelling national identity into the same imitative cycle as other identity positions.[8] Not only does this succeed in freeing nationalist subjectivity from the confines of exclusivist theories, and English Canada from the belief that it can exist outside of temporality, but it also opens up the possibility of considering the nation alongside other categories of difference within individual subjects. Thus the failure of the imitative cycle of identification proves to be itself productive. This is evident most clearly when we examine the position of the post-colonial subject within the nation.

Lawrence Grossberg uses the notion of hybridity in his exploration of border "existences," "of subaltern identities as existing between two competing identities" (91), as exemplified by the post-colonial subject. The borders which divide the nation from those outside also function to effectively exclude those who cannot fit into the homogenous, hegemonic inside. Thus, "[n]either colonizer nor precolonial subject, the postcolonial subject exists as a unique hybrid which may, by definition, constitute the other two as well" (Grossberg 91). The postcolonial subject exists in a constant state of transition between that which it is called by the outside (a national subject) and that which it is called from the inside (not quite a national subject).[9] According to Dickinson (who makes reference to Anzaldua),

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[8]Anderson suggests that nationalism was initially articulated in Europe, and then exported, through imperialism, as an international model for the functioning of a nation. Tom Nairn (1977) articulates this as the process by which modern nationalism was established: while European nationalism "represented a 'slow, conventional growth, the product of deliberate *invention*, resulting from a theory,'" later nations, those of the postcolonial world, "could not repeat this early development. Their *study and imitation engendered something substantially different*: the truly modern doctrine of the abstract or 'impersonal' state which, because of its abstract nature, could be imitated in subsequent history" (qtd. in Anderson 141, emphasis added). This might be interpreted literally, through the application of Butler's theory, as stating that postcolonial nations are perpetually caught up in an attempt to imitate the nationalism of the West, an imitation that they consistently fail to reproduce exactly.

[9]Bhabha describes this identitary process as a symptom of colonial mimicry, "a desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (1984: 126).

> the experience of "constantly 'crossing over,'" of repeatedly transgressing the boundaries/limits/margins of nationalism..., of undergoing "this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination," does contribute to the formation of... "an 'alien' consciousness," "a new *mestiza* consciousness," "a consciousness of the Borderlands." (35)

Thus the particular failure of the postcolonial subject to adequately imitate the colonial or precolonial identity categories through the performative enactment of either proves itself to be productive, at least in understanding the structures that bind them to the peripheries of the nation. It is a productive failure that forces a rearticulation of national consciousness that incorporates plurality over homogenization, fragmentation and singularity over solid and static identities. Bhabha's theory of the nation attempts to do this through the articulation of the inherent narrative function, or *narrativity* of the nation.

He argues that "the origin of the nation's visual *presence* is the effect of a narrative struggle" (1990: 295), a struggle in which the nation "fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin [in the postcolonial era], and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (291). This struggle is reflected in the construction of what Lauren Berlant (1991) terms the 'National Symbolic,' "the order of discursive practices" that interpellates subjects into "a collectively-held history" (qtd. in Savran 1998: 264).[10] Bhabha contends that it is the fundamental heterogeneity of the nation which functions to representatively disrupt this process of the creation of a unifying national symbolic. Hall explains that identities are always only representations, and thus can never adequately describe that which they seek to interpellate, an observation that clearly inflects Butler's cycle of performativity.

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[10]Using Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Angela Stukator explains that the subject is constantly torn "between processes of the Imaginary order (which strives toward the assumption of a full identity) and the Symbolic order (which is built on difference and lack)" (1993: 123). While this may be deployed as another criticism of Anderson's imagined community, one that highlights the particularly postmodern attributes of Bhabha's theory of narrativity, Chris Berry (1998) warns that this consists of a false conflation of the term Imaginary with 'imagined,' one which erroneously positions Anderson's theory into the category of structuralist essentialism.

For Bhabha, this understanding forces the conception of the nation as a site of profound *ambivalence*.

While he acknowledges the spatial conception of the borderland of the postcolonial subject, Bhabha emphasizes the temporal dimension, one which

> serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force. The focus on temporality resists the transparent linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes; it provides a perspective on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture. (292)

This assertion points a critical finger at the ground upon which Anderson's theory of the nation stands. Dickinson argues that despite the authority with which Anderson describes the 'origins' of nationalism, those not included in this meta-narrative, those figured at the margins of the national terminology, "through the incorporation of new peoples, the generation of other meanings, and the formation of local sites of resistance to the in relation to the central body politic," have forced the rearticulation of the nation, "one whose temporal and spatial reconfiguration of boundaries is at once anti-national, post-national, and trans-national in dimension" (43). Thus the primary metaphor of the nation, "*the many as one*" (Bhabha 1990: 294), is turned against itself. The national ambivalence that Bhabha speaks to is one in which the very illusionary enforcement of homogeneity serves to destabilize hegemonic notions of the temporal and spatial axes of the modern nation-state:

> It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy -- and an apparatus of power -- that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation. What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity. (292)

Thus he claims that it is not only that "colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities" are "wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its

unisonant discourse, but [they] are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (1990: 315). These peoples "challenge us to think the question of community and communication *without* the moment of transcendence; their excessive cultural temporalities are in contention but their difference cannot be negated or sublimated" (304). Bhabha conceives this innate disjunction within the nation, one which might be accurately aligned with Probyn's productive singularity ("inclusive disjunction"), as the basis for visualizing the nation as existing in a narrative *double-time*. If 'nation' stands as "a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address" (297), then it stands as a site of articulated difference, as "a contested cultural territory" (297). This internal division may then be deconstructed into two distinct, if overlapping sites of identity, both of which are figured temporally in narrative:

> the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process. (297)

This split between a *pedagogical*, essentialized history (a backward-looking search for origins) and a *performative*, contingent present (in which the nation is pursued imitatively on a daily basis) serves to split the subjectivity of the (postmodern) post-colonial subject.

The English Canadian Mimic: Narrativity and Ironic Conceit

In speaking of the colonial subject, Bhabha emphasizes the reliance on *mimicry* as a strategy for overcoming the homogenizing discourse of the national narrative. Mimicry is a doubled narrative process, one in which the colonizer attempts to impose a specific cultural identity on the Other in order to construct an effective and *almost* homogenous imperial

subject ('almost' because assimilation is always an ultimately illusionary and temporal process), while the colonized performs this identity as an imitation which is always bound to fail (he or she can only ever *approximate* the colonial identity). The result of this contradictory process is not only that the colonial discourse is 'ruptured,' but that the subject "becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (1984: 127), 'partial' both in the sense of 'incomplete' and 'virtual.' This positioning of the subject as in between two identities serves to articulate post-colonial identity as hybrid within a discourse that explicitly articulates "those social divisions and unequal developments that disturb the self-recognition of the national culture, its anointed horizons of territory and tradition" (1996: 54). The dominant term of the binary of identity in the post-colony is thus destabilized, rendering it only one of a multiple of possible discourses. Hybridity, however, must not be understood as a *descriptive* term referring to post-colonial identity, but rather must be recognized as "a *problematic* of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority -- its rules of recognition" (1986: 175). Benita Parry describes this as an instance "when the scenario written by colonialism is given a performance by the native that estranges and undermines the colonialist script" (1987: 42). The cultural identity of the post-colony is thus always already *in between* dominant representations of the nation, and the national subject is inherently split, leading to a border existence which is ultimately subversive.

Bhabha argues that those figured at the margins of this dominant discourse engage with the pedagogical and the performative through a strategy which links them together temporally in a cultural space of representation which may be characterized as 'supplementary.' He positions national identity within a narrative which suggests that 'adding to' identity may not necessarily 'add up' in a unifying way. Rather, as mentioned above, difference within the nation serves to push the boundaries of what we understand to be nationalism. Pedagogical time works to secure origins, while the performative

heterogeneous reality of the nation consistently disavows their legitimacy, forcing the rearticulation of history. This, however, does not occur within a dialectical struggle as has been suggested by Bhabha's critics, but rather through an incorporation of difference into the search for origins.[11]

The supplementary nature of the narrative of the nation implicates the pedagogical in the performative so that neither can stand as a stable reference for the interpellative appeal of national identity. This is a powerful destabilizing force in the construction of the nation. Anderson (1986) has claimed that "[h]istory is the necessary basis of the nation narrative" (qtd. in Higson 1989: 44). Bhabha does not dispute this in principle, but refuses to let it stand alone. The performative aspects of the nation function to displace the search for origins, but without its radical disavowal. The question remains, however, as to whether a universal model, such as Bhabha's, can function within the complex boundaries of a nation like Canada, or must it be adapted in order to account for the multiple lines of representation that work to figure Canada's particular singularity? What is needed is a conception of the Canadian nation that acknowledges the unique pedagogical circumstances in which we find ourselves, while taking account of the role of the performative nature of national identity.[12]

Kieran Keohane posits a model of Canadian nationalism that undertakes this objective. It involves the rearticulation of the lack that characterizes the bulk of previous theorizing on the subject. He argues that "[a]t the heart of the symbolic order of Canada is

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[11]Parry notes that Bhabha's dialectical approach tends "to displace the traditional anti-colonialist representation of antagonistic forces locked in struggle with a configuration of discursive transactions" (42), a fact which aligns him with "[m]any of today's theorists of colonial discourse [who] tend to follow the trajectory of liberal historical and anthropological scholarship in casting all forms of national consciousness as impositions upon more or less disunited 'ethnically' (or 'local knowledge') identified communities" (Lazarus 86). This is an argument that reflects Gayatri Spivak's position on the issue of post-nationalism inasmuch as it tends to obscure the importance of the 'actual' lived experience of the postcolony in favour of a more abstract, representational version.

[12]Multiculturalism fails in this regard. It presents nationalism as that which relies wholly on the pedagogical aspect of Bhabha's model, ignoring the ability of those contained within its border to construct a nation within and around the limitations of history. It also fails to recognize the necessary link between the performative and the pedagogical in the construction of the nation, treating them instead as separate categories of nationalist discourse.

an ironic relationship to the lack... We know that we lack particularity, and that acknowledgment of the lack is our particularity" (1997: 39). Our connection to the national symbolic is organized around our *enjoyment* of its inability to suture the nation over the real, that which exceeds and permeates national identity.[13] In fact, "enjoyment is only possible if the symbolic order is not totalized -- that is, closed -- because enjoyment needs a 'beyond' where desire feeds on what fantasy can introduce there" (45). This vacation from the national symbolic signifies the impossible task of containing the plurality of the nation, yet a promise of adventure in the void of the real is required for enjoyment of the nation. The articulation of this enjoyment "collects and unifies difference" (37) so that "[t]he moral commitment that sustains Canadian solidarity is a commitment to not being pretentious -- a commitment to not pretending that we are 'positively,' 'essentially' Canadian" (39). Like previous models, this 'ideal type' tends to describe primarily a white and English Canada, although the force of its hegemonic power demonstrates the manner in which all others may be co-opted into this category. Canadians are tolerant and unpretentious, pursuing their lives with little fanfare, and thus accept those who do the same.[14] Keohane explains that this approach to difference and lack, to functionally distinguishing between the pedagogical and performative characteristics of the nation, is made possible through his notion of *ironic conceit*.

If nationalism "is a fantasy construction by which reality appears to be coherent, its elements drawn together, thereby masking the traumatic, constitutive social division that Laclau and Mouffe [1985] conceptualize as 'antagonism'" (44), then ironic conceit offers a

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[13]The real, a stalwart of Lacanian psychoanalysis, will be defined at length in chapter four. For the moment, suffice it to say that the real is that which exceeds and yet limits the national symbolic's ability to represent the subject-nation. To encounter the real is inherently traumatic, inasmuch as it signals the impossible, that which lies outside of the narrative that gives an apparent coherence to the subject's reality.

[14]Keohane does warn, however, that "there is no guarantee that the ironic relationship to the lack, the unpretentious endurance on which the value of tolerance depends, is 'safe,' that the value of unpretentiousness will be hegemonically articulated in terms of a liberal tolerance and a respect for difference. There are many different versions of unpretentiousness, some of which mask deeper insecurities" (40).

space where enjoyment of this illusionary situation is possible. Keohane explains that enjoyment of the nation inhabits "a paradoxical space where the social is sutured: where it is drawn together across the void, and, at the same time, where it is always becoming undone" (45). Ironic conceit, then, is the process by which the subject claims to master the real while simultaneously admitting that this is impossible: the nation is argued to be unified while it is acknowledged to be an impossibility. Conceit functions in the first instance of the equation, where national identification "is fancifully held to have integrity, to be totalized, to be successfully sutured. This conceit of the suture means that the lack is hidden, and enjoyment possible" (45). But, as Keohane points out, ignorance of the excessive meaning within the nation is a foolish conceit, one which echoes previous models of English Canadian nationalism. A unique Canadian irony is then introduced, one which resignifies conceit as a postmodern game that we play within the national symbolic.

Irony is commonly employed in narratives of the Canadian nation because it "allows speakers to address and at the same time slyly confront an 'official' discourse, that is, to work within a dominant tradition but also challenge it -- without being utterly co-opted by it" (Hutcheon 1990: 4).[15] Keohane argues that irony "arises from a sophisticated, resigned awareness of the contrast between what is and what ought to be," and that, as a result, functions primarily as "the *implication* of a contrary meaning or attitude" (46). Through the mobilization of irony within the context of conceit, the Canadian subject is able to highlight the point at which the nation fails to adequately suture over the real, the point at which its meaning becomes excessive, without turning this lack into a spectacle. "Irony transgresses the conceit; that is, irony allows us to transgress ourselves, our own conceit" (Keohane 48). This transgression, however, is only momentary, allowing us to revel in the failure of closure without rupturing the symbolic order that fuses us into place within the imagined

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[15]Longfellow notes, drawing on the work of Linda Hutcheon, that irony "is a dominant mode of (post-modern) consciousness with a particularly strong and resonant tradition in Canada, obsessed -- as it still is -- with deciphering an identity against a heritage of colonial domination" (1996: 10-11).

homogeneity of the nation. In this way, we are able to continue to exist within the national symbolic.

Ironic conceit mirrors the temporal nature of the postmodern subject through its almost ritualized repetition of identity categories which it cites as originary and desirable, a process which simultaneously destroys that which it references, exposing its supposed unity as an impossibility. It functions within the post-colonial narrative in a manner which effectively combines the pedagogical (conceit) and performative (irony) aspects of the colonial mimic; it exposes the concrete mechanism by which Bhabha's supplementary strategy performs. How Keohane's theory differs from both the post-colonial and the postmodern subjectivities, however, is by pointing to the enjoyment that we derive from the resultant lack. Canada, and English Canada in particular, revels in the fact that identity can only ever be transitory. This takes the form of a guilty pleasure: the fiction of the nation becomes, in essence, D. A. Miller's 'open secret,' that which "is always known -- and, in some obscure sense, known to be known -- [yet] never interferes with the incessant activity of keeping it" (1988: 206). The open secret is enjoyable through the conscious 'forgetting' of the real, a titillating lapse of memory. Miller explains that secrecy is

> the subjective practice in which the oppositions of private/public, inside/outside, subject/object are established, and the sanctity of their first term kept inviolate. And the phenomenon of the "open secret" does not, as one might think, bring about the collapse of these binarisms and their ideological effects, but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery. (207)

Ironic conceit describes the manner at which we pick at the open secret of the nation, taking pleasure in our sly demonstration of our own arrogance. Through the selective abilities of *memory*, of actively remembering and forgetting the presence of the real and the illusionary nature of the narrative that tries to contain it, we effectively construct a nationalism that incorporates difference and fragmentation into a monolithic unity.

Narrative (Queer) Memory: Subverting National Lack

Alison Landsberg claims that "memories are less about validating or authenticating the past than they are about organizing the present and constructing strategies with which one might imagine a livable future" (1995: 176). Arguing that "memory is constitutive of identity" (175), she explains that "[w]e rely on our memories to validate our experiences. The experience of memory actually becomes the index of experience: if we have a memory, we must have had the experience it represents" (176). Without falling into an essentialist conception of historical experience (a notion that will be explored in depth in later chapters), memory here serves as a determinist organizing principle by which we make sense of our own relations to history, a process which may be *performed* in the present, and which may serve as the basis of "political alliances that are not based on natural or essential affinities" (Landsberg 178), group affiliations such as the nation.[16] In other words, and in following somewhat with Bhabha's conception of the double-time of the nation and of the supplementary interface between pedagogy and performance, memory becomes a powerful tool in the continual definition and redefinition of the nation. In grafting memory to an ironic conceit relating to the open secret of the nation, however, the ways in which English Canada exists as a site of profound remembering and forgetting are revealed, a process of interpretation of the temporality of national identity which both contains and exceeds the boundaries of a history grounded in the pedagogical.

In his attempt to incorporate the notion of collective memory into a nation-ness that relies on linear history, Richard R. Flores distinguishes between history and memory by defining the latter as "a means of authenticating a particular vision of the past; history, quite differently, refers to specific norms and values concerning evidence and interpretation" (1998: 432). History for him thus becomes something which is unstable inasmuch as it may be usurped and engaged in using concrete empirical tools and shifting evidence (an argument

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[16]This opens up the possibility of memory as something more than simply "a storage place, focused on the past and providing coherence and continuity to a subject's identity" (Thompson 1995: 59).

that, to some degree, ignores notions of interpretation), while memory is posited as the essential basis of nationhood due to its investment in its own narrative proliferation and fictive explanatory value. This seems to contradict Bhabha's theory by reversing the terms of the inherent split within national consciousness. The performative is not seen as being necessarily subversive in this instance, but rather works to construct counter-narratives to those offered by the pedagogical origins of the nation. This points to a potential weakness in Bhabha's model, or at least a potential for misunderstanding. In viewing the past, one cannot assume that it is divided into a pedagogical history, one which serves as an innate foundation for nationhood, and a fluid memory, one in which individual subjects actively engage with history, constantly performing their relation to the past in such a way as to reinforce their belonging to the overall signifier of the nation. While it is certain that this is the manner in which this relationship between the two may be manifest, it is not the only way.

Bhabha argues that his model only "makes it possible to confront that difficult borderline, the interstitial experience between *what we take to be* the image of the past and *what is in fact involved* in the passing of time and the passage of meaning" (1996: 60, emphasis added). Thus the past is positioned as something which is subject to representation as much as the contingencies of our relation to it is in the present. This lends credence to Flores who, for his part, argues that memory "needs no validation since it thinks itself complete: ambiguity is dispelled, motives understood, winner and losers clearly marked" (435). He believes that history, on the other hand, "is noisy: it is open, shifting, changing with the emergence of new evidence, other perspectives and possible interpretations; it is contested, dialogical, open to revision and debate, and... 'can never be complete'" (435). Flores is quite right to point out that history is fluid, and that memory may serve an oppressive function within the nation-state, especially when considered in the aggregate. Perhaps it is most useful to consider these two perspectives together, to blend them into a view that sees history as inherently implicated in nation-building yet subject to

revision, and memory as a subjective reaction and potentially subversive tool in the negotiation with history, but one which may in fact be turned against itself when incorporated in the collective justification of the historical foundation of the nation. Thus memory is both a powerful tool of individual subjectivity and a powerful silencer of history, one which "is not only forgetful, but, in attempting to preserve the forgotten, ...selectively silences those elements that attempt to rupture the quiet" (Flores 434).

In her discussion of historical ethnicity and the policy of multiculturalism in Canada, Dawn Thompson positions polity within a pedagogical narrative and argues that this fictive containment of ethno-cultures functions to performatively subvert itself. Subjects are both interpellated to a dominant national construct while they actively negotiate with it in order to construct a national identity which more closely imitates the nation that reflects their particular plurality. For Thompson, memory functions as a subversive tool for the subaltern: "the performative subject retains the possibility of agency, of resistance to the dominant pedagogy, by choosing and negotiating between identifications and displacing that which it is supposed to repeat" (55).[17] Difference is deployed here as strategy: "[t]he representation of one's self, then, *is* its construction, an ongoing narrative of performance" (Thompson 54). Her use of Bhabha, however, misrecognizes pedagogical history as essential, whether through an appeal to governmental interpretations of the past or to a myth of the nation. On the contrary, the pedagogical is itself constantly being reformulated through the mobilization of the performative. While the mimicry of the colonial subject certainly exceeds the dominant narrative of the nation, that narrative is itself only a reflection of a national symbolic which grapples endlessly with the real. Ironic conceit performs the artificial nature of the nation, but does not necessarily displace it, as this would rob the subjects of the pleasure derived from their own self-conscious forgetfulness.

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[1] / Joanne Tompkins clarifies this through her elaboration of the importance of the performative in the construction of the nation. She argues that "the 'process' of re-negotiation is more important than the moment of arrival, a moment which will in fact never arrive" (1995: 158).

Memory thus inhabits the interstitial space between the pedagogical and the performative in an attempt to redefine the relationship of one to the other. This performative, resistant memory is not deployed against the hegemonic national narrative in an oppositional manner, but rather effectively sutures national subjects into place within it. The open secret in the national narrative thus constructs an illusion of agency, one which only reinforces the marginalization of difference within it. This does not, however, deny the possibility of change within the nation.[18] Thompson concludes that "[w]ithin the nation, by the nation, and against the nation, the subject is constantly being rewritten" (55). Berry, in deploying Butler, similarly argues that in referencing the nation as an identity ideal, and consistently failing to achieve that ideal, the performance of the nation is necessarily a process of mutation. Not only is the mimicry of the subject *not quite* enough to contain the excessive meaning of the nation, but the nation, itself *not quite* enough to suture over the real, is altered in its citation. It is here that subversion really occurs inasmuch as the conceit that holds national identity in place, and the irony that ensures its continued reference within the national narrative, is altered through this very process. The mobilization of memory moves beyond the playful remembering and forgetting of the open secret, and effectively reshapes the unisonant directionality of national narratives.

Ironic conceit opens up the space for memory. Memory functions in the area where the symbolic is unable to fully contain excessive plurality of meaning. Like ironic conceit, it upholds the nation while simultaneously signaling its ultimate defeat at the hands of the real. Memory differs from Keohane's concept, however, because it describes the process by which difference actually *alters* the narrative of the nation. More than the enjoyment of transgression, memory deploys a subversion that undermines the conceited irony of the national subject, substituting the stable referent of the nation with a fluid, polymorphous conception of the pedagogical in the performative. By self-consciously remembering the

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[18]Berry correctly points out that "to invoke collective agency, and the nation as a form of it, does not necessarily entail a slide back into essentialistic, universal, unified categories..." (1998: 144).

national symbolic differently, the quality of what we forget changes, redrawing the nation and the performative process which mandates it. It is here that plurality may be truly engaged. Narrative memory demonstrates that our relation to difference is caught up in the act of constructing the nation. If identity involves an articulation with the Other, then an active remembering and forgetting is the mechanism by which this is regulated (on both the pedagogical and performative levels of the equation). What we selectively remember and forget about the Other -- a process that enables the continuation of the referent -- works not only to mold our relationship with it, but also to redesign the Other both in and out of the national narrative. Thus, if English Canada exists only in lack (of cohesion, of history, of identity...), it is a transformative lack, one which may be catalyzed for change. Representation then actually does become a tool for social change (as Thompson suggests), one which may be harnessed to reconstruct English Canada as an imagined community that actively engages with its own particularity and its own internal plurality, one which can recognize the essential impossibility of the nation without returning to a hegemonic disavowal of difference and an illusionary homogeneity. The subversive nature of memory, however, also points to the inherent queerness of the national narrative.

The model of the English Canadian nation that is opened up through the consideration of a subversive memory, one which *must be conceived as a site of profound remembering and forgetting*, both imbues and highlights the congenital queerness of the national narrative. The reconstitution of the national paradigm through the resignification of dominant narratives is a project that the notion of a queer nationalism has already started, although on a scale that does not directly figure into models of already existing nation-states. The theoretical and political implications of a queer nationalism do, though, deal directly with conceptions of difference and subjectivity within the boundaries of the nation that may contribute to a broader understanding of this alternative model of English Canadian identity. This conception of the inherently queer status of English Canada will be explored in detail in chapter five. In the next chapter, however, I will retrace some of the points made here in

order to elucidate a more specific picture of the English Canadian subject. Through an exploration of the dominant reading of how the Canadian protagonist has been read in Anglophone films, I will access more precisely the (psychic) character of the queer subject-nation. In short, it will be demonstrated that the English Canadian subject must ultimately be viewed as divided and masochistic in his or her orientation to national reality.

Chapter Three:
Castrating the Hero:
(Re)membering Difference Queerly through an English Canadian National Cinema

English Canadian national identity, like all identification, is caught up in discourses of lack and difference. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, however, this has led to the impression that, in Canada, the national subject cannot fully come to terms with his or her own sense of national belonging, one that is always already queer. The specific manifestation of this in English Canada will be explored through an appeal to the representation of the hero, most often characterized as a feminized male, in the perversion chic films. In particular, I want to question the presence of perversity in these films (the reason that these images carry such allegorical power for English Canada), and the impact that this has on both the representation and actualized experience of national subjectivity. The 'loser paradigm,' a dominant stream of Canadian film criticism, suggests a response to these questions that stems from an over-reliance on a spatially-based nationalism. This analytic model shall be queered through the incorporation of psychoanalytic theories dealing with the construction of masculinity and homosexuality in the postmodern moment. In particular, David Savran's notion of the divided American masculine subject and Kaja Silverman's model of the feminine masochist will be deployed in order to construct a richer and more temporal sense of English Canadian subjectivity. These theories work to complement the concepts of performativity and ironic conceit explored in the previous chapter, and provide a frame through which a new national identification might be articulated. I will position this reconceptualized notion of the English Canadian film hero within the discourse of queer memory, setting the stage for the analysis to follow. Essentially, queer memory opens a space where that which is forgotten in the national cinematic narrative is repositioned centrally, signaling a *queer* understanding of difference in the construction of the nation. Precisely, the perversion chic films speak to the perverse heterogeneity of the national body/audience, and thus represent and produce the innate queer orientation of both the nation and the national subject.

What Does a Canadian Film Look Like?
Landscape and the Feminization of the Hero in English Canadian Film

The narrative of English Canada has often employed landscape as a dominant, if not all-encompassing, metaphor. Cole Harris argues that, contrary to other societies which tend to focus their national consciousness around issues of language, history, or ethnic homogeneity, English Canadians "tend to explain themselves in terms of land and location" (1966: 27).[1] Kaye, echoing Angus's spatial conception of the Canadian nation, claims that English Canadians, who have often perceived themselves as not having any 'real' culture because they "have often assumed that culture comes from elsewhere, like the United States or Europe," mobilize a romantic notion of landscape because "where culture is absent, nature works conveniently to fill the void" (70). While this represents an unsupported leap on her (and Angus's) part, the fact remains that Nature (as an ideological construct) has historically been readily deployed as a means of containing difference within cultural texts. Atwood and Frye both articulate this point in their respective explorations of the Garrison Mentality in Canadian literature. More recently, Longfellow has pointed out that in English Canadian cinema landscape is "exploited as a commodified and easily exportable signifier of 'Canada'" (1996: 8). As recently as Bruce Beresford's *Black Robe* (1992) or Richard Attenborough's *Grey Owl* (1999), Longfellow argues that images of nature have served as key selling points to attract audiences to Canadian films, domestic and international alike.[2] She claims that "[a]s exotic spectacle, landscape becomes a quintessentially exportable image, a tourist vision, where Canada comes to stand as a synecdoche of Nature, unmediated by urban blight, class struggle, or political and racial difference" (1999: 179).

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[1]He elaborates this in a number of ways, claiming that some "considered their countrymen to have been shaped and strengthened by a hard northern realm, while others have envisaged a Canadian nation forged by the development of northern resources" (27). Both these perspectives are shaped, he explains, by the apprehension English Canadians feel towards what is often considered a fragile and ultimately temporary southern border.

[2]Interestingly, both these films were directed by 'foreigners.' Beresford being Australian, and Attenborough English.

This cinematic trope, however, tends to speak more strongly of external rather than internal conceptions of English Canada. In essence, Canada comes to embody Otherness to the outside world, a fact that once again positions the nation within the margins of a global binary.

This tendency to identify English Canadian nationalism with landscape in film derives from our close connection with American cinema. Canadians have historically most often seen themselves portrayed in film as alien (i.e. not American). The most familiar manifestation of that was the Hollywood 'northwoods' genre which glorified various Canadian stereotypes, among them the belief that the wilderness is that which most defines us as a nation. Peter Morris (1978) explains, "Hollywood's image of Canada quickly became the world's image... and... it might be argued, Canada's image of itself" (qtd. in Longfellow 1999: 179). Longfellow argues that, as a result of this "colonial misrecognition," Canada "is rendered as a signifier that comes from elsewhere" (1999: 179). Thus the landscape metaphor in English Canadian cinema is inherently caught up in a discourse that necessarily highlights the fundamental lack in Canadian national identity. If the hero of English Canadian films is often associated with Nature, it is a correlation that represents a relationality that stems from outside of the national borders, although this is not to suggest that it has been imposed on, or exists outside of, the national symbolic. In other words, the use of the wilderness as a national trope suggests a complex fantasy relation, one that is quite possibly unique to Canada: Canada as Nature is a portrayal of Otherness that has been constructed outside of the nation (in the United States) and which has subsequently been transposed into our own, internal hegemonic understandings of the national body. While it has certainly grown into a powerful symbol in Canadian films, landscape cannot escape its own intrinsic association with Otherness. In this way, Canada might be said to exist symbolically as Other to itself. As an image that has originated elsewhere, landscape thus fails to adequately contain a specific Canadian national difference, requiring its rearticulation

within the national narrative. This becomes evident when we consider how landscape as been mobilized along lines of gender and sexuality in the definition of the Canadian hero.

In his exploration of David Cronenberg's films, Beard argues that the Canadian hero is most often characterized by lack and exclusion. He states that "[t]he idea that Canadian art reflects a fixation on defeat and failure is a feature of the first 'identity' models of English Canadian culture..." (118) and that Canada is thus a site of anti-heroism. This stems from what Robert Fothergill (1977) articulates as the symptoms of an envious "younger brother." In the face of inevitable American superiority in all aspects of social and cultural life, the Canadian protagonist is doomed to "anxiety-dreams of failure and defeat," an overt signal of a post-colonial inferiority complex. Fothergill argues that the only psychic solutions available in this situation are either succumbing to complete assimilation into American manifest destiny or "for the Canadian ego... to identify the stronger brother unequivocally as its oppressor -- psychic, economic, political, cultural -- and to develop an energetic resistance" (245, qtd. in Morris 1994: 40). Kaye moves this further by employing a gender metaphor rather than one of sibling rivalry to demonstrate much the same point, explaining that "these gender dynamics are mapped onto colonial relationships -- with Canada playing the young subordinate female to the older, more powerful Euro-American male who seduces her with his allegedly superior culture and history" (64). In other words, "Canada is seen as the goal of the male drive, both narratively and colonially" (Kaye 68).

In Canadian film, Beard finds that these models are manifest in the fact that "[m]ore and more the hero's destructive acts, and self-destruction, are rooted in his own psychological structure: his emotional isolation, his hubristic belief that he can control his feelings and actions, his dangerous and unacknowledged appetites for 'sick' sex" (122-123). Thus, while the Canadian male/hero embodies exclusion from the 'American Dream,' a hopeless victim of history and geography, he expresses this lack in reckless self-destruction, often in the form of sexual deviance. Kaye elaborates this by explaining that "[i]n many Canadian filmic representations of male/female roles, the male protagonist suffers from

inadequacy, and therefore has difficulty colonizing the female space. More often than not, he is allied with the female space and thereby feminized" (66). The 'female space' to which she refers is ostensibly that of an abstract conception of 'Nature' or of the immediate filmic environment/landscape that surrounds the male character. Thus men in Canadian cinema are either cursed with a fundamental (internal) lack which renders them unable to cope with the (external) forces of nature, in whatever form they may take, or they are literally associated with that which they cannot control, signifying the ultimate lack (castration). As a result of the latter, the male character loses his place within stable binary systems of female/male, nature/culture, homosexual/heterosexual.

Thus, Kaye believes that if "Canada seems historically and culturally preoccupied with the landscape as an important psychic symbol of its identity" (69), this claim reflects the belief that Canadian film heroes are displaced in a feminine/masculine binary, in this case, that of nature/culture. This is supported by Beard who, in theorizing the genealogy of the feminized protagonist, argues that

> whereas the American "western frontier" is perceived as a challenge to be overcome, the Canadian "northern frontier" is perceived as a "line between the 'self' and the 'other', between what is and is not humanly possible," as a boundary of which there is no question of overcoming, only staying clear; "[t]he frontier did not play a positive role in the Canadian experience." The terror of nature and the sense of fragility and vulnerability of human life in its midst leads to an overconsciousness of the contrast and indeed enmity between nature and culture, between nature and mind. (123)

This too reflects the Garrison Mentality, but displaces it onto a specifically gendered body, a technique which serves to maintain the Otherness of the Canadian subject. Kaye points out that the "female has often been identified in the arts as being at one with nature and tied to the landscape," a fact that, when translated into film, often results in the "mapping feminine 'territory' as a female body, or as part of the landscape itself" (65-66). Given the heterocentric model in which she is operating, if the male hero of a film narrative is then

feminized, it stands to reason that he can no longer impose himself on a feminine Nature without the latter becoming "perverse or unforgiving" (Kaye 69). In essence, the Canadian hero through his feminization and consequent symbolic castration loses his ability to control the undisciplined femininity of Nature, causing 'her' to become an overwhelming force to which the protagonist must either flee or succumb. Thus, the feminization of the English Canadian male serves to maintain landscape as an unrelenting foe, while this inherent position of Nature continues the castration, the Otherness, of the national subject. Returning to Longfellow's argument, however, this process also comes to serve as a homogenizing spectacle in which "real historical and political differences are ultimately mediated and secondarized" (1996: 8) for the national audience. She claims that "we are sutured into place as national subjects through the recognition of our shared atavistic experience of the landscape" (8). In this way, it might be said that English Canadian film, with its multiple references to and associations with landscape, effectively constructs the unity necessary for the recognition of the nation through a coherent national cinema.

Morris, however, contends that while this analytic paradigm was useful in answering the almost hegemonic question in Canadian film criticism (what are the unique characteristics of Canadian cinema?), the answers provided proved to be restrictive in their explanatory value.[3] He explains:

> The answers offered by the victims/losers paradigm might not have been very flattering, but they certainly proved Canada had a national cinema with its own 'unique characteristics.' Of course, insisting on that uniqueness meant occasionally ignoring films that did not fit the model, or discussing some films in terms of an inappropriate model. And, at the same time, it tended to limit debate on other possible thematic models. (38-39)

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[3]The validity of this question must be called into question when difference is placed centrally within the national narrative. In other words, if there is no 'English Canadian experience' and thus no single 'English Canadian national cinema,' how can we even hope to explore a question that assumes the contrary: that there exists some specific characteristics that define all English Canadian films. While it will be argued that there are indeed symbolic tropes that serve to link Canadian cinema together, these are not to be confused as functioning with the same homogenizing effects as those previously elaborated by Canadian film theorists.

Even Beard, who subscribes whole-heartedly to this model in his categorization of Cronenberg's work, admits that "[d]uring the past decade there have been a number of signs of new life and direction [in Canadian film that]... seems both relatively vigorous and quite distinct in its diversity from the almost entirely depressive model of its predecessors" (120). While he tempers this observation by pessimistically stating that "the history of Canadian film is largely one of repeated 'rebirths,' but no actual subsequent life" (120), the fact remains that many of the films released in the last decade do indeed seem to resist the 'loser paradigm' in their dealings with the psychological issues surrounding the feminization of the male protagonist and his/her association with landscape, in particular when dealing with various alternative manifestations of sexuality and gender.

The atavism of landscape that Longfellow posits as the ultimate function of the use of Nature in Canadian film tends, then, to romanticize the role of cinema in national culture while ignoring the fact that many films have emerged in the last decade which tend to counter the dominant hegemony of the nation. It also works to homogenize or side-step difference in the same way that policies such as multiculturalism do (as explored in the previous chapter). The English Canadian subject is once again defined spatially through a strict relation to geography. If landscape does play a role in the formation of an English Canadian subject, can it do so without reinforcing the loser paradigm? One possible answer is that landscape acts as a stage on which gender and sexuality are explored, on which a queer marginality is mapped, forcing that which is in excess of their respective hegemonic meanings into stark relief. Difference is not denied, but rather is made central. The use of landscape in Canadian film stems from a historical accident which demonstrates the inherent limitations of the nation. Its failure, however, moves the question of national identity into the realm of the performative, rupturing the spatial border in favour of the temporal. Thus we have a clue as to how the nation might be reconceptualized as to incorporate plurality, an

act which works not only to signal the (re)membering of difference, but the productive forgetting of landscape.

Queering the Loser Paradigm

Despite its inherent limitations, the loser paradigm in Canadian film criticism serves to highlight the fact that gender displacement, through the trope of the feminized male (and to a lesser extent, the masculinized female), functions as a central organizing principle in many English Canadian films. The perversion chic films may easily be aligned with earlier Canadian films which position the male protagonist as impotent and helpless in the face of an erotically-charged, feminine Nature. How they differ from this aesthetic discourse, however, is important in signaling a break with conventional notions of English Canadian nationhood, one which works to reposition their individual narratives within a larger frame of national representation.

The productive lack that the loser paradigm embodies has been articulated as the endpoint of English Canadian nationalism, difference from an externalized Other being the highest and perhaps only possible achievement for a second-rate nation. To queer this belief is to extend its meaning beyond this defeatist sentiment, to re-examine the position of lack within the national subject, and to highlight the important gaps that it produces within the narrative of the nation. The feminized male thus comes to signify more than lack, or rather, is deployed not as a signal of that which we do not possess, but of that which we do. Cynthia Fuchs, in her examination of "alternative masculinities" and the grunge movement, suggests that, "[r]eframed as resistance to cultural interpellations, an 'identity in the lack of identity' becomes an effective position from which to speak, destabilizing preconceived binary categories of self-representation..." (1996: 176). The inherent English Canadian lack of identity that Keohane argues is emblematic of any attempt at coherent subjectivity in this country may thus be seen as productive. Further, and contrary to Teresa de Lauretis's argument that "[t]he construction and appropriation of femininity in Western erotic ethos

has also had the effect of securing the heterosexual social contract by which all sexualities, all bodies, and all 'others' are bonded to an ideal/ideological hierarchy of males" (1993: 144), the representative use of the feminized male works to subvert the normative system by which the nation is called into being. This occurs precisely at the point where difference is re-centred in the national narrative (difference being always already a component of such a normative discourse). This avowal of difference serves to disrupt the hegemony of the nation by radically calling into question the foundations of this discourse. This strategy is readily apparent in many examples of the national narrative of Quebec.

Robert Schwartzwald argues that the homosexual male (the ultimate manifestation of the feminized male, psychoanalytically speaking) has long been a potent image in the representation of Quebec, one which functions allegorically. Its deployment reflects several key reference points for Quebec as nation, among them a fierce sense of colonial oppression and an innate fear that, should sovereignty ever be achieved, "Quebec's 'specificity' [would] be [that of] a permanently countercultural society, and consequently excluded from easy integration into the extended family of modern nations" (1993: 265). Thus the gay male works to signify allegorically cultural oppression and the struggle for identity, one which is relegated to the realm of perpetual failure and death. In short, the gay body comes to represent the complex matrix of apprehension that circles around Quebec's quest for independence. This discourse of 'arrested development' strikingly echoes the use of the feminized male in English Canadian narratives of identity, and results in the nation being positioned in much the same way. English Canada also suffers from a fear that it is or will be unable to assert itself within the hegemony of global nationalism. Homosexuality is thus integrated within the national symbolic as "the repressed whose return portends only disruption and signifies failure" (Schwartzwald 270). The allegorical power of this image, however, must be understood as exceeding mere representational exploitation.

The positioning of sexual perversion within the national narrative tends, according to Schwartzwald, "to allow a symptomatic [or pathologizing] reading of homosexuality to

occult any recognition of it as a constituent part of social construction" (278). Following the problematic equivocation laid out by Beard (between self-destruction and marginal sexuality), this essentializing practice works to counter a view of the nation as inherently plural and presents homosexuality as something which must either be overcome in the assertion of national identity or as an aspect of subjectivity which will inevitably be shed when the nation reaches maturity. This aligns itself with a constructivist model of the nation through the disavowal of the difficulty in establishing a stable 'origin' from which the national subject may be hailed. Schwartzwald, drawing upon the work of Jean Larose, thus imagines that

> a nationalist discourse that seeks to establish its "own" origins must necessarily at once deform and repress the true Origin, which in the case of Quebec [and, arguably, English Canada] can never be the putative purity of a precolonized epoch, but rather a filiation with the colonizing gesture itself. (287)

The English Canadian national subject might thus imagine homosexuality as a denial of the phallic power of nation in favour of a political view of the nation as embodied state, the one necessarily justifying the other. This stems, in both Quebec and English Canada, from a disavowal of the schizophrenic nature of national identity: the fact that we exist as both colonizers and colonized. Like multiculturalism, then, images of perversion are deployed as a strategy to deny the importance of difference within the national discourse; this tactic, to expand Schwartzwald's term, effectively functions along the lines of intellectual, cultural, and political narcolepsy. This self-deception, this active forgetfulness, however, works contrary to Silverman's representative perversion which soundly displaces national hegemony in favour of a reconstituted narrative. In her work on the mannish representation of the lesbian body, de Lauretis similarly argues that the gender reversal evident in this trope is

> not merely a claim to male social privilege or a sad pretense to male sexual behaviour, but represented what might be called, in Foucault's phrase, a "reverse discourse": an assertion of sexual agency and feelings, but autonomous from men, a reclaiming of erotic drives directed towards women, of a desire for women that is not to be confused with woman identification. (146)

The feminized gay male in the national narrative also works within the confines of a reverse discourse, one which does not signal a desire to identify with a more masculine signifier of the nation (often figured as the United States), but rather an attempt to rearticulate the nation on more inclusive, yet just as assertive, terms. Homosexuality, then, may be understood as not working simply as a national allegory (whether or not this may in fact be the intent of those who manage cultural meaning) but rather as *a symbol which profoundly queers the subject-nation*, moving it beyond the restrictive and homogenizing confines of the nation-state discourse of legitimacy.

Within a project that explores the disruption of hegemonic masculinity in post-war America, David Savran proposes a model which may be effectively mobilized to counter the representation of perversion as an allegory that signals a deficiency or lack in the national narrative. Although his frame reflects a specifically American subjectivity, certain aspects of it adhere to the English Canadian case. His pivotal observation suggests that the male subject

> is always split into a masculine -- and sadistic -- half that delights in displaying his prowess and his marksmanship, and a feminine -- and masochistic -- half that delights in being used as a target. His impossible task... is to master the femininity that constantly gets in his way, the femininity at which he aims and does not aim. (45)[4]

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[4]Savran argues that in order to understand the way in which the divided self functions, "the self [must be] understood to be less the immutable ground of being than a performance, a construction that must be reimagined and reiterated" (55). This carries a number of connotations, among them the notion that identity and identification are merely parodic constructs, a position which reflects the performative notion of identity forwarded by Butler. While Savran concedes that identity is indeed constituted by an endless cycle of failure, he argues that this is the result of postwar conditions in which the dominant paradigm of white masculinity was unable to cope with the new social realities of the Cold War era. Conflicting and competing values embodied in the new collective emphasis on loyalty to company and family contrasted sharply with

Most importantly, Savran argues that this fundamental division in the psyche of the subject arises from a loss, a loss that furthermore cannot be clearly articulated, can never be fully known. Thus his model significantly bypasses previous understandings of the masochistic function by positioning it within the field of a *melancholic* neurosis.

Freud (1917) explains that in melancholia the object which has been lost (or more specifically, the individual or emotion that is now *treated* as an object) is incorporated into the ego in an attempt to preserve it, to not let it slip away. Butler, who uses this dual process in the elaboration of her gender model, explains that

> [i]n the experience of losing another human being whom one has loved, Freud argues, the ego is said to incorporate that other into the very structure of the ego, taking on attributes of the other and "sustaining" the other through magical acts of imitation... This identification is not simply momentary or occasional, but becomes a new structure of identity; in effect, the other becomes part of the ego through the permanent internalization of the other's attributes. (1990a: 57)

In short, Freud explained that "an identification of the ego [is established] with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency [in this case, the superego] *as though it where an object, the foresaken object.* In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego loss" (1989: 586, emphasis added). This is a functional act in terms of mourning, one that takes on pathological connotations when applied to the melancholic impulse. The important distinction arises from the specifics of the relationality between subject and object: melancholia results when this relationship has been one of *ambivalence*, a mixture of love

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the polarized notions of independent and entrepreneurial masculinity that existed before and during the second World War. He claims that "[a]lthough the working man/husband/father is masculinized by his (over)investment in the 'occupational role,' he is also feminized situationally, by his acquiescence, in the workplace, in the interests of the corporation and, in the domestic sphere, to the role of helpmate" (67). This perceived loss of independence and connection to the previously-defined "American Dream" resulted in a generalized identity confusion among many white, heterosexual males.

and hate. Butler claims that "[i]n cases in which an ambivalent relationship is severed through loss, that ambivalence becomes internalized as a self-critical or self-debasing disposition in which the role of the other is now occupied and directed by the ego itself..." (1990a: 57-58). The internalized object thus splits the ego, maintaining this ambivalence by constructing what Savran sees as the warring sides that characterize the masculine/feminine or sadistic/masochistic model of the national (American) subject. Further, the ambivalence felt towards the lost object suggests an important aspect of its very nature. More precisely, the object which is lost in the construction of a divided *national* subject is something which has never existed outside of the *national fantasmatic*: it is an ephemeral 'identity,' not an 'object.' Therefore, the subject cannot know exactly what he or she has lost, or in terms which more closely reference the English Canadian subject, what he or she is lacking.

Savran's conceptualization of the male national subject has several important implications for English Canadian identity. Peter Dickinson suggests that the Canadian psyche is similarly divided into masculine and feminine positionalities, ones which reflect the ambivalent split between colonizer and colonized. In an examination of Quebecois theater, he argues that if "the feminine side of each character is associated with subservience to the colonial regime, then their acquisition of a 'true' national identity can only be achieved through a strong, forceful, and, above all, *physical* declaration of masculinity" (114). On one level, this echoes the loser paradigm inasmuch as the Canadian subject is most often imagined to embrace the feminine aspect of this binary, an act in which the shared victimization of the woman and the colonized nation are paralleled. This also upholds the strong association with landscape in the national narrative. On the other hand, Robert L. Cagle suggests that it is precisely this preoccupation with the masculine/feminine split in national identity which distinguishes Canadian protagonists and "problematizes the foundations of these theories of gender and representation [he is referring specifically here to Raymond Bellour and Laura Mulvey], as well as of theories of gendered models of spectatorial desire" (1999: 192). Longfellow elaborates this point by explaining that the

trope of the feminized male serves to interrogate not only the epistemological bases of gender, but those of colonialism as well. In this way, the divided Canadian male (and female) comes to represent an ideal of the "new world subject," one which functions within a reverse discourse on gender and thus "survives, free from the conventional patriarchal codes of female [and colonized] behaviour" (1999: 175).

The gay male, as a marginal figure in discourses of both gender and sexuality, would seem to embody this new world subject. He is thus aligned with other figures on the margin, most importantly that of the colonial subject and the aboriginal. It is in this way that difference might be moved into the productive centre of national subjectivity, a position which might be contrasted with the false re-centering of difference evident in multiculturalism, one that merely represents a political slight-of-hand which masks an adherence to the 'difference as sameness' mentality. More than this, however, homosexuality, and marginal difference more generally, might be seen as a representational ideal for the divided national subject. Savran argues that attempts to reconcile the split in the dominant paradigm of masculinity between masculine and feminine positions often takes the form of identification with those outside this sphere: blacks, women, homosexuals, and criminals. He believes that the cross-race identification common to much of the work of the Beat writers, for example, is "a symptom of a melancholic process whereby the subject attempts to incorporate that which he has lost" (62). If melancholia stands as an instance where the subject moves from mourning a particular loss (in the English Canadian case, that of the 'nation,' impossibly based in the hegemonic positionalities of the white, heterosexual male) to the incorporation of a representational psychic 'object' into his or her ego, then the consequent problematics of this introjection might be partially alleviated through an identification with its apparent opposite.[5] Savran explains:

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[5]Butler suggests that this also impacts upon gender once it is considered that prohibited sexual unions are similarly introjected into the ego (for example, the young boy deals with his desire for the father by melancholically incorporating a self-depreciating object into his psychic structures, that of the male body). Thus, masculinity can arguably be considered a lost object of desire. In the case of English Canada, this loss

> Unable to face the loss of joy, of a sense of belonging -- and unconscious of the fact that he has even lost them -- the 'disillusioned' and melancholic white male subject attempts to become black himself. This act of impersonation represents a fantasmatic recovery of that which he has lost, of that otherness which he so desperately desires, and which is instantiated as a sense of community, ecstasy, the body, sensuality, the primitive, the authentic, the paternal (62).

Bhabha's mimicry of the colonial subject is reproduced here as a product of the division within postcolonial subjectivity. The desire for national cohesion is deflected onto the Other, an imitation which seeks to uphold a false sense of wholeness.[6] This incorporation, however, does not result in the sought-after wholeness. Savran claims that this subject's "oscillation between these different positionalities produces him as a schizophrenic, self-defeating -- and masochistic subject. Embracing blackness, femininity, homosexuality, and poverty to declare himself white, masculine, heterosexual, and a man of independent means, he is unable, however, to stabilize any of these positions" (52). The English Canadian subject-nation is thus revealed as a product of melancholic introjection. The apparent inability of the subject to figure him- or herself into the structures of the dominant model of hegemonic nationhood produces a neurosis by which the subject comes to embody loss or, more specifically, *lack*. The propensity for gay male protagonists and perverse erotic spectacle in English Canadian films reflects, to some degree, a desire for relief from this internalized contradiction through a fantasy identification. The national narrative is thus intertwined with difference: gendered, sexual, racial, or otherwise, producing an 'identity in the lack of identity' which paradoxically attempts to incorporate national difference into a cohesive homogeneity.

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of the masculine signifier is both articulated by and the result of an inability or unwillingness on the part of the English Canadian subject to adhere to a hegemonic nationalism, one grounded in hegemonic male-ness.

[6]Fuchs finds a similar phenomenon in popular music, one which she terms "the pop narrative of whiteboy victimization" (181). Like Savran's divided male, these work to "claim difference from the mainstream, sometimes as solidarity with more unarguably oppressed classes (the Beastie Boys come to mind) and sometimes as what Ana Marie Cox refers to as 'the masochistic glory people took in exhibiting their own failures' (1995: 2)" (181). In other words, failing to achieve success can be 'cool.'

The melancholic introjection of the supposedly 'coherent and unified' English Canadian subject goes a long way to explaining the fascination with lack inherent in Keohane's theory of ironic conceit. The internalization of the lost object, a strong sense of belonging to a national identity, accounts for the identification with lack. The irony of the process which Keohane posits as the source of enjoyment in Canadian national identity is hence revealed to be a masochistic pleasure, an enjoyment rooted in guilt and pain. The reincorporation of lack is perverted as to position it as a third term within the psyche, one which stands as an audience to the melancholic process. Savran, taking up the work of Theodor Reik, argues that narcissism stands as the third term in the bipolarity of the sadomasochist, "a spectator, whether real or imagined, whose voyeuristic delight in the masochist's pleasurable pain redoubles it" (182). Further, he argues, "because the spectatorial position is always to some extent introjected, the masochist is always, as it were, performing in front of the mirror for his or her exquisite cruel pleasure" (182-183). In other words, Savran's masochistic subject is profoundly *reflexive* in nature, and thus must be understood as deriving gratification from three different sites: "one desiring to hurt, the second to be hurt, and third to watch the spectacle, each delighting to be simultaneously self, other, and destabilizing third term" (183). The transformed ego, however, also serves the infliction of punishment, and thus also performs for the ego. Savran explains:

> Freud emphasizes that in this process "hate is expended upon the new substitute-object [the ego], railing at it, depreciating it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic gratification from its suffering. The self-torments of melancholiacs, which are without doubt pleasurable, signify... a gratification of sadistic tendencies and of hate, both of which relate to an object and in this way have both been turned round upon the self" (63).

In other words, Savran believes that the ego as transformed through the melancholic introjection of the lost object is pivotal in the creation of a masochistic subject. The formerly externalized loss is internalized, and thus all the frustration and anger previously

railed against an outside object is now incorporated into a single psyche, one which has no other choice than to turn upon itself. Consequently, the narcissism that allowed the melancholic object to be articulated with the ego functions to realign the self into two distinct halves: one which serves to punish the 'foreign' object and the loss that it represents, and one that derives gratification from this punishment in order to relieve the guilt resulting from the failure to reconcile the lost object with the ego. Savran concludes that "[i]n splitting the ego into a sadistic half and a masochistic half, melancholia produces a subject that is crippled by self-reproach and self-hatred. Unable to resolve the schism, it simultaneously longs for and hates that which it has lost" (63).

For the English Canadian national subject, this works on a number of levels. The incorporated Other might be said to be manifest in the conspicuous Canadian consumption of and identification with American popular culture, a process through which we derive masochistic pleasure through the knowingness of our inadequacy in terms of national unity.[7] This also works to explain the role of Quebec in the English Canadian national narrative. Operating under a presumed national homogeneity, Quebec stands as a constant and ultimate reminder of our lack of national coherence, a difference that we simultaneously wish to silence and incorporate. Conversely, we also perceive the lack that Quebec represents as the key to our own identity, a difference that functions on a similar line as the American Other. Quebec is externalized through our own incorporation of it as the

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[7]Manning suggests a way in which this process works to, in fact, subvert the symbolic order that cultural imperialism claims to reproduce in its entirety. He argues that "Canadians import and eagerly consume American cultural products but reconstitute and recontextualize them in ways representative of what consciously, albeit ambivalently, distinguishes Canada from its powerful neighbour... The result is a made-in-Canada popular culture, played primarily to Canadian audiences, but exported to the United States in ways that complete an ironic pattern of reciprocity" (1993: 8). Thus the introjection of the American object is seen to parallel Bhabha's mimicry inasmuch as it produces a reciprocal output that emulates it almost, but not quite, perfectly. This signals the gaps in Butler's performative cycle of citation that allow for mutation of the imitative ideal. This also importantly echoes de Lauretis in her argument that "the struggle over interpretation is a constitutive process for marginal subjectivities, as well as an important form of resistance" (151). Thus, the English Canadian cultural discourse suggests Bhabha's process of 'adding to' identity without 'adding up,' a process by which the excess signaled by marginal identification is "neither simply additive nor exclusive but signals the nexus, the mode of operation of *interlocking* systems of [difference]" (de Lauretis 148).

narcissistic ego which stands as both the inflictor of pain and the audience to our enjoyable national suffering, an audience which guarantees the pleasure we derive from the process. Both of these objects of identification serve to highlight our divided position as a nation which cannot resolve the schism between colonizer and colonized. While the United States firmly occupies the position of the (masculine) imperialist oppressor, Quebec signifies our own association with this identity, painting themselves as the (feminine) oppressed. In the end, then, the English Canadian subject finds that he or she cannot occupy either position to a satisfactory degree, and thus chooses to exist in a national limbo, an indecision which signals a lack of phallic power, a national weakness that must be punished.

Savran sees value in the stabilizing properties of this contradiction. While Kaja Silverman sees male masochism "as posing an irresistible threat to the imaginary coherence of the unitary subject" (Savran 204), Savran, drawing on Robert D. Stolorow (1975), argues that

> [r]ather than endangering the coherence of the subject, [masochism] prove[s] particularly useful in times of psychic -- and, I would like to add, social and economic -- crisis because [it] can operate "to restore and maintain the structural cohesiveness, temporal stability and positive affective colouring of a precarious or crumbling self-representation." Reflexive sadomasochism, in particular, with its self-contained, narcissistic system of gratification, would seem particularly adept at reconstructing an independent, autonomous, masculine subject and "re-establishes a sense of existing as a bounded entity, a cohesive self." (205)

In other words, the triad of sadism, masochism, and narcissism allow the subject to maintain a sense of a wholly functioning coherence within the psychic structures that are torn by alternate subjectivities. Savran's reference to the social and economic instability also suggests that these mechanisms have a wide ranging applicability that proves to have manifest effects in the everyday lives of individuals. Clearly then, in Savran's view, masochism provides the divided subject with a means by which to reconcile, if only in an illusionary sense, the competing positionalities of a split masculinity. We are also returned,

here, to Keohane's articulation of the Canadian subject, one which is able to exist as a stable entity within a symbolic order which calls for the acknowledgment of the impossible nature of that coherence.

The English Canadian subject uses the imagery of perversion as an attempt to integrate the division within the national discourse. This identification with difference stands as an attempt to reassert the primacy of the hegemonic national subjectivity, one which in fact denies the very marginality that it relies upon and hence reinstitutes the very division that is being disavowed. Keohane explains this as the process by which "[t]he Other is not-the-identity, yet constitutes the identity. The Other negates the identity, yet is its only resource" (61). He explains that

> the Other affirms the enjoyment of the modern as authentic: just when the Other exposes the lack by its naiveté, it disguises it, covers it up again, affirms the totalized character of the modern symbolic order by showing that order's mark upon it and admitting to being influenced. (61)

Identification with difference allows the national subject to oscillate between positions of conceited assertion of the nation and the avowal of lack, without rupturing the symbolic order that allows its continuance as a concrete referent. Difference works in the national narrative to remind the hegemonic subject of that which he or she has, that which necessarily exceeds lack. Keohane, in an argument similar to Savran's assertion of the stabilizing properties of masochism, claims that it is this which allows the enjoyment of the nation through that which the internal Other lacks, namely, membership. This lack of membership, however, serves to position the marginalized national subject as something extremely attractive in its exoticism, a position within the narrative of the nation that promises 'a way out' of the divided positionalities of the dominant hegemony.

Keohane argues that by not being bound to membership within the dominant narrative of the national subjectivity, the Other takes on the illusion of mobility. This serves

to explicitly demonstrate something of the quality of the enjoyment of the nation: "The space of enjoyment is a space in which there is mobility, but a mobility within boundaries of attachment/detachment. The figure of the stranger, by his or her remoteness and detachment from us, reminds us of what we share, of what we are tied to" (Keohane 66). Thus difference is shown to be central in any examination of the nation, as it highlights the commonalties of the subjects it seeks to homogenize. More than this, however, difference is shown to be a vital component *within* the national narrative inasmuch as the margins of the nation draw out a potential loophole in the performative process of identification, one which the split subject both craves and hates. Thus the internal Other, internal to the nation, functions both as a position onto which the masochistic impulse may be deflected and as an imagined narcissistic audience towards whom the nation may be performed. The stability that Savran claims results from the reflexive sadomasochistic subject is again thrown into turmoil by the presence of the irresistible Other, one that opens up a space in which escape is shown to be possible. This illusion of transcendence is productive not through any escapist impulse, however, but through its potential to subvert hegemony, reshaping the directionality of the national narrative.

Perversion, as embodied most often in the gay male, carries with it a powerful representational force within narrative. In English Canadian film it transcends the position of allegory and takes on potent transformative traits. It highlights the inherent division in national subjectivity while offering a standpoint from which change may be enacted upon and within the hegemony of the nation. By calling into question the foundations on which the hero of national discourse is feminized, it intersects with the spatial orientation of the English Canadian narrative, shifting the focus from a nation conceived in a stabilized atavism to nature towards the temporal ideal of performativity. Sexuality and gender overlap and inform discourses of landscape in Canadian film, a fact that serves to redefine the nation as inherently queer. Through this process of rearticulation of the loser paradigm, queer memory is brought into play. National structures are shown to contain an excess of

meaning, one which cannot be effectively accounted for through a turn to a normative vision of a homogenous national body. English Canadian national cinema(s), as public fantasies, are hence shown to work in a manner which questions the foundations of the inherent narrativity of the nation, one which posits a productive forgetfulness to complement the selective remembering of the national subject.

Queer Memory and National (In)difference

Queer memory opens a space in which difference may be incorporated, but not absorbed, into the productive, yet always already inaccessible centre of the nation. This concept of community parallels Audre Lorde's (1982) notion of the 'house of difference' where the nation might be refigured as "not pluralistic but at once global and local -- global in its inclusiveness and macro-political strategies, and local in its specific, micro-political practices" (de Lauretis 148). Echoing the queer nation, difference (re)membered in this way works to construct a national subjectivity which does not isolate a single specificity on which a foundation may be built, but rather acknowledges that identity -- and its basis as the ground for social and political change -- is a significantly more complex process. In short, the queerness of the nation (and this project) is derived from the subversion and unraveling of binary constructions of identity, a process that is rendered more complex inasmuch as this destruction of normative structures of understanding and self-definition does not result in the disintegration of subjectivity, but rather in the constant deconstruction and reconstruction of identity. In temporal terms, the queer nation refuses to position that which is forgotten in the construction of national belonging outside of the national narrative, favouring instead the forcible repositioning of marginal difference as central to any discourse that plays on that which is remembered. The national peripheries are thus incorporated, breaking down hegemonic dualisms, but this occurs without rupturing the suturing effect of the nation fantasmatic. The masochistic subject might consequently be viewed as the embodiment of

this fragile production of national knowledge, one that works against static conceptions of the nation in favour of a queerly fluid subjectivity.

This complex relationality, between temporality and the space of the nation, is based strongly in a postmodern conception of time. Fuchs succinctly restates this, the basis of Keohane's ironic conceit:

> The postmodern deal is -- repeatedly? -- that time is deceptive, a construct overlaid on experience in order to make some cursory sense of it. History and memory are matters of representation and perception; they can fool you, but you want to be fooled because the disorder of the universe is only bearable alongside a heavy dose of structure. (178)

This, however, cannot be where the possibilities of postmodernity end. Yes, we desire structure, particularly in the realm of the national, founded as it is in the very rudimentaries of our various systems of representation. Yes, this structure is ultimately illusionary, shielding us with language and images from the unimaginable real that signals our complete lack of a coherent identity and identification. But the desire for deception does not necessitate the wholesale rejection of all that which falls beyond the inherently arbitrary (and essentially queer) boundaries of hegemonic nationalism(s). In the chapters that follow, it will be demonstrated that such a disavowal of marginality merely signals a repressive tactic which is ultimately only a deferral of the real. What is required is a new model of national subjectivity, one that can account for this queer ambiguity in the national body. As consumers of the national discourse on identity, we are not indifferent to the Other: we are constantly engaged on various levels with multiple identity positions. The actualized diversity and contradiction of the national body (spatially literalized as population) is therefore engaged through such a representative strategy.

Inasmuch as there cannot be a single national cinema, there consequently is no homogenous national audience. The notion of spectatorship is vital in the understanding of a queer national memory. Or, rather, it stands as the foundation for queer memory, the

condition by which it is called into being and has always already existed. Again marking her position within the ideal queer narrative, de Lauretis argues that "redefining the conditions of vision, as well as modes of representing, cannot be predicated on a single, undivided identity of performer and audience..." (152). The national identification of English Canadian cinema cannot then be understood as appealing to only a single point of subjectivity: the national. English Canadian cinema has to be viewed as prismatic and unstable, constantly overlapping with other identity positions and combinations. The feminized male takes on these characteristics in his inability to occupy a single subjectivity, sexual, gendered, or national. What he signals in the national narrative is not a fundamental lack of identity, but rather a plethora of identifications. He is an active engagement with difference. He is emblematic of the nation, remembered queerly.

The prevalence of such perversity in English Canadian national film must be taken as a sign that the incorporation of that which is forgotten in the national narrative stands as integral to national identification. Our film-makers have, according to Brian D. Johnson, "acquired an odd specialty: a pathological taste for dark, antiheroic, sexually transgressive dramas" (1997: 44). The re-centring of the margins within the films of the last decade or so indicates a new stream in the national narrative, a perversion chic that queerly remembers that which stands just beyond the vision of the mainstream, shifting the spotlight onto those outside of the hegemonic subject-nation. While the loser paradigm is content to chalk this trend up to a masochistic reverie of glorious failure, the product of a post-colonial inferiority complex, a queer perspective views this process somewhat differently. Landscape in English Canadian film works as the staging ground for difference, either through its direct signaling of difference, or as its geographic significance as that which refers directly to the desire to represent that which is uniquely 'Canadian.' Landscape is not a crutch in the national symbolic, but rather is mobilized as a tool by which difference and marginality may be explored. Perversion, however, works in the same way, constructing in its intersections

with the national discourse a renewed understanding of difference and its position within the nation.

Queer memory is utilized by the national subject, in both the production and consumption of cinema, in order to suture difference into place, a process that fails to disavow plurality in favour of a complex understanding of belonging. English Canadian subjectivity is inherently divided, but it is this split, this desire for identity in the lack of identity, which situates us in a queer, post-colonial, and postmodern nexus where the nation may be productively reconfigured as Lorde's 'house of difference.' Queerly (re)membered, a perverse English Canadian cinema works to counter hegemonic views of the national, and the rigid binary structure that inevitable accompanies them, constructing a space for that which is forgotten. In this way, English Canadian narratives work both oppositionally (to dominant meanings) and subversively (within hegemony itself), thus appealing to the inherent queerness of the nation. The national subject is hence produced as fluid, that is, to reiterate, transitory not transcendent. The old narratives of stability and homogeneity no longer function in an increasingly global and diverse society. Queer memory opens up a new position in the argument of what cinema we, as Canadians, need. Fuchs sums it up when she says: "The boundaries are, they must be, more fluid, more temporary, less oppressive than we've been told: Tell me a story that makes sense" (178). The extent to which a queer national narrative, as it is present in English Canada, can 'make sense' fuels the analysis that follows in the next few chapters.

Chapter Four:
"All Men are Liars..."
Representing History and Memory in the National Narrative

Canada exists as a nation which has tended to define itself through a lack of concrete historical relation. To put this bluntly, Canada might be perceived as 'a nation without history.' This statement is both strikingly apt and extremely problematic when applied to the representative matrix of the perversion chic films. On the one hand, English Canada has consistently been plagued by an inability to whole-heartedly take up the hegemonic ideal of nation. This ultimately feminizing position has been attributed somewhat arbitrarily to a lack of indigenous culture (the post-colonial inferiority complex discussed earlier) and a consequent association of the national body with geography rather than the social constructs of a political history (evidenced in spatial tropes such as mappism and the Garrison Mentality, both of which stand as foundational concepts when considering the loser paradigm). Despite the obvious gaps in such theorizing (such as the fact that it assumes a strictly Western ideal of both culture and history), the imagery employed in Canadian films does correspond to some degree to such a construct, and the perversion chic films do present protagonists that, although they are not the cowards, bullies, or clowns that Fothergill believes, embody a model of conflicted masculinity and a masochistic identification with Otherness. On the other hand, however, to disregard history in English Canadian narratives is not only conceptually short-sighted, but it also utterly removes the possibilities of a functional nationalism from the sphere of Canadian subjectivity to begin with. To eradicate history as a factor in the self-definition of the English Canadian subject-nation is to suggest that temporality plays no role in the creation and maintenance of subjectivity. If Canada is, as Janice Kaye has argued, "a country without a self-defining moment" (1994: 65), effectively a nation without history, then what remains to be clarified is how such a powerful counter-discourse manipulates temporality in the field of the national.

To reiterate chapter two, Benedict Anderson claims that "[h]istory is the necessary basis of the national narrative" (1986: 659, quoted in Higson 44). Unlike the supposedly

more interpellatively unified British or American cinemas, however, English Canadian film has tended to have a difficult time dealing with historical topics (in a marked contrast with Quebecois film), period pieces when they do emerge tending to concentrate on fictional incidents and family drama. This might be the result of the Canadian tendency to perceive our history as containing no great events, no battles or moments worthy of mention. Another possibility is the fact that much of our history is intertwined in a colonial or post-colonial narrative, one which is often represented by British or American film, or by co-productions with filmmakers from either country (Gillies MacKinnon's *Regeneration* [1997], Thom Fitzgerald's *Beefcake* [1999], and John Paizs' satiric *Top of the Food Chain* [1999] being recent examples). Does this mean that the past is not referenced in English Canadian cinema, that we are a country obsessed only with the present and future tenses? Perhaps, but it seems more likely that our approach to history takes on a unique Canadian perspective, one that links memory (both personal and collective) with our notions of the landscape, and perhaps, with the character of our contemporary (anti)heroes. Alison Landsberg claims that "memories are less about validating or authenticating the past than they are about organizing the present and constructing strategies with which one might imagine a livable future" (1995: 176). Thus, Canadian film, in its dealings with an abstract and malleable conception of memory, has an ability to speak not only to history, but through this to its potency within the structures of a present-tense hegemonic regime of temporality.

In mapping out the relationality between time and the space of the nation in the perversion chic films, the inter-connections between the symbolic usage of marginal desire and the hegemonic constructions of nationalism are made clear. The unifying structures which link these seemingly disparate elements is the notion of *trauma*. Trauma, which is an event that serves as the subsequent catalyst for a neurosis of compulsive and masochistic repetition, is useful in this regard due to its ability to inform questions of history and memory. Precisely, the traumatic occurrence, understood as an experience that is only defined for the subject through its initial repression and eventual return, is that which

functions to construct a historical understanding of temporality, one that is then employed in order to build and maintain an adherence to certain proscribed patterns of identification. History is thus a play on memory, that which is always already the property of individual subjectivity. In Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden* (1997), trauma stands as both the initiator and the prime structuring force of a narrative that plays out through the overlapping of spatial and temporal understandings of the same event. Space comes to be imbued with the qualities of a traumatic memory, and in this way normative constructions of belonging are subverted, and perverted, in order to problematize the foundations of a coherent Canadian membership. John Greyson's *Lilies* (1996) follows up on this strategy by firmly situating the relationality of history in the perverse bodies of the characters, thus effectively drawing a parallel between the performativity of national identification (or, identification within the confines of the nation) and the disjunctive relationship of traumatic history to any notion of knowing associated with hegemony. Both films utilize trauma, and the resultant introduction of history, as a profound critique of the normative English Canadian subject-nation. In so doing, Canada is paradoxically demonstrated to be both a 'nation without history' and a nation in which history is perhaps the single most important reference point in any project of self-definition in this country. In short, both films show that *history is just memory in drag*, a masquerade which is deeply implicated in the deployment of trauma.

"Are we running away?" Mapping Trauma, History, and Lack in *The Hanging Garden*

Fitzgerald's film follows the path of William (Chris Leavins) as he returns home after a ten year absence in order to attend the wedding of his sister Rosemary (Kerry Fox). His reappearance, however, triggers a series of events which work to reveal the impact that his leaving has had on his family for the last decade. The story is told in a manner which initially reflects a traditional, linear narrative, but this structure slowly unravels as the film progresses. *The Hanging Garden* thus becomes a complex allegory for the functioning of

memory and history, a fact which is signaled both through vital plot elements and by way of the narrative structure itself.[1] Fitzgerald's strategy is to evoke confusion in the audience by refusing to fill in the ten year gap that exists between William's surmised departure and witnessed return. This is amplified by the circumstances surrounding his escape from the rigid pattern of familial relations that is constructed around and in the site of the vast garden that contains his childhood home: William committed suicide by hanging himself from the limb of a tree ten years past, a traumatic event signals his apparent departure and which, paradoxically, is immediatcly followed in the narrative by his return to the garden in a very much alive state. We are never shown the action that followed his apparent death (despite the director's careful elaboration, through the extensive use of flashbacks, of the events leading up to that point), and are left to wonder as to the meaning of both this temporal gap and the reality of what is being represented on the screen. Add to this that the only clues that we are given in order to discipher the enigma of this temporal space of knowing are the actualized images of William's hanging body (Troy Veinotte) and his young, abused self (Ian Parsons), reified memories with which the entire family is able to see and interact, and *The Hanging Garden* becomes a text with profound destabilizing properties. Has William survived his suicide and returned, or does his reappearance in the garden somehow signal something more? By the end of the film, this question is far from answered (we are never enlightened as to contents housed in this gap of time that plagues the narrative), and William once again flees the garden, leaving it, however, in a radically altered state. Fitzgerald's film speaks strongly to the issues of trauma and history as the underpinnings of self-definition

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[1]This narrative ambiguity is also reflected in the title of the film. The word 'hanging' in *The Hanging Garden* connotes two levels of meaning: it both reflects the action of the story (the garden is the site where William hung himself) and directly references a more obscure relationality with the hanging gardens of Babylon. The latter speaks to the notion of sin and heretical identification, notions which Fitzgerald wants to inform our understanding of the film (and, in particular, our associations with William's homosexuality). The double meaning of the title also aligns itself with the narrative confusion evident in *The Hanging Garden*, and is hence employed to cement an ambiguous reading of it. In the end, then, the title of the film enacts the same confusion as the narrative, a fact which speaks to the intentionality of the director in this regard.

and belonging. Through an exploration of these issues as they pertain to *The Hanging Garden*, a broader understanding of their representative role in the construction and maintenance of an English Canadian national identification will be elaborated.

The Hanging Garden functions both spatially and temporally to subvert, and indeed *pervert*, the hegemonic constructs that ground normative notions of national belonging. To borrow from Tompkins, this film "include[s] characters who are unsure *who* they are and *where* they belong: these characters, and the [film] as a whole, work as [devices] to communicate the post-colonial un-naming and un-creating of fixed identity. While nationally, politicians strive to produce arguments about unity, security, and how strong such a country will be..." (153, emphasis added), *The Hanging Garden* capitalizes on the dis-unity of the collective Canadian psyche. Importantly, it links questions of identity (who) to spatial relations (where), drawing connections between the geographical bias of the loser paradigm and the masochistic ramifications of a traumatic memory. Identity is tied to the direct manifestation of performative memory in the field of the present, but the manner in which the characters in the film interact with their materialized memories and the landscape that contains them does not speak to a postmodern neo-mappism in the English Canadian psyche. Instead, landscape is shown to be implicated in a temporal critique of national subjectivity, one that reflects the masochistic oscillation between positions of remembering and forgetting in the constitution of a shared history.

In *The Hanging Garden*, all the characters are tied quite consciously to the natural environment. This is made explicit in the opening flashback sequence in which a disembodied young William names the plants in the family garden which function as namesakes for all the characters in the film in conjunction with the display of the actors' names on the screen. Vegetation is also used as a primary metaphor for the emotions of William throughout the film as he repeats this naming ritual at several points. While this would seem to implicate the film in a narrative structure that closely parallels the film conventions of the loser paradigm by associating characters with the natural landscape, this

is bypassed, however, in two ways. First, this reification of nature takes the form of a domesticized environment: a garden. The "perverse and unforgiving" Nature to which Kaye and Beard refer is thus subverted through the apparent contradiction of a controllable femininity. If the garden stands as a significant metaphor in which the feminine is controlled (at least initially), those in the film who are associated with the feminine are equally as regimented. When the balance of control shifts back to those who have previously been its victims (notably the homosexual William and his mother, Iris [Seana McKenna]), the garden serves as the staging for the emotional impacts that result, but never in a manner which reinstates nature as an overpowering, outside Otherness.

The second way in which the loser paradigm is destabilized is through the garden's direct and surreal association with the personal pasts of the characters. If Canadian cinema has often grafted personality and emotion onto the natural landscape and used this operation in order to disavow difference in favour of a hopeless downward spiral of lack, the perverted, queer memory employed in this film counters this view by positing the titular garden as a site of temporal transgression. Space becomes historical, mapping out temporal relations of belonging, and through this particular subversion becomes subsumed within a narrative of scandal. Echoing Deleuzian thought on the subject, queer remembering and forgetting in *The Hanging Garden* sees that

> the past exists not in our recollections, but rather has its own being, which we enter into when we remember. This spatialized past consists of regions, layers, or sheets into which we leap, each of which contains the past in its entirety, more or less contracted, and each with its own characteristics, "its 'tones,' its 'aspects,' its 'singularities,' its 'shining points,' its 'dominant themes.'" (Thomas 1998: 200)

Despite the essentialized notions of temporality which Deleuze employs in this passage (a past that "has its own being" and which may be contained "in its entirety"), his metaphor is useful (in an admittedly delimited form) when we consider the manner in which the past is made present through the trope of spatial relations. Landscape becomes the literal

manifestation of Deleuze's conception of temporal complexity, a spatialized past that fails to allow meaning to be simply contained within normative structures, constructs allegorized in the representation of a controlled feminine Nature. The northern landscape may thus be both harsh and nurturing, the object of fear that the loser paradigm contends it is and the tool for a reconstruction of a pluralistic ideal of nation that is the task of so much Canadian thought. The garden becomes a site of the past made present, a spatialized past, a region into which William enters only to find himself directly confronted with his own memories of himself, actively staring back at him in the embodied forms of the young and teenage forms of himself. Space is also employed here to illustrate the incongruence between the past and the return to trauma that founds any conception of national history. The garden thus comes to embody memory and history and mirrors the relationality of each to the other.

Flores's notion of memory-place may be suitably co-opted in an analysis of Fitzgerald's representative strategy. Defining this term as the literalization of "collective memories fixed to physical places that construct meaning" (429), Flores argues that memory-places spring from the "conjuncture of the learned and the experiential that emerges with the presence of place. The result is a past made real because one stands -- quite literally -- in its wake" (429). Spatially, the garden clearly stands as such a site of collective memory, in this case that of William's family, and this memory is in turn the result of both the learned (the occurrence of actual events and circumstances -- William's abuse, his homosexuality, and his suicide attempt as a teenager) and the experiential (the prolonged and static guilt suffered by his family since the day William hung himself). This garden of the past present thus has served, for the past ten years, as a "physical and spatial [location] upon which social meanings, and concomitantly, social identities, are fabricated" (Flores 429). The centrality of marginality in the construction of this memory-place serves to further highlight the importance of an acknowledged difference in the national narrative and the resultant disruption of hegemonic identifications of membership. This is evident primarily in the character of Mac, whose self-destructive behaviours are seen as having been

mediated and exasperated by the fact that the twin apparitions of his young son surreptitiously gorging himself and his teenage son's body hanging from a tree limb have plagued him on a daily basis. The social meanings implied in these images of the past, both indicative of William's sense of losing control over his own life and his inherent perversity, have consequently shaped the social identity of Mac, both in terms of exploding his alcoholism into an all-encompassing state of withdrawal and his intense guilt which fuels the former and makes it impossible for him to move beyond his own memories.

In essence, the memory-place of the garden allows Mac to continually repeat the past while still existing in the present. In fact, Iris and Rosemary also exhibit social identities demonstrative of this tie to memory, inasmuch as they both treat William in ways congruent with their behaviours a decade ago (Iris attempting to 'take care' of him, Rosemary serving as his fiercely loyal protector). The varied reactions to this spatialized past, this re-centered difference, are aligned through the construction of similarly divided subjectivities. While Mac proves unable to position himself within the dominant model of hegemonic masculinity, both Iris and Rosemary find themselves existing outside of a typically feminine identity. Their attempts to reconcile this division results in a masochistic cycle of pleasurable pain: Mac's alcoholism and abusive behaviour, Rosemary's butch domination of her family and new husband, and Iris's obsessive need to care for (and control) those who surround her. The only option provided to this downward spiral is embodied by Grace (Joan Orenstein) who exists quite happily in the ignorance of Alzheimer's, in the apparently complete lack of memory. However, this spatial reading of the function of memory in *The Hanging Garden* also opens up a space in which an argument as to the singular importance of *trauma* in the construction of a national subjectivity may be articulated. It is only through the introduction of trauma in national narratives that the possibility of getting at the complex interconnections between the subject-nation and history are opened up. While the spatial relations mapped out in this narrative point to the garden as an important physical 'stage' on which the characters act out a masochistic psychic relationship to their individual belongings through

the trope of landscape, the spatial history of *The Hanging Garden* is inherently traumatic, a fact which highlights significant gaps in the hegemonic understanding of traumatic history and its inextricable connection with nationalism.

Throughout *The Hanging Garden*, temporality is mapped onto space in order to elucidate and problematize issues surrounding the notion of a linear narrative history. Initially, Fitzgerald's film utilizes flashback sequences in order to elaborate the path taken by William that eventually leads to the central trauma of the plot, namely, his suicide. In fact, we begin with a steady chronological progression from William's childhood, his teenage years, and the present. However, this is the extent to which *The Hanging Garden* adheres to the normative rules of temporal representation. Almost immediately following William's return to his home, the past begins to bleed into the present, forcing us to question the supposedly firm boundaries that separate one from the other. This can be seen in his exiting his car and quickly naming a nearby plant, a pattern learned from his father as a boy and set-up in the first scene. More specifically, though, William is confronted with the physical manifestation of his young self as he enters the house, and is ultimately forced to brave the mirror image of his obese teenage body hanging from a tree limb in the garden. Through William, Fitzgerald plays with the concept of home-coming and the concomitant painful memories which are triggered by a return to the site of the trauma which forces him to leave and return in the first place. This reading, however, relies upon an assumption as to the realist underpinnings of the storyline. *The Hanging Garden* is neither a straightforward story nor a linear narrative. It sets up a complex set of temporal relations through the spatial metaphor of the garden which ultimately call into question normative constructs of memory and history. This is accomplished through the explicit creation of a temporal or historical masochism that sees as its roots the notions of *trauma* and *return*.

If history is necessary in the construction of national consciousness, and trauma is the required origin of history, then Cathy Caruth sees fit to ask: "What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of trauma?" (1996: 15). Her answer both attacks and

affirms the apparent logic of the preceding statement. She argues that, first, history (and trauma) cannot be perceived as a directly referential foundation for hegemonic understandings of nationhood, and second, that "[t]hrough the notion of trauma... we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (11).[2] Her model of national traumatic history is one that posits an intense disjunction between the past and the present, between the experience of trauma and its actual occurrence, between knowing and not knowing. In this way, she gets at the idea that history is intrinsically associated with memory, memory here being defined as the individual or collective reactions to a past trauma. Memory, by Caruth's estimation, is always already *occluded* by trauma, a fact which profoundly alters normative understandings of history.

In alignment with the performative nature of identification, trauma functions to shape the subject through repetition: "the repetition at the heart of catastrophe -- the experience that Freud will call 'traumatic neurosis' -- emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2). Post-traumatic stress disorder is the popular manifestation of this masochistic cycle, but Caruth stretches the boundaries of this particular neurosis and instead positions it at the heart of the notion of national history: "historical memory... is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly" (15-16). The *return* to trauma is thus the only way in which it may be accessed in the construction of history, making its relation to this aspect of the nation an indirect and contingent one. In fact, it is only through the return to the repressed trauma that history is

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[2]This argument echoes the postmodern contention that reference can never be anything but indirect, "and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, ..." a line of reasoning that "seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgments" (Caruth 10). However, Caruth claims conversely that we must simply acknowledge the weakness of modern notions of history and trauma as directly referential, not throw out the concept of a knowable history altogether.

formed. This formative return can occur, by definition, only after the actual traumatic experience and its subsequent repression. Trauma is always already delayed; it undergoes a period of latency and repression in the psyche before it re-emerges as the experience that it is purported to be in its acuity. More precisely, however, Caruth believes that the event does not return in the psyche as the exact re-experience of the moment of trauma itself, but rather takes a form which references the trauma circuitously: history thus claims an *indirect* relationship to the initial traumatic occurrence. She explains:

> The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. (17)

The nation is a site of profound remembering and forgetting, of forgetting to remember and remembering to forget. By Caruth's estimation, however, this aspect takes on important connotations in the maintenance of national history. The repression of the trauma results not so much in a psychically-enforced forgetfulness, but rather in an instance where the trauma impacts the subject only after its occurrence, in the return to the experience only after the fact. Trauma, then, is formative only in retrospect, it is a subjective and hence social *temporality*, and thus is fundamentally disjoined from the apparently referential history that it engenders:

> If return is displaced by trauma, then, this is significant insofar as its leaving -- the space of unconsciousness -- is, paradoxically, precisely what preserves the event in its literality. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. (17-18)

A history of trauma is thus a product of a temporal masochism in which the subject oscillates between the remembering and the forgetting of the traumatic incident. Trauma's association with the real necessitates its repression, and hence trauma is only accessible in the return to the experience at a later date. This return, however, is also traumatic in nature, forcing the subject to flee back to the position of forgetfulness. It is this cycle which sets up the foundations of history, and which simultaneously problematizes the manner in which history is positioned within dominant hegemonic conceptions of the nation.

The Hanging Garden is a narrative of traumatic return. William's return to the memory-place of the garden signifies the re-emergence of the trauma and its subsequent forgetting. Significantly, the film plays with the disjunction in time that exists between the departure and the return, a fact that shatters the normative ideals of narrativity. The ten year gap that exists between William's suicide and his re-appearance at his sister's wedding breaks down linear temporality through its opacity: If William died ten years ago, how can he be here now? Is he a ghost? A hallucination that complements the others in the garden? Is any of this really happening (in a concrete, present-tense), and if it is, from whose perspective are we to read the narrative? This gap between repression and return to the trauma in *The Hanging Garden* parallels the constitution of national history as it highlights the space of not-knowing that always already precedes and accompanies the knowing of the past in the present. The only way to understand the narrative of this film is to sever the connections that we would typically construct between the past and the present, the traumatic incident and the subsequent narrative action. In this way, the gap upon which the plot of *The Hanging Garden* both relies and disavows can be seen as conveying "the impact of a history precisely as what *cannot be grasped* about leaving" (Caruth 21).

Further, *The Hanging Garden* sets up a temporal masochism that reflects the melancholic neurosis which plagues the English Canadian national subject. This oscillation between remembering and forgetting parallels the pathology outlined in the previous chapters and points to an important fact: the masochistic process is primarily formative.

History is the product of the repression and return to the trauma in the same way as the nation might be seen as deriving from the avowal and disavowal of the real apparent in Keohane's ironic conceit. In fact, the connection of trauma with the real is a significant factor that must be taken into account when considering traumatic narratives. To reiterate, Caruth, arguing along lines set out by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, explains that

> the wound of the mind -- the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world -- is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (4)

Thus the psychic impact of a traumatic occurrence exists outside of the boundaries of what may be completely assimilated within the imaginary ego of the subject. The force of trauma is such that is exceeds the structures of understanding in place in the ego, and can be accessed only partly through them. Such an event, then, might be conceptualized as the explosion of the Lacanian real into the centre such as it occurs at the point when the national subject simultaneously admits and denies the illusionary coherence of national membership. The real enters into narrative through the moment of trauma because normative boundaries of knowledge are broken down at the point where meaning is surpassed by the hegemonic constructs in place to contain it. The meaning contained in the real is by definition outside of the realms of knowledge available to the ego, and thus cannot simply be assimilated into normative understandings of reality. Caruth argues this by claiming that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Trauma, in its association with the apparent impossibility of the real, cannot simply be dismissed as a slight disruption of the knowable reality of consciousness, but rather has a far deeper significance through its highlighting of "what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4).

The concept of the real is the backbone of the psychic model elaborated by Lacan.[3] His triad (the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real) can be read as consisting of broad fields of meaning in which the subject is situated and that can only be analytically accessed through their encounter with other subjects similarly contextualized. As will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, the imaginary parallels closely Freud's conception of the ego and its concomitant baggage, while the symbolic is an intermediary which enables subjective interaction and any understanding of the spatial and temporal dimensions of reality. While the imaginary seeks to enforce an illusionary coherence within the psyche through the assimilation of Others into its own delusional image of the self, the symbolic is plagued by fragmentation and lack and consistently points to the deficiencies of the ego. The real, however, is granted far more power than the other two poles in Lacan's triangle due to its sheer excessiveness and the consequent havoc that follows an encounter with it. The real is that which resists symbolization and yet is frustrated by the symbolic inasmuch as it rages to be included in the field of signification. Above all, the real is paradoxical in its relation to subjectivity:

> [T]he Real is endlessly encountered yet [is] endlessly foreign to [the subject]. It lies beyond the network of signifiers, yet causes an uncontrollable upheaval within it. It is firm and obdurate, yet its intrusions upon the subject cannot be anticipated or forestalled. For the subject, the Real is more forcible than anything else in the world, yet it is phantasmal, shallow and fortuitous... The Real is inward and outward at once, and belongs indifferently to sanity and to madness. In all its modes, it successfully resists the intercessions of language. (Bowie 1991: 110)

Its inherently contradictory nature, coupled with its intense disruptive ability, forced Lacan to conceptualize the real as 'the impossible.' The impossible is that which exceeds normative

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[3]Lacan constructs a triadic structure of reality that both encompasses and exceeds Freud's similar structure of psychological functioning. Both theorists work beneath the assumption that their models will clarify the workings of "world-systems that have mind-systems at their core" (Bowie 1991: 99), but while Freud's id, ego, and super-ego takes a decidedly *intra*subjective slant, Lacan turns instead to a view of the subject that positioned him or her strongly within *inter*subjective relations.

understanding, yet is profoundly formative and volatile in its encroachment on the very structures that make such knowledge possible. It is here that the real is demonstrated to be manifest in the notion of trauma.

On the one hand, the inability to assimilate traumatic experience into the frames of the psychic apparatus is what links it to the real. Caruth explains that "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). The trauma of the real is an accidental encounter with an explosive excess of meaning that instigates a structural crisis in the construction and maintenance of subjectivity, albeit one that is often experienced in retrospect. Thus, the real is intrinsic to an understanding of trauma and its formative capacities within the psyche. To again quote Malcolm Bowie at length:

> The hard, durable traumatic residues that are caught up in the 'meshes' of the pleasure principle, or in the 'network' of signifiers, are an accidental catch -- no one was fishing for them; and they cannot be put to use -- no one can knit them into a net. Yet these encounters with the Real, in their obtuseness and their acuity, are essential to an understanding of the mind. They are stray events, stragglers, in which the march of an overwhelming necessity may be glimpsed. In them the mind makes contact with the limits of its power, with *that which its structure cannot structure*. (104, my emphasis)

In essence, trauma is an encounter that forces the psyche to re-evaluate its own coherence. The excessive meaning that is released in the instance of trauma intrudes on the otherwise relatively smooth running of the psyche, due to the inability of the mechanisms in place to fully account for it. The real cannot be maintained as a factor within consciousness without the complete destruction of the ego (as will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the death drive) and thus must be repressed (and re-repressed) in order to maintain the integrity of the psyche. In essence, the real in this case mimics the functioning of the id. Traumatic memory, then, must be viewed as an oscillation between a transgressive move into the real

followed by the re-entrenchment of the meaningful structures of the ego. This results in both the divisive nature of the hegemonic representations of the symbolic (characterized by the masochistic subject) and their potential, and perhaps inevitable, decay and disintegration. Trauma is what is ultimately most formative and destructive to the psychic reality of the subject, and thus has deep implications for any normative models, including that of the nation.

On the other hand, however, the indirect referentiality of trauma adds another important element to the equation when considering the impact of the real on the national psyche. Trauma is paradoxically separated from the direct encounter with the real which supposedly characterizes such an acute and formidable experience. The latency inherent in the re-experience of trauma through the repetition compulsion is such that the real is not re-encountered, but rather an *impression* of the real is implicated in the psychic apparatus. Thus, trauma as it is implicated in national representation becomes a shadow of the initial explosion of the real, an echo of the occurrence that is 'recalled' by the subject and subsequently taken as the genuine article. The enforced distancing of the real from the imaginary ego (through repression), a mechanism which makes such experiences bearable for the subject, is ultimately that which makes the return to the trauma always already partial and obscured; this internal disavowal comes at a cost. The return of the real does not force a renewed psychic repression in the ego precisely because it is not the initial shock that returns, but rather a ghost-like presence of a past acuity that re-enters consciousness, occluding the representational limits of the symbolic. The means of telling the story of trauma are restrained by this gap in the experience itself; the space of delay inherent in the traumatic neurosis is effectively transferred to the symbolic. History is thus an occluded narrative, a manifestation of a limited symbolic system which, as discussed above, can only ever reference its originary trauma indirectly. In this sense, if history can only ever hold a tenuous relation to the acute trauma, then the symbolic itself is shown to be similarly constrained in its representation connection with 'reality.' This fact holds deep meaning for

any reading of *The Hanging Garden* as a narrative of English Canada, both in terms of the story and the manner in which it is told. In the end, it is a film which attempts to negotiate the difficult space of knowledge inherent in history and memory when the latency of trauma is injected into the hegemonic structures of national understanding.

In its spatial mappings of temporal relations, *The Hanging Garden* allegorizes both the structures of the nation generally and the English Canadian identification with them specifically. The negotiation of trauma is always an attempt to navigate between knowing and not knowing the real, between remembering and forgetting the momentary disintegration of the ego. In this way, traumatic memory is a belated experiencing of knowledge, a fact which necessitates the process of repetition that characterizes the behaviour of the traumatic, and necessarily masochistic, neurotic. In short, and to return again to Caruth, "[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality -- the escape from a death, or from its referential force -- rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (7). William's death propels Fitzgerald's characters into a cycle of melancholic performativity grounded in the compulsive reenactment of the trauma that (presumably) resulted from their discovery of his hanging body, a situation most clearly indicated through the collective hallucinations of memory to which they are all subject. To see Mac frantically clutching at William's corpse ten years later is to witness his initial encounter with the traumatic real. The relationality between death and survival constitutes a double telling, a masochistic oscillation between "the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 7). The traumatic narrative is thus a narrative of history. The intrusion of the real into narrativity instigates a complex historical understanding of the subject as it serves both as a temporal reference for definition and as a pervasive force in the construction of identity. The act of remembering the trauma figures an (unknown and unknowable) echo of the real into the psyche and thus disables the ego (and the symbolic structures at its disposal) in favour of a profound admission of lack (of knowledge, of identity, of memory). The history

which is subsequently produced is simultaneously a radical avowal of lack and an attempt to suture over this very acknowledgment, both resulting from the disjunction of traumatic memory from the instance of trauma itself.

The garden functions as a physical site of remembrance, a memorial to both William's act of desperation and the encounter with the real that it represented for his family members. This act of memory in turn serves to displace history in favour of a psychic timelessness. Mac clings to the dead (significantly, an abjected form that Julia Kristeva contends is emblematic of the ego's imaging of the real) in an attempt to remain faithful to his own grief and guilt. This act of remembering comes with the price, however, of his own inability to function within the temporality of history. In order to *know* history, Mac must *betray* his memory of the past: "The possibility of knowing history... is thus also raised as a deeply ethical issue: the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*" (Caruth 27). Caruth elaborates this as the difficulty in establishing "the difference between remembering and what it is to forget" (35). In *The Hanging Garden*, the absence of the ten years between William's suicide and his return is allegorically significant inasmuch as it signals the unbearable nature of living in relation to the horrific nature of death. More importantly, this gap in knowing signals the period in which the memory of the family effectively isolated them from history. In essence, the family (and the landscape of the garden) sits statically outside of history. William's return is a collective return to the trauma, in which it is experienced for the first time. This experience, however, necessitates the forgetting of the moment of traumatic occurrence itself, a forgetting which produces and re-situates the family in history. The enforced repression that is referenced here is one which demonstrates the disjunction between the initial encounter with the real and the re-emergence of a shadow of that experience, one that in turn highlights the limitations of the historical narrative. History is not a memory of trauma, but rather is an indirect reference to the impossibility of its understanding. This is witnessed through several pivotal scenes, such as Iris's decision to leave the family (to essentially move forward into history) and William's own confrontation

with his teenage self, a scene that culminates in his burial of himself. Mac, however, refuses to enter into the process of forgetting that will formulate the boundaries of a collective history, and instead tries to dig up William's body, eventually satisfying himself with the actualized memory of the young William. Mac is acting out a refusal to let go of the real, a deluded state that keeps him trapped within a space of traumatic remembering, and out of the narrative of history. In the end, William leaves his family in a far different condition than he found them, but his departure signals a renewed repression of sorts. As he and Violet (Christine Dunsworth) are driving away, she asks him, "Are we running away?" to which he replies, with only minimal hesitation, "Yeah... No, we're just leaving." In fact, his leaving is the re-repression of the traumatic real of his suicide, an affirmation of life that distances death again and moves the garden back into the position of a memory-place of remembering. As a final image, the iris planted by the entrance to the garden, a memorial to Iris, speaks to a renewed turn towards the opposite pole of the masochistic cycle of the national subject, one that will have to be returned to in order to assimilate it into history. It also signifies the fact that what they are fleeing is not the initial trauma, but its shadow which darkens the symbolic with a radical uncertainty.

As a narrative of English Canadian nationalism, *The Hanging Garden* effectively illustrates the problematic nature of the subject-nation when counterpoised with a history of trauma. However, it also gestures to an innate contradiction in our own particular construction of nation-ness. For the melancholic national subject, as witnessed in this film, trauma stands as the moment at which a lost object is both ascertained and introjected into the ego. In English Canada, however, this instance of trauma is ambiguously defined for, as has been argued earlier, Canada is 'a nation without history.' Unlike a country like the United States, which has a specific moment in the past (the American Revolution or the Civil War) to point to in order to define its current existence, Canada is a nation that evolved rather than abruptly came into existence. If there is no sudden, originary act from which to extrapolate a traumatic shift in Canadian identification, how then might the Canadian

subject-nation be said to be a product of the melancholic introjection of a perceived lost object? More importantly, how can trauma be understood without its explosive, albeit delayed, acuity?

The answer to these questions involves the redefinition of the notion of trauma itself. Arguably, the lost object that grounds the inherent masochism of the English Canadian national subject is that of a stable, hegemonic ideal of the nation. This traumatic loss, however, results not from a sudden, combustible break in identification with the colonizing country but rather from a gradual and processional realization of lack. Ours is a history of marginality, one where the rules of national belonging have never really been a comfortable fit yet have been the ruling ideology behind the dominant politic, both domestically and abroad. The trauma of Canadian historical consciousness is thus the result of a fundamental inability to successfully adhere (or appear to adhere) to the hegemonic structures of nation-ness. We mimic the structures of the hegemonic nation, but without the referentiality (however indirect) that comes with trauma. The Canadian subject is rooted in a lacking narrative and in turn internalizes this lack of stable references as the source of that which is uniquely Canadian. Keohane argues this point when he suggests that Canadians revel in their lack of particularity, a structure of enjoyment that echoes the dualistic structuring of the split, masochistic subject. In short, the actualized trauma of Canada is not embodied in a single moment, but is, in a direct parallel to our own historical development as an independent state, a chronic trauma of process. This fact, however, is not directly referenced in *The Hanging Garden*. In this film, a moment of trauma is very clearly represented as a temporal point to which the present both refers and misses in the performance of return that follows the ten-year period of repression. How, then, might this be explained in the context of a cycle of films which argue their interpellative appeal to an English Canadian national body?

Canada's lack of a central, unifying national trauma, coupled and enhanced by our repetitive return to the impossibility of the real through our paradoxical celebration of our

own missing particularity, is what most clearly defines us as a queer nation. If in American nationalism the return of the repressed trauma signals the contradictory and divided nature of hegemonic subjectivity, in Canada our aping of the same process proves to be much more potent and ultimately disruptive to these illusionary structures of coherence precisely because we are returning to nothingness -- we experience our unique history by forgetting that there is nothing to forget! Canada's lack of trauma signals a history of (traumatic) lack -- this lack, this primal and formative encounter with the real, is what fuels our particular, masochistic experience of historical memory. This is what Keohane refers to when he speaks of a subject formed through an ironic conceit: the conceit is that we can successfully adhere to the constructs of nationhood grounded in trauma, while the irony is that no such trauma exists. The oscillation between these points, however, produces a *chronic* trauma, one where the real does enter into the national narrative, but it creeps rather than explodes into the centre. Admittedly, this radically contradicts what Lacan describes as the real inasmuch as it is a powerful force that, lacking symbolization, cannot act in the manner that I am describing. However, how else might we understand the use of the traumatic paradigm in the hegemonic definition of Canada? We are queer inasmuch as our very existence flies in the face of the conventional wisdom of hegemony.

A second point stemming from the lack of an acute national trauma in Canada is that we have consequently become a conglomerate of groups that are forced to turn to their own, individual traumas in order to situate themselves within the national collective. The conquest and internment of the First Nations, the conscription crisis in Quebec, the plight of Asian Canadians during the second World War, and the move across the prairies by Eastern European immigrants are instances of individual traumas that inform a larger idea about Canadian nationhood, but none is capable of referencing a significantly large subset of the Canadian population to be effectively positioned as a truly *national* trauma. Further, these are 'dominant' traumas, inasmuch as they reflect either large and/or influential portions of the national body, ones which necessarily occlude a host of other, 'smaller' traumas such as those

of recent immigrants, refugees, and the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. What is missing, then, is the presence of a unified *national symbolic*. On the one hand, this might be a reason for the fragmented nature of Canadian national belonging. On the other, Caruth argues that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). This latter point opens up the ground on which a *fantasy* involvement with the traumas of others comes to be the major stalwart of English Canadian national representation. This is not meant to be read as an argument for an oppositional relationality to the representation of Otherness consistent with the re-assertion of dominance by the hegemonic elite, but rather as a circumstance that highlights the inherent lack of the Canadian subject. English Canadian film, and in particular the perversion chic films, portray the fantasy of trauma, one that works to reinstate our own inherent inability to figure ourselves into hegemonic nationhood. Any attempt to return to trauma in Canada's mimicry of the national structure is always a return to the scandal of the real, to the very impossibility of our own adherence to the hegemonic model of nationalism. As such, the nation comes to be a site of profound ambivalence, signaling not stability but fluidity. Trauma is not a concrete reference point; it is a shifting psychic reality that gives shape to that which we come to understand as national belonging. Its nature as existing both inside and outside of the symbolic structures of the ego makes coherence always already illusionary, and works to counter hegemonic structures of understanding. Ours is a trauma in the lack of trauma, one that requires our perpetual failure in the functioning of the national hegemony. The construction of a traumatic history is thus that which signals the breakdown of normative structures of belonging: the nation itself is a product which is created in order to contain the excessive meaning released in our return to the real. In this way, the nation might be said to be scandalous.

National Body/Historical Body/Scandalous Body:
Traumatic Memory and National Identification in *Lilies*

Like *The Hanging Garden*, Greyson's *Lilies* works to problematize conventional notions of history and trauma through the physical mapping out of temporal relations onto space. By articulating the temporal in the spatial, it is demonstrated that national subjectivity cannot be understood outside of the complex interplay between the two. Precisely, the temporality of trauma is shown to exceed the normative spatial constraints of the nation, forcing a reconceptualization of conventional definitions of national belonging as they are situated in a historical narrative. This is accomplished in both films by way of a gap in knowledge. *Lilies* demonstrates the gap of knowing that exists between the moment of traumatic occurrence and the play of traumatic history in the temporal field of the present. It plays with conventions of masculinity, race, and (hetero)sexuality through the performance of performance (the narrative centres around the production of a play, which is in turn the re-enactment of the events that have led up to the present-tense of the film), a doubling up of hegemonic conventions of subjectivity which reveals them as inherently futile in their ability to speak of the postmodern nation. *Lilies* illustrates the literal re-enactment of memory using a theatrical metaphor to highlight its performative value; the bodies of the actors stand as the mediating field on which it is articulated. The story hinges on Bishop Bilodeau's (Marcel Sabourin) presence at a prison in Quebec, 1952 to hear the confession of a past schoolmate, Simon Doucette (Aubert Pallascio). A reversal takes place during the confession in which the Bishop finds himself trapped into watching a stage play that recreates his culpability in the events that led to the death of Vallier (Danny Gilmore), Simon's lover and Bilodeau's rival for his affections, and the wrongful imprisonment of Simon for this crime in 1912, put on by the inmates of the prison at the latter's request. This performance of memory (or memory as performance) functions on two distinct levels, each of which contributes to a critique and perverse subversion of hegemonic notions of identity and national belonging. The first deals with the split subjectivity of the national subject,

illustrating this inherent paradox of national identification on the bodies of the actors. The second level moves this counter-hegemonic discourse to the level of memory and its foundational functioning in the definition of the nation. *Lilies* demonstrates the impossibility of homogeneity when applied to the nation, both in terms of individual subjects and in consideration of the historical national body. In the end, though, this film extends the play of *The Hanging Garden* through the postulation of a category of identification (the body) that works to suture over the traumatic intrusion of the real into English Canadian nationalism.[4] The national body becomes a scandalous category, a temporality and a vessel that seeks to contain the excessive meaning released by the impossibility of the nation. In this way, history is demonstrated to be radically indirect in its relation to trauma, to be, in essence, a drag persona taken up to camouflage the inconsistencies and contradictions of memory.

Like *The Hanging Garden*, *Lilies* is a story of trauma and traumatic return. The play that is acted out before Bishop Bilodeau is that of Simon's memory of their shared youth at a private school in Roberval, one that implicates Bilodeau in the tragic events of the past, and

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[4]The fact that *Lilies* is based upon a Quebecois play (*Les Feluettes ou La Repetition d'un Drame Romantique*) by Michel-Marc Bouchard raises the question of how much credit might be granted this film in any examination of *English* Canadian nationalism. Despite the fact that it features a large cast of well-known Francophone actors, and was filmed entirely in Quebec, it is a film that is considered part of the English Canadian canon. One cannot escape, however, the fact that the potency of the narrative clearly references the homosocial environment fostered by specifically Quebecois institutions. While I am not in the position to argue this issue in all its complexity, and will therefore concede that *Lilies*' position within an English Canadian film canon is at least questionable, I do believe that this film signals an important alignment between the divergent cultures of Quebec and English Canada. In addressing issues of colonialism, trauma, and representation, *Lilies* works within the perversion chic cycle of films, regardless of the geographic origin of its author. This very fact speaks to the convergence of two cultures that argue for an oppositional distinctiveness, but who find themselves in similar positions internationally. Further, Higson argues that "the ways in which cinema inserts itself alongside other cultural practices, and the ways in which it draws in the existing cultural histories and cultural traditions of the producing nation, reformulating them in cinematic terms, appropriating them to build up its own generic conventions" (43) are vital in any understanding of national cinema. The fact that this film is based on a play of domestic origin, whether French or English, points to a clear move towards the appropriation by the film industry of Canadian texts and stories, ones with resonance beyond geographic constraints. If Canada is a nation that can claim no clear national symbolic, and is rather composed of an amalgamation of various individual traumas, then the use of a Quebecois text to make an English Canadian film seems reasonable in the creation of a national cinema in this country.

thus directly contradicts his own memories of this 'history.' The trauma of this pantomime is that of the death of Vallier, the bastard son of a French aristocrat who has relocated with his mother, the Comptesse de Tilly (Brent Carver), to the wilds of Quebec. Vallier is also the lover of Simon (Jason Cadieux), a man the young Bilodeau (Matthew Ferguson) both admires and desires (although he hides the latter through a fervent adherence to the former). His misconstrued hero-worship goes tragically awry with the arrival of Lydie-Anne (Alexander Chapman), a French aristocrat who falls in love with Simon and through whom the latter tries to (unsuccessfully) disavow his homosexuality by agreeing to marry her and return to Paris. Bilodeau violently opposes both Simon's unions, arguing instead for him to run away to a seminary with him. When Simon ultimately chooses the love of Vallier, Bilodeau, in a jealous rage, sets their school on fire, trapping the two of them in the attic, an act which results in Vallier's death and Simon's persecution for the crime (a version of events that Bilodeau apparently attests to in court). It is precisely here that the trauma in *Lilies* occurs, one that is followed, like in *The Hanging Garden*, by a gap of knowing that re-situates the audience in the present-tense. Here, Simon's fellow inmates (all men) act out this play of the past in a manner which blatantly disregards the categories of gender, sexuality, and race through the metaphor (and literal use) of drag. The ramifications of this story are obvious on several fronts: First, trauma is linked to history through the trope of memory, of the gap between remembering and forgetting, and on the apparent authenticity of a knowing narrative. What is most clearly subverted in *Lilies* is any notion as to the direct reference of trauma (exemplified by Vallier's death) and history. In fact, the whole 'point' of the film is to demonstrate the inconsistencies of knowing that exist between the divergent memories of Simon and the Bishop, and to ultimately highlight the fragility inherent in the adherence to either. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the structure of the film speaks to the problematics of the *telling* of history.

The narrative in *Lilies* winds its way to a trauma that has already occurred, signaling an explicit return rather than the representation of the initial incident. This is significant

inasmuch as it suggests the intangibility of the trauma as it exists within the historical narrative. Unlike *The Hanging Garden*, which shows us the traumatic event through a flashback, Greyson refuses to grant us the satisfaction of knowing, and instead positions the historical trauma in all its uncertainty through the play of memory. In essence, he is illustrating an indirect relation between trauma and the act of memory involved in its implication in history. This is further referenced, outside of the chronology of the film, through the deployment of drag. If drag is a satiric act which performatively undermines the hegemonic foundations of identification, then its use in *Lilies* suggests a parallel between performativity and the telling of history. History becomes a masquerade of the past in the present, of memory acting out the illusionary stability attributed to historical narrative of trauma. This is a particularly potent trope as it is embodied by the character of Lydie-Anne. This upper-class, white, heterosexual European women is played in the film by a black, gay male prison inmate. As will be explored in detail later, this radically undermines the structures of identity. More than this, though, the figure of Lydie-Anne allegorizes the role of the body in the understanding of history. In short, the national body seeks to contain the contradictory impulses that Lydie-Anne abjected body does, and through this attempts to paint a picture of homogenous belonging to a common conception of the past. Finally, *Lilies* works to counter the supposedly clear relationality between trauma and its association in history through the complete transgression of temporal boundaries. In a move which recalls the strategies of Fitzgerald, this film shifts easily between the past and the present, a fluidity evident on the bodies of the actors.

Throughout the film, the past impinges on the present (populated by the inmate actors, Simon, and the Bishop) and the present forces itself on the past (populated by the characters being performed on the stage). This sense of the confluence of temporality is achieved by Greyson's use of multiple levels of representation. Memory is portrayed, on the one hand, as a stage play, one in which we are distinctly aware that this is a prison and that the actors are, in fact, playing roles, and on the other hand, as flashbacks to the past in which

the same actors are transformed through changes in makeup and dress into the beings that they are imitating, and the stage shifts into landscapes that recall Roberval of thirty years ago. These two spheres intermingle and diverge from one another, and are occasionally disrupted by the Bishop, who strives to remain firmly rooted in the present-tense. At these moments, we see the performance delayed, characterizations dropped, illusions and technical errors are unveiled, and thus are reminded that what we are watching is not in fact the cinematic representation of a past present, but a present performance of a fantasized past. This fact is made clear during one such disruption when the Bishop scoffs at the romantic undertones of the relationship between young Simon and Vallier. The actor playing the Comptesse de Tilly retorts by stating: "Simon may have stretched the truth a bit about his love story, but, it's so beautiful..." Hence, the audience is reminded that memory and the apparent truth of history are two separate notions, and that what we are watching is the former, not the latter. More specifically, the entire structure of the play in *Lilies* speaks to the return to a trauma (that of Vallier's death), a leaving of the space of the unconscious through which a collective traumatic history is formed. This re-conceptualization of the truth of history plays into the effects that *Lilies* has on the formation of identity.

One of the most unique aspects of the film is that it never lets us forget that we are watching a performance, but that this occurs despite its best efforts. The cast is composed entirely of men (as would be expected in a prison) and thus all the roles, including those of women, are portrayed by men. Even in the sequences filmed as former presents, actualized views in the past, men continue to play the roles of women (albeit in better costumes and makeup), a cinematic strategy that constantly and reflexively references the present as it explores that which exceeds it. Marginal difference and the feminized masculinity of the loser paradigm is thus present in this film. It might be claimed, however, that in this excess *Lilies* fulfills some of the subversive performative functions of drag. Judith Butler has argued that

> gender is always already expropriated. As an effort *to be* what is always lost and only fantasized, gender is never adequate to itself but always a kind of gestural deferral of its own ideal accomplishment. In this sense, drag characterizes the wishful performative of gender as such, the production of "identity" through an imitation that seeks to approximate an ideal that is always already expropriated and elsewhere... In this sense, drag is not a representation that falsifies or distorts an original but rather the enactment of a constitutive falsification or failure that undermines gender's claim to identity. (1990b: 2)

Performative gender identification figures strongly in a film where drag is employed as a subtle critique of the stability of gender identity, and thus of the pedagogical memory which sutures difference into place in a matrix of national belonging. Butler further specifies the complexity of gendered positionalities by explaining that the necessity of repetition in this process of establishing an identity is one which "moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*" (1990a: 140-141). Thus identity is inextricably linked to the play of memory, the overlapping of past into the present, which makes itself so evident in *Lilies*. Identity can only ever be grounded in a temporal process, one which is socially-based inasmuch as identity ideals are always collective in the sense of homogenous belonging. Bhabha's notion of the performative speech act in national narratives highlights this particular aspect of Butler's work and its functioning within a larger process of collective memory. If the performative works to destabilize hegemonic appeals to the pedagogical, constructing a space for difference where "there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, a minority discourse that speaks betwixt and between times and places" (1990: 309), it demonstrates itself as a mechanism that relies very much upon the same economy of forgetfulness. This "syntax of forgetting," one which parallels Butler's assertion that a social temporality of gender is one which functions as a "provisional failure of memory" (1993: 244n), is one which taints all forms of identification, including the national: "To be obliged to forget -- in the construction of the national present -- is not a question of historical memory; it is a construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the

problematic totalization of the national will" (Bhabha 1990: 310-311). Thus all identifications, each of which presumes a narrative of belonging (similar to that of Keohane's ironic conceit), prove to be the result of a repetitive and prolonged process of remembering and forgetting. Memory is constitutive of identity, and is hence implicated in their performative construction. As Caruth has pointed out, however, the memory of trauma can never be simply attributed to the individual, but rather finds itself implicated in other traumatic returns and thus in a larger discourse of social stability.

While *Lilies*' use of drag certainly functions subversively in terms of its references to a hegemony of gender (and, through this, one of sexuality), this particular perversion also effectively serves as a critique of the "always already expropriated and elsewhere" nature of the past, one which may be used to expose the transitory nature of the current model of the Canadian nation. Importantly here, *history is memory in drag*, a performance that seeks to undermine the pretenses that history has as being something which is concretely knowable, and which may consequently serve as the stable foundation for a model of national identity. Butler refutes the notion that identities may be knowable in an unchanging, permanent sense, and rather argues that they are formed discursively through the interaction of the social with the bodily. In *Lilies*, the past masquerades on the bodies on the actors, forming a corporeal landscape on which notions of historical truth are drawn only to be refuted as the intangible constructions that they are, imitations of an ideal notion of truth for which there is no original. Trauma, which grounds the history of *Lilies* as much as it does that of the nation, is thus demonstrated to be distanced from its experience in the present. Performative history, then, is the re-emergence of a repressed trauma that is felt for the first time in this return to it. This performative play of temporality within a landscape constructed of bodies is most evident in the characterization of Lydie-Anne which functions to unmask notions of truth in terms of the past and identity by working on multiple levels to repeatedly reference the fact, as she succinctly puts it in her final scene in the film, that "all men are liars, and that I too was lying." Gender, sexuality, and race are shown to be fluid manipulations of the

process of subjectivity construction through an excessively overt literalization of the conflicted identificatory position of the national subject. This condition, however, is one which *Lilies* links explicitly to that of the nation. Refusing to simply critique the hegemony of the dominant white, heterosexual man, Lydie-Anne embodies a radical difference which works to queerly (re)member the very foundations of English Canadian membership.

On the surface, Lydie-Anne's body cites the marginal difference of a queer national memory on three levels. First, as with all the actors, she is an inmate, a condition which implies not only a peripheral relation to the centre, but a lack of control over her own body contingent on deviance; second, she is played by a male actor, hence servicing the subversive gender imperative fundamental to Butler's conception of drag; and third, she is black, a fact that, considering the care taken to elaborate her character's background within the Parisian aristocracy, and the fact that the events in which she is implicated occur in 1912, functions to erase any chance that we might forget the innate difference that positions her as something which she is not. Lydie-Anne is manifested within the film as the ultimate signifier of difference, her body housing Otherness, one which is then incorporated seamlessly into a narrative that seeks to expose the 'truth' of a past situation. Through the considered betrayal of her body, she serves the purpose of exposing the innate contradictions that plague traumatic history and thus national identity.

If nation has been already illustrated as foundationally male and heterosexual, *Lilies* seeks to demonstrate that it is also a landscape which is snow white. Dionne Brand (1994) has commented that, perhaps more than is acknowledged in contemporary theories of the nation, Canadian identity relies upon a difference which is set up against a stabilized conception of 'whiteness:'

> The European nation-state of Canada built itself around "whiteness," differentiating itself through "whiteness" and creating outsiders to the state, no matter their claims of birthright or other entitlement. Inclusion in or access to Canadian identity, nationality and citizenship (de facto) depended and depends on one's relationship to "whiteness." (173-174, qtd. in Dickinson 168)

Again we see here a re-centering of difference in the national equation, a difference which is always already intrinsic to national belonging, but one which, like 'perversity' in all its multitude of formations, must be disavowed in order to preserve the illusionary hierarchy of 'the many as one.' If Lydie-Anne serves to illustrate the inevitable failure of both masculinity and heterosexuality through her performative use of drag, she further signals the instability of the more apparently self-evident category of whiteness. Importantly, then, difference and its play within the 'syntax of forgetting' used in the construction of the nation is shown to be a process of fragmentation.

Inasmuch as she embodies multiple perversity (blackness being perverse in a white landscape), Lydie-Anne demonstrates a further problematic of national identification, namely, that of the divided, and masochistic, subjectivity. This subjectivity, however, is one which must be viewed as transcending basic gender differences and instead embracing difference in its own plurality of forms. Difference is oppositionally positioned against not only masculinity (although this is not meant to downplay its importance) but also sexuality, race, class, and various other marginal specificities. Standing in sharp contradiction to three significant identificatory positions which must be accessed in order to claim insider status within the nation (masculinity, heterosexuality, whiteness), Lydie-Anne nonetheless masquerades as the centre. As the representative of upper class Parisien society (signaled through her dress, her condescending mannerisms, and the fact that she arrived in a hot-air balloon), and contrasted to the provinciality of the denizens of Roberval, she clearly stands as difference, but one which works to alienate the multiple representatives of a common and thus peripheral existence. She is also used as a foil to the artificial centrality of the Comptesse de Tilly, one which functions to effectively paint the latter as delusional and merely a colonial mimic attempting to approximate the French oppressor. Working strongly in the context of the full flashback sequences, those where memory is demonstrated to be most closely correlational to a supposedly stable history, these acts of the centre are

highlighted as ultimately artificial when the context changes. As a black, gay male prison inmate, Lydie-Anne cannot in fact lay claim to the dominant themes of national belonging. In the end, then, she is shown to embody the contradiction of national subjectivity in English Canada: she is both colonizer and colonized, centre and periphery.

Lydie-Anne's final revelation, that "All men are liars, and that I too was lying," serves to illustrate, however, the degree to which she stands as the most self-aware, and ultimately most usefully deconstructed character in *Lilies*. In order for her camp-inflected performance of the dominant model of national belonging to be effectively subversive, it must be understood as one which situates multiple difference and the paradox of identity within a single, perverse body. The corporeal landscape of her conflicted physicality works to contain both the 'syntax of forgetting' and the language of a queer (re)membering in a solitary location. Lydie-Anne embodies the innate contradictions of traumatic history, but without the melancholic cycle of masochistic abuse and narcissistic pleasure so evident in English Canadian belonging. Here, the many are not one, but rather exist as many *within* one. While this might be paralleled to the multicultural model, the treatment and explicit referencing of difference here signals a move away from this problematic archetype. In speaking of Brand's poetry, Dickinson argues that she harvests a complex knowledge of difference and geography, that in her work "[*d*]*is*-location from without thus becomes a *re*-location from within" (170). This unique textual closure of identity and nation, Brand's refusal of marginality grounded in the body, "challenges certain orthodoxies of Canadian literary nationalism, with its emphasis on a presumptive pluralism and notions of multicultural inclusion" (170). The same might be speculated about *Lilies*.

Lilies stands as a profound criticism of traditional views of national subjectivity. It questions the treatment of difference within the dominant structures of national hegemony, and works to offer the beginnings of a new model by which the nation may be understood. The "dis-location from without" in the film is one which parallels the state of Canadian nationalism, stemming as it does, on the one hand, from an imperialist American Other, a

Quebecois independence movement, or the various sources of our post-colonial status, and on the other, through the enforcement of rigid categories of identification. Lydie-Anne's status as a Parisien, along with all its connotations of social hierarchy and colonial power, functions to position Roberval as inferior and subjugated. She constantly seeks to play out a centrality-based power over the local people, including Simon who she attempts to mold into her own image, thus containing his perverse difference, a task which proves ultimately to be impossible due to the artificial nature of her own identity. Similarly, English Canada is consistently marginalized through its inability to adequately contain its own internal difference in the manner evident (however artificially) in other nations. This has led to the necessity for the construction of a new model to account for plurality within Canada, examples of which have been variously been demonstrated to be faulty in their conceptualization of relationship between difference and nation. The challenge taken up by *Lilies* and the other films under examination here is that of a re-location of difference within the hegemony of state-sanctioned national belonging. Difference is organized not in a manner which signals the familiar 'difference as sameness' trope of policies such as multiculturalism (as discussed in chapter two), but rather starts at the significantly divergent point of 'difference as difference,' period. If the body of Lydie-Anne serves as a nexus at which contradictory singularities are sustained within a single subjectivity, it is not a condition that proves to be fundamentally debilitating. Instead, difference is recognized as inherently fragmentary and is reconfigured as that which stands as the essential foundation of nationalism.

The landscape of her body and its subversive impacts on identity aside, however, Lydie-Anne also works within the narrative as the character which points a fearful finger at normative notions of traumatic history and its relation to the trauma itself. While the Comptesse de Tilly hides in her deluded remembering of the past and expectations for the future in order to stabilize her present-tense identity, thus isolating herself from history (drawing obvious parallels to Mac in *The Hanging Garden*), Lydie-Anne revels in her 'lying'

about the past to others and, more significantly, to herself. From the start we see that she unabashedly and quite self-consciously lies to the Comptesse in order to preserve the fragile identity that she has constructed for herself. More than this, we see her casually forming within the context of the narrative a memory of previous events in the film, one which will serve to maintain her identity as young Simon's fiancee. In both instances, Lydie-Anne demonstrates the disjunction between past and present, between knowing trauma and the experience of history. Her body is a site of return, a leaving and re-entry into the field of trauma. In the end, her identity is shattered (along with that of the Comptesse) as she realizes that "love is the greatest of lies we can tell ourselves" and that by performing an identity she is simultaneously avowing its falsity, its ability to be displaced and shed as easily as it was adopted. In this way, trauma is exposed as something which does not denote an innate, historical truth based in a direct and linear relationality, but rather serves as a basis by which identity is manufactured and performed on the body, a performance that functions as a drag masquerade of the past in the present.

Identity and history (and identity based in history) are thus proven to be products of an enacted return to memory, one which is mediated on, in this case, a corporeal landscape, one which simultaneously avows and disavows the instability of its genesis. In essence, both are temporal constructs. Trauma is an identity ideal inasmuch as it constitutes the foundation of a performative failure of knowing. Thus national identification becomes inherently divided and ultimately futile through its enslavement to a history which is always already a return to a repressed trauma. The body becomes a nexus of this contradiction, playing out a masochistic oscillation between remembering and forgetting. If the Comptesse is trapped by her own remembering of trauma, then Lydie-Anne is in a state of perpetual denial of trauma, a forgetting which necessitates her eventual return to and delayed experience of her encounter with the real (represented, perhaps, by her realization of Simon's homosexuality). Consequently, the trauma of the real, signified in *Lilies* as both death and the encounter with a radically perverse difference, is shown to be as inescapable in the

formation of national subjectivity as it is in the construction of the multiplicity of identifications which exist paradoxically in each character.

It is here that the structure of the film, and of the play within the film, becomes vital. *Lilies* relies upon a complex inter-relation between the performative and the structuring principles of belonging in order to enact its subversive effects. If it demonstrates that subjectivity is founded on a false sense of stable identity ideal within the performative cycle of citation and imitation, it also positions the actors of this allegorical narrative as working to create a new sense of nation-ness. On the most basic level, *Lilies* is an attempt to illustrate the construction of a collective memory, one which has less to do with any notion of historical truth than it does with the performance of a fluid temporality. This is primarily evident at the level of the prison, where a group of marginal characters (in terms of their sexuality and their position as criminals) work together to present a particular view of the past, a specific memory which, through their performance, becomes 'real.'[5] Again to parallel Tompkins' argument, the rehearsal of the play (one which also occurs within the theatrical narrative in terms of the love between Simon and Vallier) becomes more important than the traumatic events it references. Fact and fiction lose their concrete boundaries and flow into one. If Bishop Bilodeau initially denies the reality of what he is seeing on the play, their performance eventually wins him over. Essentially, through the course of the film he moves from a position of repression and denial to one where he experiences the trauma for the first time. Simon, on the other hand, through the obvious process of rehearsal of the play, has clearly been living a cycle of temporal masochism, one that has allowed him to embrace the history of the narrative he forces on Bilodeau by way of his forgetting of the actualized trauma of Vallier's death. *Lilies*, then, might arguably be illustrative of the process by which

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[5]The fact that the play is being produced by the margins proves to be a potent answer to Gayatri Spivak's question of "whether the subaltern can speak" (qtd. in Dickinson 171). Although imperfect in this specific manifestation (the actors are, by and large, a relatively homogenous group), *Lilies* still manages to successfully posit a model of nation in which difference is shown to be central rather than peripheral. Belonging might arguably be hegemonic in nature, but it is a hegemony which transcends current dominant trends in favour of one which embraces marginality as the key reference to membership.

the traumatic neurotic experiences the past through an elaborate staging of the repetitive traumatic nightmare. Moreover, Simon impels Bilodeau to return to the trauma, thus moving him into his own traumatic history. The 'truth' of history is not revealed here, but an interpretation of traumatic occurrence based in its return as psychic drama. This drama is also illustrative of Caruth's contention that the story of a death is always already the story of survival. Both characters have survived their traumatic encounter with the real, but only through a strategy by which the real is sutured over in the construction of a historical narrative. Thus, past becomes present in such a way that the former is essentially unnecessary for its impact on the story, precisely because it is caught up in a narrative of trauma. In *Lilies*, then, traumatic history is related to the body in order to demonstrate the fundamental intangibility of traumatic memory in the construction of a knowable national identification rooted in history.

In the end, *Lilies* does not claim to be able to provide all the answers to questions of English Canadian nationalism. Instead, the film might be read as a sort of 'survival guide' for the melancholic English Canadian subject, or as inherently dangerous, inasmuch as it serves to remind us of the forgotten that must be disavowed in the process of constructing the subject-nation. Lydie-Anne embodies difference to the point which it becomes irrelevant in its singular form, and instead must be understood as multi-faceted and thus potent in the creation of a new model of the nation. If, as Butler point out, one cannot 'be' a single identity position, one can only 'do' it, *Lilies* demonstrates that even this equation is too simple. Identity involves a complex inter-relation of multiple identifications, ones which contradict yet manage to be organized into coherent patterns of belonging. In the same way, the nation has to be viewed as a nexus of difference which functions only in the existence of heterogeneity. Thus, 'the many are many' and difference can never stand in as sameness. More importantly, *Lilies* demonstrates a new relationality in collective belonging. If individual patterns of identification must be understood as inherently pluralistic, and thus inextricably caught up in a cycle of performative repetition and failure, then the collective

proves itself to be similarly implicated in performativity and the need to address multiplicity in any attempt to define what it means to belong to a coherent whole. History becomes the product of a rehearsal of the past, one where history stands not as a 'truth' but as yet another identity ideal which is constantly emulated imperfectly. This failure of the collective performance of belonging is productive, however, as it shows the need to address the wider implications of membership. Difference cannot only be used to define that which we are not. It must be recognized as an integral part of the cycle of identification on an on-going basis. If an identity based in traumatic history is always fluid and flexible in its interpellative appeal, then difference is rooted on all levels of this process. The margins must be collapsed into the centre in order to the nation as a signifier to adequately begin to deal with internal plurality. This represents a "re-location from within," one which may serve to deal with the English Canadian identity 'crisis.'

With *Lilies*, however, we are led to a new understanding of the spatial body inasmuch as it is consciously related to the intense disjunction and gap that exists between trauma and traumatic history. To return to the question posed in the analysis of *The Hanging Garden*: if the nation is grounded in a sense of membership to a shared traumatic history, how does a view of this temporality which argues for a narrative of not-knowing and forgetfulness impact on the conception of the subject-nation as inherently divided and masochistic? A tentative answer to this question is to be found in a return to the trope of the body. In *Lilies*, the body is that which works to contain multiple subjectivities in a singular form. In conjunction with the theorizing of Savran, this places the subject in the uncomfortable and masochistic position of having to negotiate between competing and contradictory identity positions in his or her attempts to claim membership to a national whole. To explode this condition outwards, we are again reminded of Bhabha's criticism of the primary tenant of the nation: the many as one. Here, the subject becomes a complex allegorical representation of the inherent paradox of national identification, namely, that radical and wide-ranging difference cannot in fact be contained within the hegemonic

structures of sameness to which the nation consistently appeals. The nation is thus produced as fragmentary, unable to reconcile its own innate difference with the stated homogenizing goals of hegemonic understanding. This fragmentation, in turn, leads the divided subject-nation to masochistically alternate between central and marginal terms. This, according to Keohane, opens up a space where the real can explosively enter the national narrative, and thus a strategy by which the real can be sutured over is required in order to maintain the integrity of national forms. In *Lilies*, this is rooted in the corporeal suture, the body standing as that which glosses over difference while simultaneously signifying its very possibilities. With the injection of history into the national matrix, this process of radical avowal and disavowal (characterized by Keohane's ironic conceit) is further complicated and entrenched.

In terms of structure, traumatic history parallels the jarring repression and return evident in national identification. The trauma is repressed and then returned to in order to assimilate it into history, but this return is ultimately a return to the real. In Canada, this is a particularly difficult position inasmuch as the recovery of the trauma signals a direct return to the nothingness and impossibility of that which exceeds symbolization. The cycle of traumatic departure and re-emergence is ultimately masochistic as the historical subject is unable to realize a stable ideal of 'true' past-tense, thus promoting a restless shifting forwards and backwards in time. This apparent fluidity, like that of identification, produces history as an in-between category, as something that is erected to contain the sheer excessiveness of the real as it is released by the impossibility of the hegemonic constructs of normative temporality. In *Lilies*, we see this mapped onto the body, as the physical form becomes temporal.

As the inmates shift between levels of memory, their bodies remain essentially unchanged, denoting a sense of stability that defies their fragmentary nature. This seemingly stable position is indicative of their situation as suture, as that which encompasses a wide range of meaning and attempts to organize it outside of the normative structures of reality. The corporeal landscape in *Lilies* is thus equivocated with multiple temporalities at once,

straddling them all and yet failing to capture any in its singularity. In this way, the (historical) body becomes scandalous in the field of temporal meaning. As such, the body undermines the dualistic structures of historical understanding within the nation in the same way that it works oppositionally to normative identity. In its existence in-between temporalities, its disrupts the conventional relationality of memory and history, of trauma and the nation. It demonstrates that direct referentially of the trauma to the present-tense is both inadequate and impossible, and instead seeks to negotiate the excessive meaning of history physically through the trope of the scandalous form. In this way, the scandalous category both shatters the hegemonic matrix and sutures over the resultant trauma of the real through the creation of a new, in-between category. This has profound implications for the nation, as history, like homogenous identification, is an unshakable pin in its hegemonic construction.

In the following chapter, this idea of the scandalous, in-between category will be elaborated. Canadian films have an invested interest in this theoretical construct inasmuch as it speaks evocatively to the notion that the nation is somehow *in-between*. For the perversion chic films in particular, the notion of scandal seems especially apt. Through the exploration of the scandalous representation of nation, hegemony is *perverted*. Perversion, a term which connotes subversion but also exceeds it, thus is granted a specifically Canadian, and queer, slant, one that informs the re-definition of what it means to belonging to English Canada in the late twentieth century.

Chapter Five:
Queerly Canadian

The perversion chic films function in two ways in terms of the national narrative of English Canada. First, by making difference visible, by re-centering it within the context of a hegemony which otherwise and arbitrarily insists upon its invisibility and un-mentionability, they fundamentally subvert any concept of a nation grounded in discourses of homogeneity (potentially, and quite often, read as whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality). Second, and more difficult to articulate, is that they take the ashes of the hegemonic nation and attempt to re-define what it means to speak of nationalism, belonging, and membership. In essence, these films do more than simply reverse hegemonic binarisms; they topple the oppositional terms of a dualistic identification into each other, effecting the disintegration of how we understand identity in the first place. This is the project of a queer deconstruction of identity categories. While these two points are thus inevitably intertwined, the first must not be confused with or collapsed into the second. The first step broadens the social picture, demonstrating gaps in previous representation which had been sutured over with strategies more harmful than effective (the melancholic cycle of masochism which plagues the normative English Canadian subject springs to mind). Joan W. Scott, in speaking of alternative-history writing, describes this point as having

> provided evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds, whether these constructions vaunt the political superiority of white men, the coherence and unity of selves, the naturalness of heterosexual monogamy, or the inevitability of scientific progress and economic development. (1991: 776)

While this challenge to normative constructs is certainly a positive one, there is a danger involved when we suppose that this is enough to effect concrete social and political changes within the nation-state (arguably, a potential goal, if not the overt purpose, of cinema). To stop the consideration of the perversion chic films at this first level would be to concede a

very important victory to the very structures that we seek to undermine. By merely reversing the centre/periphery binary of self-definition, by simply re-positioning the marginal terms 'black,' 'woman,' and 'gay' so that they now stand in the spotlight, we fail to recognize the epistemological frame which has set up this system of inequality to begin with. Returning again to Scott, we hence "take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented [or, in this case, represented] and thus naturalize their difference" (777). A film which merely called into question the legitimacy of a definition, but failed to examine the consequences of this query, would not yield an answer that holds much weight in the quest to secure actualized change.

To state that perversion chic merely functions as a narrative which subverts the national symbolic is not enough. It might similarly be argued, then, that multiculturalism is a political and cultural strategy that suffices in its accounting for national plurality, although we have seen that it merely works within a representational frame where difference becomes sameness through an exercise which parallels those of the hegemonic nation. Scott explains that

> the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as *fixed immutable identities*), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and of its notions of subjects, origin, and cause. (778, emphasis added)

Despite an obvious problem with Scott's reasoning in this passage (although the task of rendering experience visible is not *synonymous* with an exploration of the functioning of these categories, there is no clear reason to suggest that such a project *precludes* this possibility), her basic idea holds: the quest for the visibility of marginal categories of identification is often accompanied by an ideological naiveté as to their meaning. It might be said, then, of Cynthia Fuchs' plea for a "story that makes some sense" that grunge music and perversion chic always already makes sense because they reproduce the very terms that

allow us to differentiate just what 'rebellion' and 'perversion' mean. Difference is re-centred, but then (so) what? Hegemony already acknowledges the presence of difference within its very act of constituting the nation (what is homogeneity without heterogeneity?), so what has really changed in the imposition of the peripheries back into the centre of the story? Such an analysis would certainly function as a critique of the structures of the nation, but the extent of such a critique would be quite shallow. The stories of the films under examination here, fortunately, do not make sense. Instead, they actively work to queer the national narrative, calling into question not only the primacy of the terms that figure so prominently therein, but the very terminology that prompts the difficulties inherent in hegemonic discourse to begin with.

Not only do the perversion chic films make difference 'visible,' thereby countering the enforced invisibility of the hegemonic readings of these categories, but they also push at the boundaries of the definitions which allow us to recognize that what we are 'seeing' is in fact perverse. If Scott is right that "[e]ach category taken as fixed works to solidify that ideological process of subject-construction, making the process less rather than more apparent, naturalizing rather than analyzing it" (792), then these films refuse the limitations that she herself imposes on her own analysis. Scott suggests that experience made visible must be radically historicized in order to transcend the structures which bind it into a mere reproduction of oppression. However, she fails to recognize the fact that such a task may be accomplished within and beside a narrative which also functions to re-centre the Other. Perversion chic accomplishes this through the deconstructive act, by first breaking down the system which holds one term over another within the national symbolic (the idea that there can ever be a "fixed immutable" identity), and then collapsing the wall that separates them into a space of indeterminacy, a space in between differences which can only be termed the *queer*.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that 'queer,' arguably a term with many shifting and overlapping definitions, can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps,

dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (1993: 8). Moving from this rather self-evident definition (at least within the confines of conventional queer theorizing), Sedgwick then argues that this potent term may in fact be far more inclusive and can hence be applied to phenomena and work that "spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses" (9). 'Queer' works, on the one hand, as an adjective which may be mobilized in the critical examination of any number of hegemonic discourses, a significant characteristic which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue is the state by which "queer commentary has refused to draw boundaries around its constituency" (1995: 345). On the other hand, the constitution of this field of queerness insinuates the term's usage as a methodological construct. It accomplishes this task of narrative activism not through the mere exposure of an essentialized difference, the re-centering of the invisible term of any binary structure of any identity position, but in the questioning of the very structures which make such an understanding possible.

In terms of sexuality, queer historian Lisa Duggan suggests that the formation of a truly 'queer community' or identity is "unified only by a shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender" (1992: 20). This represents the quest for a new elasticity in the boundaries that have traditionally only encompassed gay men and, to a lesser degree, lesbians and bisexuals. In other words, the search for a queer identity has moved from a "loose but discernible lesbian and gay 'we' to a broad and fluid coalition of sex and gender transgressors" (Gamson 1996: 251). This new 'transgressive' rather than 'oppositional' identification refers not only to those which are artificially homogenized and easily recognizable (and thus easily contained and de-centred) categories (gay/lesbian/bisexual), but to a vast array of sexual 'deviants' including, prominently, "sadomasochists, individuals who prefer cross-generational encounters, transsexuals, and transvestites" (Rubin 1993: 18).

More than this, 'queer' seeks to embrace multiplicity and thus reconcile the oxymoronic position that a single characteristic can define a community of individuals. In this way, the search for a 'queer identity' is demonstrated to be itself an activity of hegemony, one that embodies the contradictory struggle both to uphold (in terms of social and political action) and to transcend its limitations. Duggan argues that "for people with multiple 'marked' identities, the [queer] political project begins at the level of the very problematic construction of identities and their relation to different communities and different political projects" (18). These differences, and the use of the terms of sexual diversity, take on "at least three dimensions that have different force for different social actors, notably distinguishing subjects by race, gender, and class" (Herrell 1996: 286). In short, the queer project attempts to embrace multiple vantage points along the continuum of difference (defined broadly and inclusively), and through this to enact a theory and a politic that radically and paradoxically challenges normative assumptions about the structure that underlies the plurality of manifestations that it harbours. The queer project is also the conduit through which we can understand the functioning of perversion chic within the context of English Canadian nationalism.

A queer understanding of identity intersects with memory in considering the English Canadian subject inasmuch as both articulate similar points about the construction of systems of knowing and not knowing. If a queer perspective on identity demands the examination and deconstruction of the systems by which these categories function in the first place, then memory, when applied to a critique of the temporal relationality of trauma and history, works to similarly destabilize the normative structures that underpin how national subjectivity is understood. The term 'queer memory' seeks to encompass the subversive functions of both the queer methodology and the analytic functioning of memory (itself, in part, a methodological construct) and through this to construct a new system of knowledge that deconstructs the overall inconsistencies of the nation and the national subject.

The model of the nation that is opened up through the consideration of a thus-defined queer and subversive memory, one which *must be conceived as a site of profound remembering and forgetting*, imbues the perversion chic films with a political urgency. It is not enough to destabilize the foundations of the nation: they must be thrown out completely and a model be resurrected from the wreckage that remains. The reconstitution of the national paradigm through the resignification of dominant narratives is a project that the notion of a queer nationalism has already started, although on a scale that does not directly figure into models of already existing nation-states. The theoretical and political implications of Queer Nation do, though, deal directly with conceptions of difference and identity within the boundaries of the nation that may contribute to a broader understanding of this alternative model of English Canadian identity. Queer nationalism provides an alternative manner in which the concepts of membership and belonging can be articulated without resorting to a limited hegemonic terminology. It also stands as that towards which the perversion chic films gesture once they have performed the act of *perverting* conventional national formations, thus moving the strategy of visibility to the next, more radical level of actualized change.

Queer Nationalism

Founded by a small group of activists frustrated by ACT UP's strict focus on AIDS issues, Queer Nation attempted to integrate many of the postmodern identity ideals. Richard K. Herrell characterizes this as a return to "the confrontational politics of gay liberation, anxious to disrupt the conformity enforced on 'natural polymorphous perversity,' to undermine the entire sex/gender system" (1996: 288, using Rubin 1984).[1] Berlant and

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[1]ACT UP, through its activities, have fostered a knowledge that "recognizes the necessity to master the specific functions of political bureaucracies and to generate loud demands that these live up to their promise to all of 'the people'" (Berlant and Freeman 1992: 155). As Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman explain, "Queer Nation takes from ACT UP this complex understanding of political space as fundamental to its insistence on making all public spheres truly safe for all of the persons who occupy them, not just in psychic loyalty but in everyday and embodied experience" (155).

Freeman suggest that, following closely Bhabha's conception of the national narrative, the "key to the paradox of Queer Nation is the way it *exploits* internal difference. That is, QN understands the propriety of queerness to be a function of the diverse spaces in which it aims to become explicit" (156). Rosemary Hennessy argues that the use of the term 'nation' "signals a commitment to disrupting the often invisible links between nationhood and public sexual discourse as well as transforming the public spaces in which a (hetero)-sexualized national imaginary is constructed in people's everyday lives -- in shopping malls, bars, advertising, and the media" (1995: 51). To this end, QN utilizes and re-territorializes "the hyperspaces of commodity consumption as sites for political intervention" (Hennessy 52). As strategies that maximize visibility, the actions of QN seek to emphasize "the ambiguities of this sexual geography [as] fundamental to producing the new referent, a gay community whose erotics and politics are transubstantial" (Berlant and Freeman 159), while bringing the invisible inconsistencies of identity construction (such as those elaborated by Butler) into plain view for their (primarily) heterosexual audiences. They pointedly deal with sexuality -- and sex -- over notions of 'lifestyle,' and attempt to blur the boundaries between gay and straight, consumption and desire, individuals and nations, in short, "to simulate 'the national' with a camp inflection" (Berlant and Freeman 152).

David Savran notes that what is most interesting about Queer Nation is "its expropriation of the discourse of nationalism in an era when, at least for most self-identified leftists, nationalism was (and remains) deeply suspect" (1998: 281). He elaborates by stating that "Queer Nation represented an attempt to queer America, to produce a counter-hegemonic patriotism that militates for a redefinition of the nation and simultaneously for the recognition of the always already queer status of American culture (from Whitman to Madonna)" (281). This aligns itself with Benedict Anderson's claim that "since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms" (1983: 12). The mobilization of a queer memory in the (re)definition of the Canadian nation finds obvious parallels here. In essence, the project of rearticulating the nation within the Canadian

context refers to the necessity of *queering* Canadian nationalism. Using the terminology of Allan Berube and Jeffrey Escoffier, Savran explains that, first of all, "the name Queer Nation is oxymoronic, asserting both difference and sameness. Insofar as 'queer' designates a perverse or marginal positionality and 'nation' an affirmation of commonality and centrality, Queer Nation necessarily combined 'contradictory impulses'" (282). As has been earlier, the word 'queer' need not be attached to 'nation' for the latter to embody contradiction. Rather, as Savran (echoing Bhabha's criticism of the 'many as one' assertion) astutely notes, nationalism is itself queer inasmuch as it works to reconcile that which can never be reconciled: the heterogeneous national body.

Queer nationalism also distinguishes itself, in terms of its dealing with Canada, through its object of address. While post-colonial theory overwhelmingly speaks to the so-called Third World (and, to a lesser extent, the un-decolonized nations of the Fourth World), queer nationalism turns its gaze towards the imperial centre, in this case, the United States. While not conflating Canada with its southerly neighbour (although being careful not to set up the contentious binary that so many theorists make between the two), it is clear that, at least in some respects, that English Canada stands as a colonizer. Elspeth Probyn (1994) points to the fact that Canada finds itself positioned as post-colony that is, in fact, a colonizer, resulting in what might be termed a post-colonial schizophrenia (as discussed in chapter two), the fact of which effectively distances Canada from many of the nations addressed in the work of post-colonial and anti-colonial theorists.[2] Thus, queer nationalism

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[2]By arguing that Canada finds itself caught between discourses of colonizer and colonized, I am not suggesting that this is a unique characteristic among post-colonial nations (most colonial subjects having been somewhat involved in the process of their own cultural and political conquest), nor do I mean to uphold a view that Canada's colonial past should be seen as the only pivotal marker in the construction of a queer national subjectivity. English Canada finds itself situated in the wake of an onslaught of competing narratives of national history, a fact that stems from its diverse national body. The colonial symbolic, however, is an important voice among these many discourses. The reality in which we find ourselves, where we are still caught up in the behaviours of both the colonizer (in terms of the First Nations peoples) and the colonized (in terms of our subservience to the American political behemoth), speaks to the radical in-betweenness of the nation, a fact which effectively distances us from the Imperial *past* of the British Empire without negating the significant impact on the *present* of the post-colonial narrative.

might stand as a more fitting model in which to conceptualize the nation. This does not, however, necessarily distance it completely from the possibilities offered by post-colonial theory. Like the colonial subject, the queer national "is produced in the borderlands, these multidimensional sites that traverse and deconstruct the difference between centre and margin, the normative and the perverse. Like the subjects who embody it, it is constantly on the move, constantly unmaking and remaking [the nation]" (Savran 286). Thus queer nationalism serves as an analytic tool for the examination of the not-so-marginalized periphery of the colonial world.

Finally, Savran indicates that queer nationalism may be considered beyond the limited activist confines from which it initially emerged. Noting that "[e]very nation is potentially a queer nation" due to the international nature of desire, he states that queer nationalism must "ensure that 'queer' denotes more than just a particularized, if universalized, form of sexual dissidence. It must also look to the construction of racialized, gendered, class-based, and (post)colonial positionalities" (288). Thus the multivalent constructions of difference that make up the Canadian nation are adequately encompassed, at least in theoretical scope, by the model of the queer nation. Savran claims that Queer Nation failed as a political movement less because its conception of the nation was faulty than it was unable to fully realize it.

On the other hand, perhaps queer nationalism is already embodied in the form of the multivalent nation of Canada. Certainly it is a model which accommodates the inconsistencies of this nation, and facilitates the project of the rearticulation of the national symbolic in order to construct a more inclusive, postmodern nationalism, one in which difference functions within the universalizing discourse of nationalism. The subversion of the stable referent that is the nation requires a model that can adequately account for the split between the pedagogical and the performative aspects of the national subject, while understanding the complex interrelation between the two. Queer nationalism, in its reliance upon subversion of hegemonic structures and its attempt to rearticulate notions of belonging

and difference beyond this initial destabilization, seems to offer the best possible version of this model, one which may be used to rupture what it is we know to be 'Canada.' In fact, might it not be suggested that the function of perversion chic and queer memory in the arena of national representation functionally *queers* the nation? Queer nationalism centres on a 'war of representation,' one in which the dominant discourses of the nation must be resignified in order to become more inclusive of their disavowed queer content. In connection with a broader understanding of the term 'queer,' however, the very structures that are made to accommodate excessive difference are ruptured under the strain of this task, facilitating a new, queer model of community membership. In English Canada, then, the search for inclusive identity fields must also be articulated in this fashion: opening up the national narrative so that it might more effectively account for its own excess, its own queer existence. This is accomplished, to some degree, by the perversion chic films, suggesting their potential for social and political change.

Spectacularity and a Queer Canadian Nationalism

What has become obvious at this point is that one potential risk inherent in the strategies of visibility of both Queer Nation and the perversion chic cycle of films is that by making the margins central, they are merely reinforcing the *ex-nominated* status of the centre. Borrowing from Roland Barthes (1973), John Hartley suggests that the representation of the margins in popular culture (in his case, television) serves merely to reinstate the hegemonic dominance of those who hold normative positions of power within the current social and cultural regime. While 'black,' 'woman,' and 'gay' are all categories which are easily named in cultural texts, their presence stands as a reference to the un-marked nature of their binary opposites: 'white,' 'man,' and 'straight.' By failing to address directly the hegemonic categories that such representations attempt to displace, they figure themselves into hegemonic structures which view the dominant poles of identity dualisms as assumed and natural. In terms of the perversion chic films, then, it may be argued that the

overt portrayal of the margins of gendered and sexual behaviour serve to paint the mainstream as 'normal,' as that which does not need to be shown and interrogated. Hartley continues, however, by arguing that it is the absence of the dominant categories, in combination with the innate ambiguity of the marginal poles (inasmuch as they are much less rigidly defined), that signals a new model of hegemony, one in which the boundaries between subjective positions are 'dirty' and produce categories which are in-between recognized binary constructions, categories which are hence 'scandalous.'

Despite Hartley's apparent ignorance of categories of sexual difference, his theories do perform an important task in the understanding of the subversive nature of perversion chic and its concrete placement within a (queer) English Canadian nation. He contends, as do Butler and Bhabha, that individual subjects contain multiple and competing identifications, and that each serves to inform, transform, and constrain the others. In this way, subjectivity cannot be simply seen as a 'pure' and 'unitary' manifestation of an adherence to one or another pole of a binary relation. Instead, identity is inherently dirty, constantly shifting between both identifications and positionalities within identifications. In the process, the categories produced by popular cultural texts become ambiguous through their juxtaposition in between poles and thus may be seen as scandalous. If Bhabha's post-colonial subject can only ever imperfectly mimic the identity structures of his or her oppressor, but is still compelled to automatically repeat this cycle of failed imitation, then how can it be said that he or she stands as the neat opposite of the dominant position? Instead, each failed cycle produces an excess of meaning, one which cannot be contained with the hegemonic systems of understanding. Hartley argues that "[a]mbiguous categories are by definition more meaningful than the two (or more) categories they transgress, since they partake of the attributes of both" (1984: 133). Each turn is citational, but imperfect, producing mutated categories of identity which work to gradually reconfigure identity through the transgression of normative binary relations of subjectivity. Despite the temptation that might prompt one to suggest otherwise, perversion is *not* a scandalous

category, but rather, is that which *characterizes* such an identification. If scandal arises from the queer nature of hegemonic self-definition, if it is the result of the masochistic oscillation between supposedly stable poles of a binary, then the category which straddles it is perverse, or 'perversive.' It is from this position that it implicates Canada in the process of a queer (re)membering of the nation by way of the perversion of national hegemonic structures.

In terms of address, the films of English Canada must find a way in which to figure the inherent plurality of the national body. This begs the question of why perversion has proven such a potent image in the (re)construction of national interpellative appeals. Several possibilities suggest themselves, ranging from the conception of an oppositional discourse with mainstream Hollywood, a reaction to the globalization of national culture resulting in the cultivation of a national art cinema, to the adherence to a queered loser paradigm in which the feminized national subject seeks out fantasy identifications with the Other in order to reassert his or her dominance within hegemonic structures of power and oppression. It might be accurate to argue that a combination of all these factors, of both production and consumption as well as an abstract notion of national consciousness, has come to play in the creation of the perversion chic films. If perversion stands as the spectacularization of difference in order to maintain certain ex-nominated categories of power, it also encourages the audience to identify with it. The absence of normative characters in the films that have been explored here does not necessarily work to suggest what is and is not 'normal,' but rather to move the discourse away from the idea that there is a strict boundary which divides centre from margin. This is more than a fantasy involvement on the part of a Canadian audience: it is a rupturing of the very underpinnings that suture over the impossibility of our sense of national belonging. If, as Kieran Keohane asserts, Canadian culture is caught up in activities of ironic conceit, of suturing over the rupture between the impossibility of the nation and its concomitant maintenance in the face of its own illusionary nature, then where

might we fit the perversion chic films? We must see them as innately scandalous (in Hartley's sense) and thus powerful tools for the reshaping of our national reality.

Perversion, as a temporal process, aligns itself with the scandalous category inasmuch as both fail to adhere to a single pole of identification, and rather seek to straddle, spill over, and ultimately shatter the artificial relations of the binary structure. It can be argued that, on the contrary, perversion is inherently marginal (an argument which has been touched upon in previous chapters). In fact, it must be viewed as marginal in order to perform the first act I have attributed to the perversion chic films: the destabilization of dominant categories of identification within the national narrative and the resultant revelation of homogeneity's imposed nature. The representation of perversion *does* reverse the dualistic notions of race, gender, and sexuality, and it *does* work to reinstate a conception of heterogeneity into the national model, but it *also* demonstrates how the very foundations of how we know what it is that we are looking at are perverse to begin with through its usage to undermine dominant structures of understanding. Once re-centred, perverse marginality creates an excessive meaning, one which cannot be contained within binaries, reversed or not. Perversion is not simply a product of the periphery, however, because it transgresses so easily the boundaries between itself and the terms which serve to define it. This transgression, rather than mere subversion, is what suggests the perverse nature of the scandalous category. It is dirty inasmuch as it implicates itself as a category which is *in between*. In each film, perversion is introduced as a critique of the norm, a radical interrogation of the mainstream categories of national belonging. Difference is not simply repositioned; it is deployed, released into a normative frame in order to perform transformative possibilities.

This is made more tangible when we see that, in each of the films of the perversion chic cycle, perversion comes to implicate, to infect dominant categories with marginal attributes. In *Lilies*, for example, the device of drag works to pervert notions of gender, race, and sexuality as Lydie-Anne masquerades as the ultimate embodiment of power despite

her actual position within three different categories of marginality. Once the boundaries have been removed, sexuality and gender over-flow into each other, erasing any previous definitions that might have been applied. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, this perversion extends allegorically into issues more obviously associated with the question of nationalism, in particular, historical consciousness (although clearly individual gender, race, and sexual identifications are pivotal to the construction and maintenance of national hegemony). Through this apparent infection of the supposedly stable categories which underpin the national system of knowing, the nation is queered. If, on the one hand, the perversion chic films serve to signal the end of homogeneity and coherence in hegemonic structures through their forcibly re-centering of the margins within national discourses, they can also be seen to uphold national narratives of belonging through their own internal coherence within a system of national cinema. How then might they be seen as perversive? It is in their articulation of a queer potentiality within the nation that these films answer this question. Queer nationalism (and I am relying upon a broad interpretation here) attempts to both displace the hegemonic structures of a white, masculine, and heterosexual nation and to replace them with structures which rearticulate the very foundations and primal meanings that they represent. In pursuing this goal, however, the queer nation effectively demonstrates the inherent perversity of normative structures of national knowing, a state which inevitably leads to the conclusion that the nation is always already queer and perverse.

The queer nation is a scandalous category inasmuch as it encompasses an excess of meaning in its attempt to embrace the transubstantial difference which exists within the national body. This concept, however, relies upon an already pre-existing national heterogeneity that can only ever be positioned strongly against normative understandings of the national make-up ('e pluribus unum,' or 'the many as one'). Thus, the nation is queer before it has been queered.[3] To extrapolate further, if the nation is always already queer,

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[3]Tony Kushner, in *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, makes a strikingly similar point when he refers to America, through the voice of Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz, as "this strange place... the melting pot

and the queer nation is a category of identification that operates simultaneously inside and outside of hegemony, producing it as a scandalous category, then this condition is clearly one which must be grafted onto the nation as it stands in the mainstream. In short, the hegemonic nation is inherently perverse because, as Bhabha argues, its existence fundamentally contradicts that which it relies upon to define itself. In his discussion of television, Hartley argues that "the concept of hegemony should not be collapsed into the 'pure' text:reader binary, where there is a clear-cut division between the hegemonic text and the subjected reader" (137). On the contrary, hegemony is itself dirty: While the hegemonic system of understanding dictates certain, dominant ideals as to the content of national structures, these are always already distanced from the heterogeneous reality of the 'many' which it seeks to constrain as 'one.' In this way, the normative apparatus which grounds the subject-nation is constantly pushed outside of the limits that it sets for itself; it simultaneously suggests homogeneity and transcends the binaries by which the former is named.

Inasmuch as the nation is thus a construct that straddles multiple vantage points from the perspective of identification, it can justifiably be insinuated into the terminology of the scandalous category. As such, it becomes a suture which attempts to obscure the traumatic real which emerges, belatedly, from Keohane's masochistic cycle of national identification. The perversity of the nation, that which makes it intrinsically queer, positions it as in-between, a condition that both ruptures hegemony and signals the basis by which it is maintained. For English Canadian cinema, and the perversion chic films in particular, this is

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where nothing melted... You live not in America. No such place exists." (1992: 10). Queer nationalism is an inherently American conception, a reaction to the very paradox of the nation that Kushner elaborates. America does not exist because the nation is always already an impossible abstraction, a suturing narrative construct that serves to create homogeneity where none is possible. The similar plurality of the national body in Canada is what serves to expand this notion into a *North* American reality: despite the differing colonial histories of these two countries, they are uniformly histories of immigration and settlement, of the voyage. Thus, in speaking to the youth of the day, Rabbi Chemelwitz states: "...such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist. But every day of your lives the miles that voyage between that place and this one you cross. Every day. You understand me? In you that journey is" (11).

taken as self-evident in the stories that are told and the manner in which they are narrated. In *The Hanging Garden* and *Lilies*, this plays out through the exploration of memory and its relation to traumatic national history. In the films of Atom Egoyan, especially *Exotica*, the relation between trauma and history is central, but the narrative methodology employed differs significantly. Egoyan, through the use of multiple and conflicting perspectives, weaves a complex system of national understanding, one that reflects the always already queer state of the subject-nation.

"You have to ask yourself what brought the person to this point?" *Exotica*'s Voyeurism and the Temporal Scandal

Exotica sets up a complex system of historical understanding through the mobilization of a regime of looking. Whereas the act of telling was pivotal in *The Hanging Garden* and *Lilies*, voyeurism here becomes the method by which Egoyan communicates the discrepancies that exist between trauma and history. More than this, however, Egoyan clearly refers to notions of community and belonging in his film, constructing a microcosmic hegemony within the confines of the titular club and among the characters that come there every night to watch and be watched. Trauma plays into this equation, but Egoyan refuses to let the bulk of his message be focused there. Rather, he forces his audience to witness the delusional constructions of unity to which his characters both cling to and ultimately fail to adhere. The masochistic subjectivity elaborated in *Exotica* (and many of Egoyan's other films) suggests, like in *Lilies*, that the body is situated as a site which is always already in between dualistic systems of knowing, and that their ability to straddle competing positionalities speaks to their scandalous nature. The body both reveals and sutures over the terrible knowledge of the real, and is thus a product of the paradoxical relationality of knowing to not knowing, of remembering to forgetting. In this way, Keohane's model is again invoked. The witness of the body in this film implicates the audience in the dirtiness of hegemony, forcing us to reconsider the basis of the English Canadian subject-nation. In

short, *Exotica* effectively queers the hegemonic constructs of nation-ness through their direct subversion and perversion at the level of the corporeal. The body is revealed to be both an illusion and always already tainted by its own inherent queerness. This queer, in-between body is hence emblematic of the nation, a nation which is always already perverse, scandalous, and dirty.

Exotica follows the intertwining stories of a group of individuals linked through their association to a single traumatic incident in the past. Like the films examined in the previous chapter, this is a narrative of traumatic repression and return, and in a manner similar to *The Hanging Garden*, this temporal relationality is played out through its physical mapping onto a specific space. The titular club figures as the stage upon which trauma and history are negotiated. Francis (Bruce Greenwood) is a melancholic masochist, manifested in his relationship with Christina (Mia Kirshner), a woman he pays in order to play out fantasies wherein he 'protects' her from the predators who murdered his own young daughter, Lisa (her body was discovered in a uniform similar to that which Christina dons for her nightly performances). The repetitive nature of his rehearsal of protection is disrupted by Eric (Elias Koteas), Club Exotica's M.C. and Christina's former lover, who is attempting, unsuccessfully, to reassert himself into Christina's life. Both Eric and Christina are further implicated in Francis's trauma because they are the ones who discovered Lisa's body (a fact which is gradually revealed throughout the film through the strategic use of flashbacks). The triad of voyeurism set up in *Exotica* (Eric watching Francis watching Christina) rings loudly of the cycle of performative failure associated with the repression and the return of trauma. They are also consciously associated with a particular take on Freudian melancholia, a fact that moves *Exotica* deliberately into the realm of a divided and masochistic subjectivity.

Egoyan has spoken of the process of "faulty mourning" in discussing *Exotica*, a process by which "a patient builds a ritual of mourning which only accentuates and exaggerates the sense of loss which they think their dealing with" (qtd. in Coates 1997: 28).

Francis's manifestation of the repetition compulsion is characterized by an endless, spiraling downward into a cycle of masochistic pleasure and the concomitant retribution, circumstances which echo the melancholic neurosis. Francis, Eric, and Christina are all shown, to varying degrees, to be dealing with the death of Lisa in this manner. The traumatic behaviour of these three central characters implicates the supporting cast in a net of relationality which serves to uphold the stasis articulated by their disavowal of the past: Zoe (Arsinee Khanjian), the club's owner, literally seeks to maintain the status quo in her establishment; Tracey (Sarah Polley), Francis's niece who continues to babysit for him when he visits the club despite the fact that, as she points out, "there's no baby to sit;" and Thomas (Don McKellar), the gay exotic animal smuggler, with a fetish for 'exotic' lovers, whom Francis blackmails into infiltrating Club Exotica in order to re-gain admittance once he has been barred. These marginal figures in the plot are pivotal inasmuch as they serve to maintain the masochistic structures set up by the protagonists. Also, and more importantly, all the characters in *Exotica* add up to a web of hegemonic relationality which is, by the end of the film, both queered and shown to be always already queer.

Club Exotica echoes the temporal confusion asserted by the masochistic denial of trauma, as does the narrative structure of the film. Memories (played out in the narrative as flashbacks) are not the exclusive property of specific individuals in *Exotica*, but rather flow into each and overlap between characters. Egoyan also accomplishes this through the use of music, which seems to play inappropriately at certain times during the film: Tracey's flute playing while babysitting will spill into a scene where Francis is watching a half-naked Christina dance on stage, the exotic strains of Club Exotica will overlap with Thomas's search for an exotic Other to accompany him to the ballet, etc. This indecipherability in terms of both the past and the present informs the way in which this film should be read. Flashbacks and soundtrack intersect neatly with the use of Leonard Cohen's "Everybody Knows," a song that foreshadows the revealed connected-ness of the entire cast of *Exotica* in the play of Francis's trauma. In the end, the club becomes a site of a queerly remembered

nation of sorts. Each of the characters in the film uses the club as the point from which to define their own identity, their manipulation of the past in order to secure some sort of coherent and livable present, and the position of that particular subjectivity in a wider web of relation and belonging. Each is also implicated in the trauma which has been mapped onto the space of Club Exotica, a memory which is played out through the witness not of the past, but of its concrete manifestation in the present.

The act of seeing in *Exotica* sets up a perpetual failure to adhere to the hegemonic constructs of national identification, one which is rooted here in the correlation of the gaze to the corporeal. To return briefly to Caruth's conception of traumatic history, she suggests that one link which can be made between history and the body stems from the inevitable betrayal of the past that results through witness: "the act of seeing, in the very establishing of a bodily referent, erases, like an empty grammar, the reality of an event. Within the insistent grammar of sight... the body erases the event of its own death" (29). This idea stems from what Caruth believes to be the difficulty in communicating history, a problematic that is caught up in the very act of seeing or, more precisely, the conceptual paradox of perspective. In order to suture the past into a knowable history, the reality of the associated events must be erased, effectively forgotten. Further, witness is the always necessary step by which that which is known is separated from the unknowable. This links with perspective inasmuch as seeing is inevitably based in the body, and thus speaks not to a universality, but to a particularity, a radical contingency that undermines any claim to 'truth.' Consequently, the seeing that is required in order to construct an understandable history is that which inevitably betrays the reality of the past that it references. This seems a particularly apt statement when considering the mesh of voyeuristic relations that exist in *Exotica*'s narrative.

From the opening shot of the film (after the credit sequence), we are told that this is a visual text that demands the audience to witness.[4] The gaze becomes a *question*, a vessel for the very questioning of hegemony, and its temporal immediacy is what ultimately shatters any notion of a direct relationality between the memory of trauma and national history. "You have to ask yourself what has brought the person to this point?" "What would happen if someone hurt you?" "Why would someone want to do something like that?" "If nobody asked you if you wanted to be brought into the world, the question is, now that you're here, who's asking you to stay?" These questions are the questions of history in the film, the questions of life versus death, the answers to which, as Caruth explains, "cannot simply be spoken... the possibility of this knowledge can only arise within the very act of its denial" (37). *Exotica* is thus implicated in an economy of seeing that echoes that of the nation: knowing and not knowing are allegorized in the film through the act of seeing and yet not seeing. More specifically, the voyeuristic basis of the film hides the irony that all the characters (and Francis in particular) spend the majority of the narrative attempting precisely *not to see that which compels them to look*. To paraphrase Caruth's analysis of *Hiroshima mon amour*, there is a temporal lapse between the 'when' of Lisa's death and the 'when' of seeing her body, "an unbridgable abyss, an inherent gap of knowing, within the very immediacy of sight, the moment of the other's death" (39). This is manifest in the film as a conflation of Christina's body with that of Lisa, a deliberate confusion between life and death that speaks (for Francis, for Eric, and indeed for Christina herself) to that gap between knowing and not knowing. By not knowing the moment of Lisa's death, *by not being able*

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[4]Thomas is being observed by a pair of customs officers through a two-way mirror as one tells the other: "You have to ask yourself what has brought the person to this point?" Clearly, Egoyan is challenging the audience to do the same, but the visual cues which accompany this phrase are such that we know that what we see may not in fact be reality. Looking continues to be important throughout the opening minutes of *Exotica*: The camera follows Christina into the club where it then pans off to observe the heavy atmosphere of the gaze: men watching the strippers dance, Eric watching the men, Zoe surveying the club (these last two activities often being accomplished through another set of two-way mirrors). This is continued throughout the film, with Zoe watching Eric watching Francis watching Christina, with Thomas enjoying the voyeuristic pleasure of his various exotic partners watching a ballet, and with the gaze being the medium of the real for Eric and Christina when they discover Lisa's body.

to assimilate into the structures by which he understands his identity, Francis has transformed his life into an endless search for her life. This is the essence of a melancholic subjectivity. The inability to fully assimilate the lost object signaled by the trauma is also echoed in Eric who, having witnessed Lisa's corpse without having known her life or death, transposes his insufficient capacity to move into a temporality beyond the shocking moment of sight onto Christina. Both men utilize her in order to reconcile the impossibility of the trauma into a masochistic cycle of pleasurable pain. In essence, Christina becomes the embodiment of the traumatic real. She does not, however, signal an exact replication of the moment of trauma, but rather, in a fashion consistent with Caruth's notion of traumatic history, is a shadow of the trauma, one which is known only in its return.

The look becomes a narrative tool for the elaboration of historical relations, one that functions primarily through its attachment to the body (be it Christina's erotic body, Zoe's pregnant body, or Lisa's dead body). Sight imposes a wholeness to the physical form, and thus enacts a corporeal forgetfulness which counters the fragmentation necessary for trauma to be remembered on the body. Francis watches Christina in order to remember his daughter's death, a clear refusal of forgetting that therefore positions him outside of history (his act of fantasy being a form of repression). His gaze is a refusal to see, a masochistic strategy that situates Christina's form as a fragmentation of Lisa's body, a shadow of the traumatic real. By frequenting Club Exotica night after night, Francis is acting out of the repetition compulsion, a performative cycle of failure that implicates the similar positionalities of Eric and Christina. For Eric, however, his static isolation from history becomes intolerable, and consequently he sets in motion a series of events that effectively forces the forgetfulness required to escape the masochistic oscillation of melancholia. Francis transgresses the boundaries of his own game when, at Eric's urging, he touches Christina, an act that signals the illusionary nature of his sight and which effectively represents a betrayal of his memory. Christina's body takes on a wholeness that disrupts his masochistic equilibrium and effectively erases his daughter's death by way of the actuality of

Christina's life. In short, Francis's violation of the rules of voyeurism represents his first true return to the trauma of his daughter's death, one that is played out corporeally. Christina is for the first time recognized as being distinct from Lisa, and this forces Francis to acknowledge the limitations of his symbolic memory and to thus step outside (he is literally thrown out) of the intoxicating reality he has constructed within the club and steps back into a historical narrative. This, in turn, triggers the breakdown of the intricate pattern he has set up in order to accommodate his remembering: Tracey confronts him as to the nature of "what we do" and Zoe explains to him that "we all know" and expresses concern over his strategy for dealing with his grief. Precisely, he realizes that "everybody knows." Despite his attempts to reassert his presence in the club (through the positioning of Thomas into his place), Francis ultimately abandons his memory, an act which is symbolically enacted by Eric's revelation that he is the one who found Lisa's body. The acknowledgment of their shared sight is where *Exotica* ends, an ambiguous end to a film that posits the inherent ambiguity of the hegemonic structures (history and the body) by which we figure ourselves into the nation.

In moving beyond a strict adherence to the plot of the film, it must be stated that the effectiveness of the corporeal in *Exotica* stems from its multivalent positioning within the narrative. Christina's body occupies multiple temporal positions simultaneously: she is a stripper in the present-tense, Eric's former lover with whom he discovered Lisa (in the shared flashbacks of the film), and the representative of Francis's dead daughter. This latter is important inasmuch as it positions her body as the return of the trauma which drives the historical narrative of the film. It is through her corporeality that the characters in *Exotica* experience the trauma of Lisa's death for the first time, but its distance from the initial explosion of the real situates her as an echo of the real, an imitation which is compulsively returned to in order to reconcile the horror of knowing with the calm of forgetting. Thus, she is pulled back and forth in the narrative between the positions of sexual object and corpse (both of whom wear the same uniform). In this way, Christina's body is variously an

impression of the trauma which constrains the symbolic structure of the narrative, a simultaneously direct and indirect link to the past, and a scandalous category that straddles multiple temporal identifications. This excessive meaning produces her as the embodiment of scandal, a subject that is capable of occupying multiple positionalities at once, adhering to none exclusively. As such, she demonstrates the always already impossible nature of hegemonic relations of history and identification. Her body works both to queer the hegemonic constructs to which the characters adhere in order to define their sense of belonging to a coherent whole and to reveal the innate contradictions of this system. Ultimately, then, Christina embodies the latent queerness of the subject-nation by way of its perverse application in the hierarchy of knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing.

The body as temporal scandal has specific ramifications for the economy of queer belonging that Egoyan sets up in his film. As is stated in the opening line of the film, nothing is as plainly evident as it might appear in *Exotica*. The relationality that is painstakingly constructed in the first half of the narrative is steadily unraveled in the last half as the connections between characters are gradually complicated by way of their visual relations to Christina's body as the site of trauma. The hegemony or understanding of the events in the film is demonstrated to be dirty; there are no clear boundaries in *Exotica* and meaning thus erupts and flows where it will. The film does not so much queer the link between trauma and history as it shows their always already queer relationship. This is mobilized through the witness of the scandalous body, one that cannot help but signal the impossibility of occupying a single polarity within the constructs of the normative subject-nation.

Admittedly, there is an inevitable circularity in this argument: the scandalous category queers the national hegemony because it illustrates the fundamental weaknesses of representation that arise in its contention of 'the many are one;' this, in turn, is an activity that is accomplished due to the always already queerness of the system, a system that employs difference in order to erect boundaries which, by their very genesis, are unable to cope with the excessive meaning of the national body. To say that we are perverting the

national structure is merely to point out the latent perversity that is intrinsic to the system. The queer nation is hence oxymoronic (as Savran has pointed out) because it signifies a unity which its functioning denies through the exposure of the inevitable impossibility of any coherence in symbolization. How, then, might we argue for a queer English Canadian subject-nation without this wheel-spinning that seems to plague any argument about identification? An appeal to the temporal matrix of identification, as opposed to the static construct of 'identity,' is certainly a good first step. Butler's contention that identity is a 'doing,' rather than an ontologically based 'being,' suggests a circular process that echoes the structure of the queer nation. An elaboration of this point, however, requires a return to a more rigidly psychoanalytic frame, one that I have, to some degree, displaced in this chapter.

The national subject is queer due to his or her divided nature, a split that is made evident through the reparative strategy that melancholic masochism provides. This queered subject-nation is the result of the pre-existing queerness of the system that produces it. The perversion chic films, in their elucidation of the innate contradictions of the national body, may thus be seen as potential tools for effecting social and political change. They may also, however, be read as addressing the deeper paradox of subjectivity in general. It is this that will be explored in the next chapter through the positing of death as the ultimate perversion of hegemony. Death, figured here as a self-destructive impulse or necrophilic desire, works against its representation in the loser paradigm by demonstrating its dynamic nature and its vitality in the functioning of consciousness, one that echoes the refigured view of perversion that has been explored in the past few chapters. In its intersection with sexuality in the perversion chic films, such a conceptualization of death becomes a potent metaphor for the psyche, one that signals not only the breakdown of the hegemonic structures of national identification, but the primordial psychic constructs which allow for subjectivity in the first place.

Chapter Six:

Self-Destruction/Desire: The Death Drive and the Masochistic National Subject

The perversion chic films examined in the last two chapters rely upon allegorical narratives of trauma and traumatic return in order to situate the national subject outside of the supposed stability of hegemony in favour of a space of radical indeterminacy. By positing both the nation and the national body as scandalous categories, ones that are situated in between the normative poles of hegemonic binaries, the structures of the dominant narrative of national belonging are effectively disintegrated. The melancholic and masochistic nature of such a ('border') existence suggests the impossibility of national coherence, one that is articulated in these films through the disruption of the historical narrative and the (re)construction of a queer and perverse national memory. English Canadian subjects perform their belonging to the nation through an ironic conceit by which they acknowledge the futility of any attempt to define the boundaries of the national body while simultaneously suturing this radical avowal of difference through the assertion of membership to this previously acknowledged 'impossible' structure. The excessive meaning released by this masochistic oscillation between identity poles is what underpins the creation of scandalous, third categories which straddle both ends of the oppositional dualisms, calling their structure into question. The trauma of history and the consequent impossibility of the nation thus enacts a radical upheaval of the hegemonic system of sense-making, one that signals the position occupied by the subject-nation as a site of extreme contingency.

The three films previously explored suggest a narrative that closely adheres to this model of the national subject. The insertion of trauma into the libidinal discourse on perverse sexuality constructs the body, existing as both a spatial and a temporal construct, as a scandalous category with the power to shift conventional understandings of national identification in new and important directions. In this chapter, the archetype of the melancholic, masochistic subject-nation will be pushed beyond the context of historical trauma and corporeality through the exploration of another, arguably related, category in

English Canadian film, namely, that of *death*. The coalition of discourses of death and sexuality, death and trauma, death and consciousness, speak to a more exact understanding of the psychic roots of the masochistic impulse, one that points to a fundamental split in human subjectivity which always already positions the subject as split and melancholic in its orientation. National *subjectivity* is thus, through a parallel argument, demonstrated to be foundationally queer. Importantly, it is this distinction that will distance my argument from that of the loser paradigm. Self-destruction and sexuality are aligned in these films, but not in a manner which pre-supposes the problematic constitution of the subject as inherently lacking the ability to maintain a position within dominant narratives of national belonging. Rather, I suggest that this coalition of representative taboos speaks to a queer national perspective, one rooted deeply in the structures of the psyche. The national subject thus remains marginalized, but this position becomes a valid point from which to articulate a queer national consciousness and new boundaries for the national body.

In *Kissed*, this will be illustrated though the elaboration of the scandal of necrophilia in the national narrative and the ways that this particular perversion incorporates trauma, as resulting from the presence of a self-destructive impulse (Freud's death drive), with the libidinal economy of the sexed and gendered national subject. It will be argued that the ironic conceit evident in the English Canadian national narrative is one that sutures over the primal forces of the Lacanian real in order to maintain the integrity of the imaginary ego. A similar process is to be found in *Crash*, although here the primordial masochism of the subject is centred adjacent to a sexual discourse, rather than implicated directly in it. In this last film, it will be shown that the rebellion of the unexpressed energies of the real against the illusionary coherence of the ego stands as the primary motivating force behind the particularities of the perversion chic canon, and, in the end, demonstrates their own inevitable failure in the attempt to displace the hegemonic constructions of the nation. The greatest scandal of perversion is not that it stands outside of normative structures of meaning, but rather that it is itself the means by which they are sutured into place within

national subjectivity. In the end, then, perversion chic merely reasserts the masochistic cycle of ironic conceit that maintains English Canada as ultimately divided and marginal.

"I've Seen Bodies Shining Like Stars..."
Death, Desire, and the (Real) Scandal of Necrophilia

Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* is a film which provides a critique of dominant gender relations, one that opens a space in which marginal sexuality might be employed in order to comment on Canada as nation. Rejecting the representative strategy of portraying Canadian males as fundamentally lacking, Stopkewich utterly subverts this convention through its deliberate exaggeration, taking the loser paradigm to its inevitable end-point: the female protagonist in *Kissed* insists that her male sexual partners embody the ultimate lack -- "they have to be dead, or she's just not interested" (Parpart 1999: 259). Based on the short story by Barbara Gowdy, *Kissed* follows the life of Sandra (Molly Parker), a young woman whose childhood obsession with death flowers into full-fledged necrophilia by the time she enters adulthood. The majority of the film follows her tumultuous relationship with Matt (Peter Outerbridge) as they both attempt to come to grips with her unusual sexual perversity (Sandra comments at one point that necrophiliacs are not supposed to be women) and the effect that this has on her physical relationship with her very-much alive lover. Matt in many ways adheres to the feminized male stereotype of the loser paradigm, proving unable to compete sexually with Sandra's dead lovers, a fact which ultimately leads him to suicide. He explains his actions through the pathetic acknowledgment of his own inadequacy in her eyes: "You don't [love me]... but you will." The importance of *Kissed*, however, lies not in its ostensibly feminist critique of the conception of a masculine/phallic order in English Canada, nor in the suggestion that the national body parallels the dead body, but in its ability to transcend the very categories that the director has consciously reversed. The act of necrophilia figures powerfully within national narratives, its sheer excessiveness surpassing any examined in the previous chapter. *Kissed* delves into the realm of the abject through the

coalition of desire and death, moving beyond issues of gender and sexuality per se. In this way, it speaks, through parallel structures, to the foundations of the masochistic positionality of the national subject and demonstrates the collective ramifications of this neurosis when it is used to critique the hegemonic structures of national identity. In the end, the perverse power of *Kissed* lies not in its position outside the Canadian mainstream, but in its horrific inclusiveness. The necrophile body figures as an allegorical representation of the national body, one that works to paint the nation itself as a scandalous category.

Kissed, much like *Lilies*, enacts the reversal of several normative constructions of gender and sexuality. These are performed through the nexus of the necrophilic act, and through their intersection with this larger perversity they work to re-figure desire into a third, scandalous category. Lee Parpart argues that "Sandra remakes the (heterosexual) female look in ways that directly threaten the dominant fiction by falling *outside* the binaries of active and passive, feminine and masculine, controlling and compliant, that serve as the dominant fiction's points of reference" (267). She is, admittedly, clearly aligned with a masculine subjectivity, one where she takes a dominant role in those sexual encounters she finds most satisfying (in other words, those which do not include Matt). Stopkewich has herself remarked as to her intentionality in this manner:

> I wanted to empower her gaze from a sexual standpoint, which is why whenever it's her point of view, she's always looking at a dead guy ... You see [scopic rules] in courtship rituals, where the man is always the one with a "penetrating gaze" while the woman "averts her eyes in a coquettish way." ... It's embedded in the language we use about looking. I wanted that to be completely turned around. (qtd. in Parpart 264-265)

In her love-making to the various corpses in the film, Sandra is granted the phallic power of the dominant (male) partner in heterosexual intercourse, "performing a ritualistic dance around the embalming table, crawling up on their bodies, and somehow affecting a form of cunnilingus" (Parpart 263). This is contrasted to her sexual encounters with Matt where she

is determined to play the passive role, lying beneath him and enacting the positionality of and thus a narcissistic identification with her dead lovers. Thus Sandra's perverse necrophilia is seen to embrace a host of other, lesser perversions: the phallically-empowered woman and the feminized male being the primary among these. It is here that *Kissed* most clearly transcends the very identificatory binaries that it seeks to simply reverse, and where necrophilia is demonstrated to be a scandalous third term, one which is both the result and the cause of masochistic relays of desire between oppositional poles in the binary structures of identification. Necrophilia in *Kissed* breaks down the apparently concrete barriers between dualistic terms, revealing them as dirty and thus permeable. More than this, however, Sandra's necrophile body proves to be unable to contain the surplus of meaning generated in this process. Sexual desire bleeds into other realms of desiring, forcing the re-conceptualization of the very hegemonic structures that attempt to suture it into place within the narrative of nation.

Necrophilia is a profoundly perverse deployment of the libido inasmuch as it constructs a volatile connection between the apparently contradictory discourses of desire and death. This in some ways echoes the paradoxical position that the death drive occupies in the human psyche. Richard Boothby, in his reading of Lacan's re-reading of Freud, suggests that

> From a Lacanian point of view, the source of what Freud called a "death drive" is to be located in the tension between the real and the imaginary, between "the real of the body and the imaginary of its mental schema." The pressing towards [symbolic] expression of somatic energies alienated by imaginary identification constitutes a force of death insofar as it threatens the integrity of that identity. (1991: 67)

The imaginary ego is constructed during Lacan's mirror phase through the *exclusion* of a vast spectrum of psychic energies in favour of a project that attempts to image the body in a coherent fashion, one which reflects the *image* of an other. The mirror phase, according to de Lauretis, establishes "an ego constituted by narcissistic, self-aggrandizing impulses and in

the *mis*recognition of its own mortality, its division, its subjection to the symbolic, its utter dependence on the other, its ever-present death drive" (1998: 875). Boothby views this process as profoundly *alienating* "not just because it is modeled on an other outside the subject but because imaginary identification somehow *splits* the subject from itself" (47, my emphasis). In other words, the ego is formed through a process of *the radical separation of the self from the self*. This suggests far deeper motivations for the masochism of the subject-nation, ones which move beyond the melancholic internalization of the lost object.

Melancholia, and desire more generally, is deeply ambivalent in nature. Teresa de Lauretis argues that "there is not only love but also hatred toward the one who has abandoned or betrayed us" (875). This ambivalence, this combination of love and hate, is what connects the masochism that results from the introjection of the lost object, and the subsequent splitting of the ego, with the death instinct. Freud argued that the aggressive or sadistic impulse is a manifestation of the death drive "which is initially directed toward the ego and subsequently redirected towards others" (de Lauretis 876). In melancholia, de Lauretis contends, "the ego's sadism regresses onto the ego itself (in the form of secondary masochism, as distinct from primary, erotogenic masochism)" (876). This primordial form of masochism both echoes the reflexive masochism of the national subject and moves beyond it in its referencing of *the real*. That which is refused through the constitution of the imaginary ego is the Lacanian real, what Julia Kristeva (1982) refers to as the uncanny or the unthinkable:

> I become a *subject* capable of dealing with *objects* only by virtue of having constituted a domain of the *abject*. Thus "refuse and corpses *show me* what I have permanently thrust aside in order to live." But what threatens to emerge from the real is ultimately a part of oneself, one's own refuse, one's own corpse. (Boothby 65)

The realm of the abject is that place where the subject relegates that which would signal the complication or destruction of his or her 'identity.' The abject thus fuels the aggressivity of

the subject, but does so through an internal rather than external force. Boothby characterizes the drive towards death as a rebellion of the subject against the ego, one which stems from the relation of the ego to the self: "It is the ego itself that is frustrating" (45). Thus, "narcissistic aggressivity is first of all a response not to a social but an internal conflict" (Boothby 45). The intra-subjective struggle between the containment of the ego and the unbound energy of the id (symbolized by the abjected body) is what proves to be the foundation of the masochistic impulse of the subject. It is not, however, a defensive posturing enacted "when the loss of an ideal threatens the unity of the self" (as might be suspected when a connection with Butler's performativity is made) but rather is a complete rejection of the idea of a unified self: "Aggressivity is a drive toward violation of the imaginary form of the body [the *imago*] that models the ego" (Boothby 39). Hence its specific linkage in fantasy to "violations of bodily integrity" and abjected images of fragmentation, ones that represent "the most primitive expression of the coming-into-being of the subject against the constraints of its imaginary identity" (Boothby 40). In other words, the death drive seeks to *unbind* the ego. Primordial masochism is a hatred of what the ego represents, and may thus be aligned with the self-hatred of the national masochistic subject. Both stand as responses to an identity ideal that can only ever connote failure, and both are struggles to uphold normative structures in the face of a terrible real. Necrophilia, in this instance, is another form of national masochism, a parallel in function to the melancholic neurosis, one which results from the productive lack embodied in the hegemonic systems of understanding and that fights to overthrow the very constraints that force its conception to begin with.

The death drive, notwithstanding its ultimate goal of the complete destruction of the ego, is perversely pleasurable in its functioning. Freud used it as the conceptual basis for explaining the repetition compulsion, a traumatically-based neurosis in which the imaginary ego of the subject "scans over and over again the contours of the traumatizing event in an effort to contain it in a repaired *Gestalt*" (Boothby 93). The melancholic subject performs

this repetition in order to contain the excessiveness of the introjected lost object and to reassert control over a split subjectivity. This repetition hides, however, the urge for the release of the psychic energies of the real and the destruction of the imaginary ego. The death drive is a source of pleasure inasmuch as it signals the reduction of all psychic tensions to zero (the Nirvana principle) rather than their regulation at a constant, functional level. Boothby explains:

> it is not the traumatic event in and of itself that is desired... Nevertheless, the trauma is repeated insofar as it negatively "represents" a force of desire excluded by the ego that otherwise remains wholly unsymbolized. What the traumatic neurotic finds in repetition of the trauma is, as it were, an "opportunity" for overcoming the restrictive and alienating form of the ego. (90)

We are returned, therefore, to the struggle between the real and the ego as the basis for the masochistic impulse of the subject, regardless of where this neurosis is generated. The national subject is thus intrinsically bound up with the functioning of the death drive. It is this point that necrophilic desire, as a narrative tool, most dramatically illustrates.

The death drive links itself with the aggressive tendencies of the subject through its inherent connection with self-destruction: violence against an externalized object is symptomatic of violence against the self and the desire for the eradication of the imaginary ego. Necrophilia, with its uneasy alignment of the death instinct and the pleasure principle, reverses this process by turning self-destruction into a narcissistic desire for the subject's own image as object. This parallels the homoerotic object choice, but does not imply the homosexual object as the final destination of the libido. While in homosexuality the narcissistic desire is for an imaginary other who echoes the traits of the ego, in necrophilia desire is directed towards an object that reflects not the imaginary ego, but the real which seeks its expression within the field of the symbolic. In essence, the necrophile turns his or her libidinal energy towards a representative of the abject, the literalization of Kristeva's mutilated body, the "invisible face of the real" (Boothby 90) that is expressed through the

ultimate lack, namely, death. In this way, the necrophilic impulse is correlated with the self-destructive drive through a series of convoluted steps: desire for an object that symbolizes the unexpressed real of the psyche, the real being that which can only lead to the disintegration of the imaginary ego via the release of unbounded psychic energy into the illusionary coherence of consciousness. Thus, necrophilia must be seen as emblematic of the aims of the death drive, aims which are inherently masochistic in nature (albeit on a primordial level).

Necrophilia as it is expressed in *Kissed*, however, also aligns itself with a series of identificatory reversals which parallel those of the divided psyche of the national subject. The reversals of both gender and sexuality lay claim to a masochism that works entirely within the context of a self-contained ego. The ultimate perversion played out in the narrative of the film is hence one which directly references Savran's reflexive masochist, one rooted in the melancholic introjection of an ambivalently lost object of desire, and not necessarily those of Freud's deeper, primordial masochism. While structured in similar ways, these two forms of masochistic pleasure and pain are disparate in their causational foundations and in their ultimate goals. One seeks the destruction of the ego, while the other pursues the reification of the illusion that holds the ego together in the first place. How, then, might these two forms of masochism be correlated into a clear picture of the psychic workings of a necrophilic impulse that speaks to both the alignment of death and desire and the inherently perverse nature of the imaginary ego of the subject? As explained above, it is through the self-destructive impulse that masochism is linked so that even the melancholic incorporation of a lost object becomes a rebellion against the restrictive imagery of the ego. A way of getting at this in the context of necrophilia might be to consider the shared root of these perversions (masochism and necrophilia), namely, the reversal of hegemonic categories of identification, the re-centering of the marginal term or the abject, and then to spin this commonality out to their unequivocal relation to the construction of a scandalous, in-between category that positions itself outside of the hegemony of the nation.

While the end result of both forms of masochism differs significantly, they might be shown to work in conjunction with each other in the overthrow of conventional understandings of hegemonic identification (an obvious if not unproblematic parallel to the ego). Reflexive sadomasochism suggests that the polarity of dominant and peripheral terms within the binary relation of identity positionalities is that which necessitates the split of the national subject and leads to the eventual breakdown of the structure which underpins it. Savran's masochistic subject alternates between masculine and feminine poles because he or she is unable to reconcile them into a singular and coherent whole within the ego. The primordial masochist similarly moves between positionalities, but on a much deeper level. The onslaught of the real against the imaginary ego does not line up as clearly on the binary scale of centre-periphery relations, but the characterization of the real as the abject invokes the familiar metaphor nonetheless. What might be suggested here then is that once the reflexive masochism of the subject reverses the terms of gender as they found the nation, a space is opened up where the real might enter and begin the dismantling of the ego as a whole. The masochistic national subject thus functions in a uniform fashion on both levels: the inherent split of national subjectivity signals the need for a reparative strategy, one which does not, in the end, result in the sought after wholeness, but rather signals the innate failure of the ego to fully contain difference, thus allowing the real to explode into the centre through the trope of the abject and work to re-figure the very structures of bound psychic energy that prompt the perverse division in the first place. In both instances, this results in the construction of new, scandalous categories that attempt to account for the excessive meaning released in the dissolution of the binary infrastructure of hegemony. Necrophilia is such a category, one that reflects and refracts the problematics of hegemonic forms of identification.

To restate the obvious, necrophilia is a perversion that constructs an unlikely (at least in terms of conventional reasoning) connection between sexuality and death. It is a third, in-between category whose excessive meaning straddles both identifications, forcing the

rearticulation of one in relation to the other, and vice versa. A less spectacular, and hopefully more accessible example of this might be the insertion of AIDS into the narrative of mainstream sexuality over a decade ago. Like necrophilia, AIDS is insinuated as an excessive category that links sex and death. This linkage is accomplished through the multitude of images that AIDS invokes, namely, those of the diseased body and the sexual predator, all clearly symbols of Kristeva's conception of the abjected real. Despite attempts to contain these images within well-established modes of identification such as homosexuality generally or the white gay male specifically, the excessiveness of AIDS easily crossed normative representative boundaries and spilled into other poles of the hegemonic binary -- it could not be maintained as simply a gay disease, a fact evident in the change of the syndrome's name from GRID to AIDS -- and thus enacted the radical breakdown of the structure of identification itself. AIDS is a scandalous category that functions from its in-between positionality to shape the representation of all identifications that come into contact with it. 'Sex' becomes 'safe sex,' 'death' becomes 'living with AIDS' or 'HIV positive.' These new categories, the result of a re-patching together of the fragments of a shattered hegemonic view of the world, also proved to be scandalous as they transcended old boundaries of understanding (particularly the divisions between homosexual and heterosexual, but also those between gender, race, class, and even nation), effectively demonstrating the flimsy structures that underpin identity. The intrusion of AIDS into the narratives of sex and death resulted in new systems of meaning construction and understanding, ones forced through the illustration of the innate 'dirtiness' of hegemony itself.

From this example, we might access the point at which the differing perversions of reflective and primordial masochism intersect in the scandalous category of necrophilia and how this in turn effects the hegemonic understandings of subject-nation through the radical explosion of the real into the centre of identification. In *Kissed*, the necrophilic act is the narrative instance where reversed gender and sex binaries are broken down and the

masochistic oscillation between the poles of each is erased through the traumatic intrusion of the real into the narrative of the film. Boothby explains that "the real can be approached only obliquely; it is representable *only negatively* in the dehiscence of the imaginary":

> The real never appears as such (it is impossible, says Lacan) but rather erupts, like a burst of gases from a ruptured pipe, in images of the *corps morcele*, the body in bits and pieces. It is in this way that the real of desire is elicited by the shattering experience of trauma. In the trauma, we encounter the invisible face of the real. (90-91)

The real is again aligned with the horror of the abject, a trope which speaks accurately of its relationality within the psyche. *Kissed*, however, presents the real in a manner which somewhat contradicts Boothby's assertions about the negatively-figured face of the real, assertions which are in fact reflected both in the spectacle of AIDS and in the traumatic trope as seen in the films of the previous chapter. For Sandra, her moment of necrophilic orgasm is an instance where hegemony is *transcended*, if only for a moment. Her 'crossing over' is an obvious reference to both near-death experiences (the bright white light) and to a religious semiology of transcendence and conversion (having 'seen the light'). The morbid, decomposing corpse is transformed into a vessel of beauty, radiating an energy ("I've seen bodies shining like stars...") that surrounds her and proves to the source of pleasure in an act which signals an innate drive towards self-destruction. Nowhere is there reference to the abject that so often signifies the real in narrative imagery. Instead, the re-centering of the real is a moment of release and joy, the reduction of all psychic tensions to zero without the accompanying death and lack that Freud contends is intrinsic to the Nirvana principle. In other words, Sandra's physical identification with the abjected lack of the corpse is a way to move away from the ultimate goal of the death drive and to incorporate it into her subjectivity without rupturing the imaginary ego.

While necrophilia is hence a moment of transcendence of both the ego and hegemony, it proves to be a temporary one. The scandal of necrophilia is not a new form of

identification which might be used as a model in the reshaping of the subject-nation, but rather stands as a strategy which echoes Keohane's notion of ironic conceit. On the embalming table, Sandra beckons towards the real, towards the point at which hegemony might be pushed aside. She revels in the possibilities of the real and the impossibility of the imaginary narrative that the ego employs in an attempt to suture over it. The intrusion of the real at her moment of orgasm, however, is followed by her quick retreat from the sheer excessiveness of what she desires, a re-suturing over of everything that her act releases. Like the English Canadian subject then, Sandra admits the impossibility of her position with a hegemony of belonging (to a gender, a sexuality, a nation) only to disavow it once she comes too close to the realization of the radical lack of structure and understanding that follows such an acknowledgment. This performance of the English Canadian subject relationship to lack references the reaction of the imaginary ego upon its encounter with the unbounded energy released by the excessive stimuli of a trauma. Boothby claims that "the trauma, far from bringing about a complete disintegration of the ego, elicits a regressive re-entrenchment of the ego's defenses along the fault lines laid down by the traumatizing experience" (92). In short, the ego struggles against the onslaught of the real by performatively re-enacting the imago, the very image of unity that the real seeks to displace. The trauma thus triggers the masochistic process by which the subject moves back and forth between positions of dominance and marginality, a process made possible by the foundational split of the ego from the self. National subjectivity functions in the same manner within the symbolic by both admitting and then simultaneously disavowing the impossibility of the real. In *Kissed*, Sandra's 'crossing-over' stands as the moment at which these competing impulses intersect, allowing the real to enjoy a split-second in the centre. Sandra, however, cannot integrate the real into meaning structures that constrain her, and thus she retreats from this temporary transcendence of a hegemonically constructed, and thus illusionary, coherence. She does not escape this experience unscathed, however, as she finds herself occupying the position of Other within a scandalous category.

Sandra's ability to 'cross-over' positions her within the national narrative as Keohane's marginal Other who suggests the possibility of mobility and escape from the hegemony of national membership. As the embodiment of a perverse subjectivity, she is shown to be emblematic of a scandalous, third category, one which moves beyond the constraints of normative notions of gender, sexuality, and death. This position is, however, in the end demonstrated to be the illusion that it is because she too refuses the avowal of the real in favour of a suturing over of the excessiveness that it brings, returning instead to a performative cycle of failure in which she attempts to adhere to normative identifications (exemplified by her repeated attempts to enjoy intercourse with Matt). This return to the norm, however, only works to shatter the very structures that she apes in order to counter her perversity, and in the end she always returns to the position of Otherness due to her inability to fully adhere to the restrictions of the categories she mimics. More than this, the fact that Sandra finds pleasure in her perverse relations with lack (the corpses) and that this signals her contact with the real paints the scandalous nature of necrophilia in a new light. Her performance of ironic conceit does not transcend the boundaries of English Canadian membership (although her position outside of the norm does serve to reinforce the inclusive limits of this term), but rather works to illustrate the Otherness inherent in the Canadian subject-nation as a whole. We are a perverse, masochistic nation, one which may in fact be termed a scandalous category within the larger, global hegemonic system of nationality. *Kissed* speaks to the impossibility of Canada in an ultimately inclusive, rather than exclusive, manner. Sandra's acts of perversion signal a lapse of memory that both remembers and forgets the functioning of the real in the national narrative. Despite the radical difference of the necrophile body, it effectively allegorizes the nation, moving the scandalous category of perversity into the Canadian mainstream, the mainstream of a marginal nation.

The masochism evident in Sandra's performance of the necrophilic act is allegorical, not oppositional, within the national narrative of English Canada. Like the specific perversity of the film, the nation forces the reversal of identity dualisms through an innate

Otherness, an Otherness which also reinforces the re-centred difference that makes its position as a divided, masochistic construct possible in the first place. The death drive is thus that which underpins the Canadian lack that plagues our search for a unique (and 'stable') identity in the face of more apparently cohesive nationalisms. The collective imago of nation, the imaginary coherence constructed through an appeal to normative structures of understanding, cannot fully contain the unbound differences of the national body, and in the struggle to do so it splits the national consciousness and inaugurates a cycle of masochistic pleasure and pain, the oscillation between competing identity positionalities. The named (albeit under-theorized) perversion of *Kissed*, however, distracts from this larger symbolic purpose due both to its sheer excessiveness and spectacularity and its grounding within the binary structures which make its manifestation in this film possible. The film can still be read as an oppositional marker that serves to uphold normative conceptions of centre-periphery relations, despite the fact that it clearly gestures towards the symbolic expression of the real of the nation (as all representations of scandalous categories might arguably do). In *Crash*, this limitation is overcome to some degree in the same way that the perversion chic films counter their reading through the loser paradigm. The spectacular nature of the masochism in Cronenberg's film paints a scandalous category in such a way as to exceed the libidinal context and thus explores the issues of an inherently divided and perverse subjectivity and the resulting primordial masochism in a more direct fashion. This apparent coherence, however, cannot mask the evidence which points to a certain futility which is exposed when we consider the scandalous category. The real can never be avowed within the national consciousness, begging the question of how any narrative might then work to move beyond the hegemonic structures of understanding set up by the imaginary ego.

Sex and Car Crashes: The Abjected (National) Body and the Scandalous Suture

The power of scandalous categories lies in their not being completely positioned outside of normative systems of meaning, thus drawing the horror of the abject into the

comfort of the mainstream. In this way, the construction of a new category of meaning is able to effect a profound destabilization of existing hegemonic structures of identification. However, this apparent subversion risks being romanticized as the solution to the problem of English Canadian identity and its foundation in a discourse of lack. The scandalous category cannot be said to destroy hegemonic structures because it is in fact a strategy by which the ego works to reassert its power upon the intrusion of the real into a narrative. Although it shakes the concept of binaristic systems of identification to their core, it also sutures over the real, thus effectively leaving the ego in place, battered, but not erased. Contact with the real is always traumatic for the subject, and hence cannot exist in the symbolic realm without the complete annihilation of that order. In *Crash*, we see this much more clearly than in the previous film, mainly because it moves outside of the libidinal context to address the issue of masochism in its root manifestation as the conflict between the imaginary ego and the real. Death is aligned much less literally with sexuality than it is in *Kissed*, and this in turn showcases the inherent contradictions of embracing the death instinct over the pleasure principle and the subsequent construction of scandalous matrices of identification.

More than any other film under examination here, *Crash* exemplifies the primordial masochistic impulse imbedded in the hegemonic model of Canadian national belonging. The five central characters struggle to assert control and definition to a contemporary existence which defies coherence, and which in fact rebels against the very notion that a unity of definition is possible. Perversion in *Crash* takes many forms, from the overt representation of difference manifested in Vaughan's 'project' to the more familiar tropes of homosexuality, drag, adultery, and the characteristic Cronenberg obsession with alternative-orifice intercourse (as is more clearly evident in his later film, *eXistenZ* [1999]). The alignment of sexual perversion, technology, and the compulsive repetition of past traumas, however, points towards a narrative that does more than simply re-centre difference in a critique of existing categories of identification. Instead, *Crash* speaks to the masochism of the subject-nation, one that stems from the intrusion of the death drive into narratives of erotic desire.

The ever-present possibility of the real serves as the motivation behind the inexplicably perverse behaviour witnessed in this film, but unlike *Kissed*, this positions itself outside of the realm of the purely sexual in favour of a discourse that more accurately gestures towards the potentialities of the scandalous category.[1] Sex and death are aligned in an *explosive* fashion, working at cross-purposes to re-figure that which is never directly referenced but which is underpinned by the hegemonic categories that perversion chic destabilizes: the nation.

David Cronenberg occupies a paradoxical position within the Canadian film community. It has been said of Cronenberg that

> between the continuing reluctance of traditionalists to make a place in the pantheon for anyone whose principle identifying feature is the habit of depicting gooey inner body parts, and the emphasis of truly Canadian cinema partisans on a more culturally pure, less commercial genre, Cronenberg does not actually *fit* anywhere very comfortably. (Beard 1992-1993: 169)

Indeed, Cronenberg has been instrumental in the creation of a unique genre of Canadian film that manages to parallel the precarious position of the Canadian nation as standing *in-between* worlds (in this case, between the commercial realm of Hollywood movies and a purist conception of a Canadian art cinema). Arguably, this is the position that all films belonging to the perversion chic cycle occupy. This inability to define firmly the boundaries of belonging in terms of his work also informs Cronenberg's approach to difference. Firmly situating herself against theorists such as Beard who view Cronenberg as the embodiment of

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[1] In *Crash*, the necrophilic impulse is present, but it is clearly *not* necrophilia. Despite its greater ramifications, the narrative of *Kissed* still functions within the confines of a libidinal discourse, desire in the film clearly aligned with a gendered and sexualized desire. Death and desire are correlated in the same way in *Crash*, but gone are the neat reversals of sexed and gendered categories. This begs the question: what makes necrophilia *necrophilia* rather than simply an elaborate manifestation of a primal masochism? The lack of theorizing on this topic, combined with the limits of this particular project, demand that this important question remain unanswered. Through the exploration of *Crash*, however, it is hoped that significant differences between these two distinct narratives will be highlighted, pointing to potential avenues of exploration in the future.

the loser paradigm, Christine Ramsay states that his body of work is "clearly about boundaries -- about the borders that have been established to keep separate what are in fact the dialectical, enabling conditions of mind/body, male/female, rational/irrational, conscious/unconscious" (1996: 84). This is not to say that Cronenberg's interests lie solely on the marginal term in each of these binaries (an apparent weakness of some of the other films under examination here). Instead, he tends to focus on that which causes the hegemonic borders of each term to dissolve into the other, forcing identity as it is conventionally understood to collapse and a new model to be conceived. Ramsay describes this representational space as

> where the true fragility and lawlessness of the human body exposes itself -- where destruction, death, decay, murder, suicide, sacrifice, bodily orifices and wastes, genitalia, sex, perversion, and incest loom. This is the place where meaning collapses, where the (male) self as a secure and integrated thinking subject faints away because rational identity, system, and order are disturbed, and borders, positions, and rules for daily living are no longer respected. (86)

Cronenberg's imagery is that of the abject: the fragmented, violated body that signals the terrifying impossibility of the real and its inability to be incorporated into the imaginary ego. Marcie Frank suggests that Cronenberg's protagonists present notions of unity and contradiction, "are at once separate and unified, different and the same" (1991: 460), ones which echo the workings of a scandalous category of identification, one that lies in-between the regimented polarity of hegemonic positionalities. Cronenberg subverts the hegemonic rules of identity, shifting our view from what is easily seen to that which might not want to be acknowledged. In this way, his films are exemplary queer texts, focusing as they do on the gaps within the current system of identification. They also serve to illustrate the dirtiness of the boundaries that attempt to re-assert order in the face of the abjected real. Binaries are broken down and discarded because the excessive meaning generated by the forcible intrusion of the real into the lens of the camera only serves to illustrate the porousness of the

lines that conventional narratives of identity draw. Significantly, this is often accomplished by the re-direction of sexual desire into areas which most accurately reference Silverman's ideas pertaining to perversion as a narrative tool. In short, Cronenberg puts sex to work in a way that has nothing to do with sexuality.

In *Crash*, Cronenberg continues his assault on stable masculine identity positions through the careful equation of sexuality with death. Like many of his earlier films (*They Came from Within* [1975], *Rabid* [1977], *Videodrome* [1982], and *Dead Ringers* [1988]), he uses the image of technology in order to demonstrate the fragility of the human body and from here he extrapolates to the human condition (a pattern which he seamlessly carries into *eXistenZ*). As Ramsay argues, there is no separation possible in a Cronenberg film: the mind and body are intimately linked -- what affects one can only impact on the other.[2] It is here that the death drive intrudes on his narrative. The characters in *Crash* performatively enact the primordial masochistic impulse through the collusion of sex and violent injury and death, one that echoes that of the necrophiliac as it aligns self-destruction with desire. Ramsay suggests that "this violence is testimony to the very real fact of the *fragility* of masculine identity, which must be disavowed at all costs in order to preserve the dominant cultural fantasy of male omnipotence" (89), a fact which would seem in line with the view of divided national masculinity explored by Savran and Silverman. This argument, in turn, might be expanded to speak of the masculine *body*, and its fragility within the imaginary landscape of the ego.

While the drive towards violence and death may be read as the literalization of the behaviour of the reflexive sadomasochist, an attempt to reconcile the innate contradictions

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[2]Ramsay alludes to a deep criticism, evident in many of his films, of Cartesian dualism. Cronenberg, in essence, makes the postmodern assertion that the lines of demarcation between mind and body are hardly self-evident, and that, in fact, they are as dirty and obscure as those which divide the arguably more accessible categories of gender and sexuality. Moving away from a postmodern discourse, however, this argument also speaks to a conception of the Lacanian psyche, where the mental image of the body (the imago) is inadequate inasmuch as it is rooted in the *imaginary*. The ego is consequently always already lacking, which prompts the inherent division of the subject and masochistic tendencies of the psyche.

that exist within a national subjectivity rooted in concepts of phallic empowerment, *Crash* exceeds this interpretation and instead articulates a far deeper criticism of the nation, one stemming from the very nature of hegemony. The blatant masochism of the characters in this film works to displace the regime of corporeality imposed in the mirror phase of psychic development, allowing the unbound energy of the real to intrude *physically* into the symbolic order. The violence of their various performances, all elaborate manifestations of a suicidal desire, clearly reflects the paradoxical nature of the aggressive impulse inherent in the death drive, one where a blow to an externalized object is in fact a blow to one's own ego. In *Crash*, the mutilation and destruction of the body speaks to the ultimate disintegration of the imago: the characters subject their morphology to the same punishment that they are inflicting on their apparently coherent psyches. In this way, the externalized object is more often than not their own corporeal forms, bringing the relationship of desire to death into a stark, new relief.

Vaughan at first claims that his 'project' is to explore the re-shaping of the human body through its intersection with technology. Despite his later argument to the contrary, this stands as an important aspect of how *Crash* represents the national subject as primordially masochistic and inherently conflicted. The project, which permeates the films both through the behaviour of the characters and the frequent references to past traumas (the re-enactment of the James Dean and Jane Mansfield car crashes and Vaughan's obsession with the recording of roadside accidents and injuries) insinuates a postmodern conception of the body where subjectivity is inextricably caught up in discourses of the corporeal, each serving as a reflection and refraction of the other. Contrary to scholars such as Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (and, to some degree, Butler) who argue that "the (natural) body in the postmodern condition has *already* disappeared, and what we experience as the body is only a fantastic simulacra of body rhetorics" (1987: 21-22), the encounter of the body with technology does not serve to disembody identity, or to sever the body from the matrices of identification, but rather serves to signal the radical re-centering of the corporeal

in subjectivity. This is not to argue for a morphological essentialism, but rather to reassert the importance of the body in any consideration of the divided psyche. The masochistic split in the English Canadian subject is one which must always be brought back to corporeality, as it is here that it might be most clearly grasped and its potential realized. In *Crash*, the body is demonstrated to be a reflection of the rebellion of the real against the imago and the ego. The abjected body is positioned against the imaginary body as an alternative identity ideal, one that strives towards the desires of the masochistic (and necrophilic) national subject, not for stability and coherence within the ego but rather for its ultimate destruction. This produces the body itself as a scandalous, in-between category, one that is as much a reflection of the psychic battle being waged within as it is a weapon to be deployed in the struggle against hegemony.

Manuel Camblor suggests that "*Crash*, though it does not invent a 'new language of desire,' clearly aims to produce a drastic uncertainty in the old one which translates into a destabilization of the ego as conditioned by the traditional narrative fiction film" (1999: 3). This is accomplished through the centering of the death drive as the primary motivator in discourses of desire throughout the film. This is supported by Kelly Hurley who explains that the fundamental joke of a Cronenberg film is that "though it negotiates so smoothly within the discursive field of sexuality, it isn't much concerned with sex (at least, sex as we know it!)" (1995: 215). It is not the multitude (and multifarious) displays of coitus which are the loci of sexual desire in this film -- it is the car crashes. Engaging in a narrative of metonymic desire, Vaughan's seemingly interminable sexual appetite is undermined by his quest for an understanding of the "benevolent psychopathology" of modern society (the second definition of his enigmatic 'project'). He explains: "The car crash is a fertilizing rather than destructive event -- a liberation of sexual energy mediating the sexuality of those that died with an intensity which is impossible in any other form. To experience that, to live that, that is... that's my project." Death stands in for sexual gratification, revealing a far more profound statement on the perverse nature of the divided English Canadian psyche. As

demonstrated in *Kissed* (and in a narrative which closely echoes Sandra's 'crossing over' experience), the pleasure derived from the masochistic pursuit results not from the satisfaction of libidinal desires, but through the release of the real into the symbolic. It is perhaps more appropriate, then, to discuss Cronenberg's films as exploring "economies of wanting, of appetite and drive, rather than economies of desire" (Hurley 215). The violence of the desires expressed in *Crash* echo the aggressive nature of the death instinct, effectively reconfiguring libido into self-destruction and suicidal tendencies. Desiring energy is thus employed in the project of murdering of the ego or, as Camblor states it: "'Violence' focuses here directly on the symbolic practice (the configuration of given forms of 'understanding') that results in the constitution of the ego" (3). This focusing of sexual desire outside of the realm of sexuality is written on the bodies of the characters in *Crash*.

The body in *Crash* comes to be imbued with the properties of the real. Camblor explains that, in a striking parallel to the formative perversity of the psyche, "Cronenberg has dealt in bizarre variations upon the theme of modern man grappling with the horror of *extreme alienation*; twisted mutations of the human psyche and, ultimately, of the human body, are the inevitable outcome..." (4, emphasis added). The abjection of the body must be viewed as a reflection and result of the psychic turmoil that results from the alienation of the subject from the self. The masochism that drives the subject to struggle to reassert the primacy of the ego in the face of the real manifests itself physically in Crash through broken bones, scars, and wounds. The body is violated and fragmented, so that it comes to resemble the very image of that which can never safely (or sanely) be avowed. Camblor articulates this fascination in *Crash* through the lens of erotic desire:

> Metal and human skin, preferably bent out of shape, torn or otherwise traumatized after car collisions, are the source of the new eroticism put into practice by Vaughan's coterie of 'crashophiles.' Their *jouissance*, individual and collective, stems from a vision... of the machine finally becoming inextricable from sex, from the flesh as it dents, breaks, bleeds, suppurates and scars. (5)

What Camblor is describing here is the construction of a scandalous category, a new erotic positionality that transcends normative sexual and technological meanings in its attempt to contain the excessive meaning generated by both. While intriguing, Camblor's analysis fails to move beyond what Vaughan calls in the film "...a crude sci-fi concept that floats on the surface and doesn't threaten anybody." The meshing of technology with discourses of perversion and sexuality is at least as old as Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) and has been broadly appropriated in mainstream popular culture. Camblor is right to elaborate the workings of the spectacular nature of this scandalous category in *Crash*, but he fails to grasp its deeper meaning beyond a few off-handed comments and a title ("Death Drive's Joy Ride") which references a concept that he never explores. The "new eroticism" is not sexual at all, but rather signals the functioning of a repetition compulsion and the replay of traumatic memory on the surface of the body. Like necrophilia, the sex/death desires of the protagonists in *Crash* exemplify a narcissistic attachment to the reflective image of oneself as the embodiment of the real. The self-destructive impulse of the death instinct bleeds into libidinal desire as a means of getting at the more primal desire which signals the complete annihilation of the ego. The body that is structured by the imago is re-inscribed with the horror of the abject, forcing a re-conceptualization of the self through the mutilation of corporeality. The abjected body becomes an object and thus breaks down the hegemonic binary system of understanding the process of identification by moving an idealization of the real into the position normatively occupied by the imaginary ideal of the imago. *Alienation*, not sexuality, is the focus of *Crash*. However, national subjects are represented in all their pathetic glory as torn and bloody emblems of the abject that grapple towards the disintegration of the ego even as they are shown to recoil from the potentiality of the real.

The body is, to begin with, a source of profound alienation. It stands as evidence of the inadequacy of the imaginary ego to fully symbolize subjectivity. The bodily imago is only ever an approximation of the corporeal form, and thus fails to adhere to the multitude

of meaning produced by the existence of a physical reality in which the psyche is housed. The alteration of the body evidenced by its abjection thus stands in a similar light: the physical aspect of identity is altered, but its meaning can only ever be grasped through its filtering through the iconography of lack employed by the ego. Its existence as a scandalous category of extreme in-between-ness thus articulates morphology as simply another suture over the real, an attempt on the part of the imaginary ego to implicate the expression of the abject into pre-existing structures of understanding. To state this as a gross over-simplification, the abjected body represents yet another instance of identificatory failure. Just as the ego can never fully imitate the reality of the body, the real can never be adequately contained in the body. Lack is an ever-present force within the narrative of identification. The implication of the death drive into the narrative of *Crash* works to reverse the hegemonic process of identification, but the ultimate subversion of its structures is delayed through the construction of a new, third category that encompasses the excessive meaning produced by its innate failure. Thus the point at which the real explodes violently into the centre, the moment of impact in the collision of two vehicles, is sutured over by the body as the ego struggles for control over unbound psychic energy.

As Camblor points out, no new language of desire is initiated by *Crash*. What is accomplished, however, is difficult to ascertain as the divided subjectivity which founds the melancholic masochism of the national subject is not in fact transcended, but is simply reasserted in a new form. In *Kissed*, Sandra flees from the real, her 'crossing-over' is only a temporary escape, even as she unconsciously knows that her desire for it will draw her back again and again. She cannot take up a subject position that functions entirely within the ego while at the same time her performance of Keohane's ironic conceit compels her to disavow the real once it has been displaced into the centre. In *Crash*, a similar compulsion to repeat is enacted, as the trauma of the real is replayed over and over again, through the pageantry of Vaughan's meticulous recreations of historic car crashes, his recording of abjected images of collisions and death, and James' (James Spader) ultimate taking up of his place in the

'crashophile' subculture upon Vaughan's final escape from the masochistic cycle of subjectivity. The only way in which they acknowledge and embrace the real, however, is through the realization of the logical endpoint of the death drive, something that the ego rebels against at full force. Thus, the protagonists in *Crash* (with the notable exceptions of Vaughan and Seagrave [Peter MacNeil]) find themselves repeating a failure to express the real (an inexpressibility which is, of course, the very nature of the real), a failure bound up in their occupation of an erotic corporeality. Through the violence enacted upon their bodies they approach the real, only to move away from it as they move into each other's arms. They are hence also products of the ironic conceit of the Canadian subject, a fact which forces them to repeat the masochistic neurosis and to remain eternally divided beings.

If the body is inscribed with the characteristics of the real in *Crash*, its abjection signifies its position as a scandalous category, a nexus of difference through which the imaginary ego and the unbounded energy of the real are filtered in an attempt to redefine each. Sexual desire is thus focused outside of the realm of the sexual through its association with the death drive. The body becomes imbued with excessive meaning, meaning which has been forcibly deflected through the intrusion of the real into the symbolic at the point of vehicular impact. The body, however, also becomes a point of suture, a canvas on which images of coherence are painted in order to disavow the radical indeterminacy of subjectivity. Corporeality becomes objectified, the physical form a slate upon which the rhetorics of necrophilic desire and technological nihilism are written and re-written in an attempt to make sense of the divided subjectivity of the subject-nation. The masochistic impulse of the national subject is literally embodied, the body of the accident victim coming to stand allegorically for the national body. English Canada is represented as the abject. In *Crash*, however, the abject cannot be disavowed, but is instead implicated in the narrative as a source of perverse and masochistic pleasure. Moreover, death is an escape from, not an alternative model of, subjectivity. As in *Kissed*, the intrusion of the real into the realm of symbolic expression is intolerable for the protagonists, prompting them to either flee it

through suicide or to suture over it with an erotic discourse of sexuality or philosophy. Although they gesture towards the destruction of the ego, they are finally unable to follow through, again triggering a masochistic cycle of identification. Thus in *Crash*, as in all the other films in this study, the national subject is demonstrated to be caught in the sadomasochistic spiral of its own perversity. The abject is presented as an alternative identity ideal, but it is still one which cannot be satisfactorily imitated. Identity remains a process, a halt to which is only possible through the final escape suggested by Nirvana principle.

Chapter Seven:
"Why are we so weird?"
Towards an Understanding of Perversion in English Canadian Subjectivity

Perversion has proven to be a particularly rich conceptual matrix for English Canadian film-makers, a fact that has been proven by its prominence in the perversion chic films that have characterized the mainstream of English Canadian cinema in the last ten years. Up to this point, however, there has been little critical work that has dealt specifically with this trend and its representational effects in a rather marginalized national cinema. This thesis has attempted an initial step towards an understanding of perversion as it is deployed in English Canadian film, and to elaborate a potential explanation for its popularity. I have been especially interested in formulating tentative answers to three questions:

- Why does perversion figure so prominently in English Canadian cinema?

- What does this particular conceptual tool say about national subjectivity?

- How does this inform an understanding of nation in English Canada?

Rather than examine the political and economic context of the Canadian film industry, I have chosen to approach the topic of perversion chic through a close reading of several archetypal films of the cycle. This has yielded a theoretical model that may be used to inform further work on the marginal trope so often employed in cultural production in this country, as well as to speak to a broader perspective on the functioning of the nation in the construction of an English Canadian subject. In this final chapter, I will demonstrate how the analysis of the selected films has opened up a new space in which to question the national paradigm. If nation has always already been a deeply ambiguous concept for English Canadians, a critical approach to the analysis of perversion chic articulates that this has to do with the always already queer, or perverse, nature of national subjectivity.

Are Canadians Perverse?

There is more than one way to answer this question. An approach that has often been taken is to compare a generalized 'Canadian' cinema with its more immediately accessible competitor in this country: the behemoth that is Hollywood film. Although this somewhat artificial dichotomy sets up the potential for a series of inaccurate arguments as to the nature of what is 'Canadian' in the face of what is 'American' (after all, if Canadian films do not adhere neatly to the universalized tag required for a national cinema, how can Hollywood?), a fact that does a great injustice to the complex social and cultural contexts in which these films are being made, there is, in some sense, a place for such an understanding in Canadian film analysis. For instance, the question of why perversion figures so prominently in Canadian film (Anglophone and Francophone alike) might be posed somewhat differently (as it is by Brian D. Johnson): "why don't Canadians make hit movies?" (1997: 43). This rearticulation of the question I am attempting to answer points out several political and economic circumstances that cannot be escaped when drawing a broad picture in which to examine English Canadian cinema. Johnson, in making a comparison between the Canadian and the relatively more successful (both domestically and abroad) Australian film industries, argues that Canada lacks several important things in this respect:

> an irrepressible confidence, more generous government support for its cinema -- and some 13,000 km of ocean between it and Hollywood. Canada sits in the shadow of the most powerful entertainment economy in the world. It siphons off our most ambitious writers, actors and directors. Canada also has the unfortunate distinction of being the only country in the world that Hollywood treats as part of its domestic market. (43-44)

These are economic, social, and even geographic realities that unquestionably affect the way in which films are conceptualized, produced, and received in this country. But notice Johnson's first point: Canadians lack "an irrepressible confidence," a subjective

generalization that the author feels compelled to mention, but never to elaborate. Instead, in moving to the question of why "Canadians don't *do* triumph of the human spirit" (45), Johnson seems content to explain, somewhat superficially, that "[o]ur screenwriters seem allergic to happy endings" (45) and to chalk all this up to the dispassionate distance inherent in the documentary film-making tradition that so many critics have attributed to the Canadian cinematic 'style.' The rather more important question of *why*, however, cannot be explained away, but instead must be taken up as the central theme of any analysis of Canadian film. Why is it all right to matter-of-factly state that Canadians lack confidence? And what does this say about the English Canadian subject?

Johnson's argument seems to be largely based on the loser paradigm of Canadian film criticism, one that views this lack of "an irrepressible confidence" as stemming from the more fundamental lack that exists within the state of Canadian nationhood. In short, we are a nation that fails to adhere to the hegemonic ideal of the nation, and thus our cultural representations demonstrate a timidity which is most often characterized by the feminized male protagonist. The loser paradigm, however, presumes a deficiency where none exists. Lack is not a source of weakness; it is the foundation of an alternative view of the nation, one that distinguishes Canada in the face of a regime of normative social and psychological constructs of belonging. This might be articulated as the difference between 'identity' and 'identification.' Whatever English Canadian identity may or not be, Canadians clearly do not *identify* with that which is subsumed under the umbrella of hegemony. If Canadians employ the imagery of perversion so often in their popular culture, it is perhaps because only the abject come close to what the masochistic subject-nation envisions as the ultimate escape from a system that represses difference in favour of a narratively enforced, and ultimately illusionary, homogeneity. Homi Bhabha, in his deconstruction of the most common locution in nationalist discourse, argues that the notion of 'the many as one' is automatically and easily dismissed inasmuch as it represents the illusionary garb used in order to cover the inherent multiplicity of the national body. Identification is thus, at its root, a ***temporality***, one that is

usefully understood as 'national desire.' The narrative of the nation is one which is as innately paradoxical in its production and address as that of any desiring economy. Canada, arguably a country that addresses difference and plurality more than any other, would seem especially suited for such a counter-hegemonic narrative. Hence, perversion is a trope that is uniquely qualified to function within a national consciousness that is compelled to oscillate between the positions of centre and periphery, its scandalous nature paralleling the situation of the divided Canadian subject as *in-between* competing discourses of knowing. Perversion chic is a cinematic discourse that reflects the contradictions that exist in English Canadian identification and critique the very structures of hegemonic knowledge by way of the allegory of the perverse body. Johnson's lack of confidence thus becomes a powerful tool in the dismantling of the constrictive mechanism of the nation.

Perversion implicates a radical indeterminacy to identification. It is situated simultaneously inside and outside of hegemony, thus calling into question the dominant ideology that stems from the supposedly stable base of the subject-nation. The masochistic push and pull that serves to construct the English Canadian subject is further reflected, however, in its affinity for the very psychic constructs which enable the creation of a coherent subjectivity. To state that the English Canadian protagonist is masochistic is to suggest a level of understanding that moves to the very root of hegemony. Knowing and not knowing, remembering and forgetting, make up and articulate the building blocks of the psyche. Lack in Canada is consequently imbued with a potent urgency, one that moves beyond the social and cultural and into the very heart and soul of identification. Perversion thus signals another, primordial, association with the English Canadian subject. If Canadian film-makers utilize this powerful trope in order to breakdown the hegemonic systems of knowing that fail to contain the excessive meaning that is English Canada, this condition speaks to a more fundamental difficulty in understanding nation-ness. In short, perversion chic transcends its obvious ramifications in an oppositional dialectic with other national cinemas (both inside and outside of the nation-state borders) in order to conceptualize the

problematics inherent in a normative understanding based in the psychic constructs of the mind.

Perversion and the Subject-Nation

Perversion, in its most literal definition, disrupts the normative boundaries of sex and gender relations by demonstrating that the 'dirtiness' of the boundaries that keep the polar extremes of hegemonic definitions of each separate. As a mode of desiring that arises from the process of (national) identification, it constructs an excessive meaning that straddles both ends of the binaries that strive to maintain the dominant ideology in place, rupturing and collapsing their respective meanings into each other. The use of perversity in English Canadian film hence implicates deviance and Otherness in a discourse that utterly subverts normative structures of knowing. By demonstrating the 'dirtiness' of the categories that are at its root, the nation is hence shown to be radically inadequate in its own ability to contain the plurality of the national body. In this thesis, I have accomplished such a critique through the engagement of the psychological constructs that both underpin and disrupt the normative model of sense-making that is proliferated in hegemonic national narratives. The divisiveness of the national subject can only ever be grasped at this level of analysis, national structures being both the product of and that which most impacts on the psyche. Masochism, arguably the base perversion that links all others to the national paradigm, may be manifest in the body politic, but it is essentially a force that emanates from the individual subjectivities of the national body. Thus, perversion is that which always already is in excess to hegemony because it cannot be contained within normative, binary definitions.

More than this, however, perverse desire does more than simply subvert hegemonic structures: it highlights their inherent perversity. This aspect of perversity is observed when we examine the psychological constructs that regulate the unbound energy of the psyche in order to facilitate the functioning of the imaginary ego. Consciousness is fragile, waging a constant battle against the intrusion of the real into the symbolic, against that which it cannot

structure, and the consequent destruction of the psychic constructs that are at the root of subjectivity. This inability to fully account for the energies of the psychic within the mental structures of the subject is evident in hegemony through the parallel requirements of repetition, of repression and return. Thus the national subject owes his or her masochistic positionality to more than the competing demands of hegemony. A performative relationality is inscribed at the level of the psychic, and this innate perversity spins outwards from there.

The perversion chic films draw out this correlation through the exploration of trauma and its relationship with memory and history. The critique evident in these films stems from the disruption of hegemonic constructs of a national history of trauma, and the nation that is founded upon them, and its connection with the psychic underpinnings that make its apparent stability an impossibility. In short, *by undermining the constructs on which nationalism stands, the nation collapses under the weight of its own conceptual inadequacies*. This stems in part from the difficulty that English Canada has in situating itself in between the competing discourses of colonizer and colonized, a problematic not so evident in a nationalism such as Quebec's, where the trauma of history is seen as an originary point. There is a further difficulty, however, in examining the perversion chic films in order to suggest a link between a perverse discourse and that of English Canada precisely because the five films in this thesis revolve around *trauma*. *The Hanging Garden*, *Lilies*, and *Exotica* all follow the events that spin off from an initial traumatic intrusion of the real into narrative, while *Kissed* and *Crash* take up the repetition compulsion associated with the post-traumatic stress disorder in order to paint a picture of hegemony gone horribly awry. To parallel these cinematic narratives of trauma with that of the national narrative is to fundamentally contradict a truism of Canadian studies: that Canada is 'a nation without history.' Admittedly, this contention needs significant qualification even if we consider its basic tenant to be accurate. Despite this fact, the perversion chic films clearly push the boundaries of how Canada has traditionally understood itself (from a macro-political

perspective) through the implication that trauma and traumatic history are indeed at the root of national subjectivity. The paradox of English Canadian nationalism is that it is apparently constructed on a lack of temporality, but yet this is a factor that it cannot ultimately escape. Perversion chic, by thus undermining the normative defining structures that English Canada has set up for itself, profoundly disrupts the national matrix that grounds hegemony, forcing a complete re-conceptualization of nationhood in general. This process has led to the inevitable conclusion that English Canada is always already *queer*.

National In(queer)ies: English Canada as Queer Nation

English Canada, and its concomitant cultural representations, are fundamentally queer in their orientation. Despite the immediate ramifications of this contention (ones that speak to the queer content of these narratives), theorizing such a position proves to be significantly more complicated and ambiguous. Questioning the presence of a vast field of perverse desire in English Canadian film leads one to issues that reach to the deepest underpinnings of what it is we understand 'nation' to be. Hegemony and subjectivity are both 'dirtied' in the perversion chic films that have come to stand as the archetype of Canadian film-making in the late twentieth century, a fact that highlights the always already queer nature of the ideologies that ground representation in this country. Peter Dickinson, himself speaking of Canadian nationalism, argues:

> 'Queer,' as an inclusive term, an expansive signifier, a transitive word with linguistic roots, as I have come to discover, in reaching 'across' boundaries, in standing 'athwart' various social communities, would seem especially suited to negotiating the distance between 'here' and 'we're.' (1999: 38)

The gap of knowing that is produced in the process of national self-definition (Dickinson's space between 'here' and 'we're') points to the deeply ambivalent nature of the subject-nation, one that must forever return to the presence of absence, to lack, in order to construct an

imaginary coherence for the national body. This reliance upon the meaning that transcends and yet is inextricably linked to the psychic and cultural structures of the nation is what points to the queer existence of the English Canadian subject-nation. Identity in lack, identity in the lack of stable identification, is a queerly articulated positionality, one that breaks down hegemonic modes of understanding in order to paradoxically inscribe dominant power relations of the national body. Thus, the presence of perversion in English Canadian cinema signals a profound critique of the normative construction of the national subject, one that both queers and highlights the inherent queerness of all that it touches.

Queer English Canada is a concept that is deeply implicated in the postmodern circumstances in which we find ourselves at the end of the millennium. A postmodern conception of identity prescribes an inherent fragmentation and fluidity that is rooted temporally into the field of the national, a fact that Butler exploits in order to elaborate her processional model of gender identity and identification. Performativity, when applied to the national model, radically calls into question the equation of nation-ness both generally and in terms of the English Canadian example. The 'difference as sameness' metaphor that is deployed so frequently in nation-state discourse (multiculturalism being the obvious Canadian instance of this) cannot hold its own against a subversive theory of subjectivity that posits the weaknesses of normative constructs of belonging within the matrix of group identifications. Produced in the contradiction that results, the national subject is always already *in-between*, forced to map out a reality that strives for an illusionary wholeness yet is bound to fail due to the very constraints that have been mobilized in the creation of the identity ideal. This paradox implicates the entire undertaking of a national cinema in its 'dirtiness' inasmuch as this notion undermines itself through the assertion that cultural representation can ever be anything but radically inadequate. The task that it sets for itself is, to be blunt, an impossibility. Difference can never be fully contained within the dualistic structures of hegemony, a fact that produces the subject as ultimately divided and masochistic.

In English Canada, the split national subject is granted a specific potency inasmuch as the national body seem to be produced through an epitomization of the postmodern context: we are rendered scandalous by way of our in-between position, trapped, as we apparently are, in the middle of the competing discourses of colonizer and colonized, hero and loser, knowing and not knowing. We embody the space of radical indeterminacy that is simultaneously normative and marginal, centre and periphery. We transcend hegemonic definition yet endeavour to insinuate ourselves into that which can never contain us. In short, we are the lack that exists in the normative national narrative. Consequently, the perversion chic cycle of films, as an example of a cultural project that has resulted from the 'unique' circumstances of Canadian existence, can only ever reflect this paradox. Thus, if English Canada can be said to actually have a national cinema (and I would say that it does), it is one that must embody the ephemeral contradictions that are at the root and are articulated by our scandalous and queer national experience. The point is that there is no single national existence, and that even if there was, it could not be represented in a manner that would universally encompass the range that such an experience necessarily implies. English Canadian cinema, as a queer cinema, has done remarkably well in working purposefully within these limitations. While one image of Canada cannot be gleaned from the films that have been explored in this thesis, such ambiguity can only ever bring us back to the conclusion that Canada is a queer nation, and as such, has no need for the artificial boundaries of hegemonic discourse.

Imagining the Queer Nation in the New Millennium

To paraphrase (and somewhat re-interpret) Dickinson: if the nation is an imagined community, then it is a community that can be imagined as queer. Queerness is not just a property of scholarly analysis or artistic representation, it is a social force that may be mobilized in the re-constitution of the social and political structures of nation-ness. The implications of this research thus extend beyond the confines of the texts themselves. How

might a queer understanding of the nation, taken from both a psychological and cultural perspective, inform the study of specific manifestations of difference in the social or political spheres in Canada? How might we access the root perversity evident in the other major cultural groups that make up this country (for instance, the Quebecois, the First Nations, recent immigrant groups, etc.) and their cultural representations of themselves and Others? Does queerness stand as that intangible 'thing' that links this nation, the lack that is so often referred to and yet never defined? These are all questions that might be drawn from this thesis, questions that I have not has the time nor the space to explore, but the answers to which can have a powerful effect on the inter-national relations that characterize domestic politics in Canada. In essence, if we are a nation that cannot be defined except by that which we are not, we must strive to fully grasp this gap of knowing, to elaborate it as a source of strength rather than a sign of impotence. We are more than simply the geography we occupy. Our task, however, must be to discover precisely what that 'more' is.

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