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„The Otherness of Canadian Cinema: the Surreal in Guy
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Hypothesis

This study discusses *My Winnipeg* in the context of Canadian cinema as a cinema of otherness (see Chapter 2) and Guy Maddin as a prominent contributor to this Canadian phenomenon. If, as George Melnyk observed, David Cronenberg “allowed the weird to be equated with being Canadian” (*One Hundred Years* 157), then Maddin's films did nothing to change this equation. Maddin's films are remarkable because they differ strongly from the norm of modern filmmaking. They are odd because they confront the spectator with a mélange of obsolete imagery combined with otherworldly stories. *My Winnipeg* attributes special attention to surrealist techniques to achieve these effects. William Beard observed that the surrealist film *L'Âge d'Or* (1930) is among Guy Maddin's “absolute touchstones” (*Past* 7). Surrealist elements have traditionally been components of Maddin's films and that led to his being labelled a Surrealist. Surrealism, according to André Breton, involves the “dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation” (Durozoi). Maddin's application of Surrealism is not as radical as the original understanding of the movement as proclaimed in the first Surrealist Manifesto; however, it is well documented in the literature on Maddin that the filmmaker is familiar with Surrealist art and its possible effects. In *My Winnipeg* Maddin avails himself of techniques typical of the Surrealist movement to achieve desired effects, but that does not make him a Surrealist, nor does it make *My Winnipeg* a Surrealist film. This investigation of the use of Surrealism in the film will thus argue against an interpretation of Maddin as a Surrealist, and instead explicate the notion of the Winnipegger as a filmmaker who uses surrealist techniques for specific effects.

1. Introduction: what is Canadian film?

“Norman Jewison is a film maker who was born and raised in Canada. He has [in 1971] finished directing the film version of *Fiddler on the Roof*, shot on location in Yugoslavia and England. Is it a Canadian film?” (Buttrum 14)

The question 'what is Canadian film?' is one that was subject to extensive discussion in the literature on the Canadian national cinema (a term perhaps even more problematic than the first). According to Homi K. Bhaba “the current perception of nation represents a 'symptom of an ethnography of the contemporary within culture' (qtd. in Vanderburgh 81). Vanderburgh herself argues that “the perception of national cinema likewise serves as a signifier of the public opinion within an ideological context.” This, of course, also applies to Canada, and so it comes that “by analyzing both the trajectory and the substance of a director's career and body of work, we can come to a better understanding of the Canadian cultural psyche and its various paradigms based on nationality, race, gender, ethnicity and class” (Melnik, *Directors* IX). In Canada and elsewhere, films are signifiers of the culture in which they were produced. They offer insights into a national or ethnic character, communicate a sense of cultural identity and illuminate distinct aspects of the culture for the rest of the world.

In a world that is divided into nation-states, it is practicable to regard and interpret Canadian art in consideration of the culture as framed by political boundaries, or to dive more deeply and consider regional differences as they exist in Canada. At the present moment, Canada is comprised of a mixture of anglophone, francophone and native populations as well as members of other ethnic groups whose members, it can be assumed, would argue that they have distinct identities despite the fact that they all carry Canadian passports. As this elusive concept that is 'Canadian film' proves, the distinctions are not always clear-cut. Buttrum's question as to whether or not *Fiddler on the Roof* is a Canadian film can be extended to whether Norman Jewison should even be grouped among those directors that are almost universally accepted as ‘Canadian directors’ making ‘Canadian films.’ David Cronenberg, Patrizia Rozema, Don McKellar, Bruce McDonald, Sarah Polley and Vincenzo Natali from Ontario, Atom Egoyan and John Greyson from British Columbia, Guy Maddin from

Manitoba, Gary Burns and Anne Wheeler from Alberta, Zacharias Kunuk from Nunavut, Thom Fitzgerald from Nova Scotia as well as Denys Arcand, Robert LePage, François Girard and Jean-Claude Lauzon from Quebec could be named as a few representative examples of contemporary Canadian filmmakers. Jewison and, for example, Ivan Reitman, on the other hand, are affiliated with the Canadian national cinema only partly, whereas James Cameron and Paul Haggis are generally not considered 'Canadian' film directors. All four are Canadian citizens, but Jewison and Reitman started their careers in Canada, and later on worked primarily in the United States, while Cameron and Haggis started their careers in the United States, where they now direct commercially successful blockbusters well beyond the budget of any Canadian release. Naturally, artists, while born in one country, are free to pursue careers elsewhere and, interestingly, a considerable number of the 'core' filmmakers mentioned above have at one point in their career done so. David Cronenberg set and shot *Eastern Promises* (2007) in London. Atom Egoyan was born to Armenian parents in Egypt and thematizes his Armenian heritage in *Calendar* (1993) and *Ararat* (2002), both of which are set in Armenia. Deepa Mehta is a filmmaker of Indian heritage and her 1997 film *Earth* features four languages. Guy Maddin has worked in Seattle for *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006) and Thom Fitzgerald and Vincenzo Natali were born in the United States. Moreover, all of these directors have at one point cast American or other foreign actors and crew members for their films. Nevertheless, all of these artists and most of their films are included as parts of the canon of Canadian film because they were based for the greatest part in Canada, set their films there and, with inevitable exceptions, cast Canadian actors and other crew members.

The debate as to whether or not a film or filmmaker is Canadian is a serious one not only because it concerns the important matter of Canadian identity, but also because, as will be discussed in further depth later in the chapter on Canadian film policies, Canadian film makers may apply for public film funds and tax credit to sustain their work. The Canadian film policy, like that of other nations, supports domestic products. In order to determine whether a project qualifies as 'Canadian,' the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO), has developed a quantitative approach to determine whether or not a project is admissible for public funding. Vanderburgh explains that “under this method of evaluation, projects are awarded points based on whether or not key creative roles are filled by Canadians” (83). Due to a lack of objectivity of such a quantitative method,

however, qualitative criteria are taken into consideration as well: “for example, the Canada Feature Film Fund [...] requires not only that projects meet a minimum of eight out of ten points, but also that projects meet more elusively 'Canadian' creative elements, such as stories, characters, themes.” The notion of a 'Canadian' film is certainly a complex one, but there is no need to suggest a definition in this text because the scope of this paper does not extend beyond those 'core' filmmakers who are usually considered part of the Canadian national cinema anyway. This particular aspect will thus receive no further attention here.

A topic more relevant for this paper and one that has sparked further discussion is the notion of ‘the Canadian national cinema’ itself. Jerry White's introductory chapter to *The Cinema of Canada* (2006) is one of the many texts that addresses the delicate matter of defining the Canadian national cinema. White turns to John Raulston Saul's 1997 book *Reflections of a Siamese Twin* in which Saul explores the idea of a “triangular reality” in the country. Saul writes of Canada that

its strength - you might even say what makes it interesting – is its complexity; its refusal of the conforming, monolithic nineteenth-century nation-state model. That complexity has been constructed upon three deeply-rooted pillars, three experiences – the aboriginal, the francophone and the anglophone. No matter how much each may deny the others at various times, each of their existences is dependent on the other two. (qtd. in White 1)

White then applies this “triangular reality” to the cinema of Canada. Indeed, in a country that is comprised of a hybrid of anglophone, francophone and native populations as well as other ethnic groups, it is problematic to speak of one unified national cinema. Besides the obvious linguistic and cultural differences that exist between these the three major groups, they also face dissimilar conditions for filmmaking. Directors from different regions are concerned with different modes of public funding for their films. Anglophone films have a different target market than Quebec films and are burdened with a direct rival in Hollywood output. The Quebec identity issue ensures that there is a proportionally larger audience for francophone films in Quebec than there is for anglophone films in the English-speaking provinces. The native perspective then, and the riches of aboriginal culture and history, offer insights that are so opposed to the anglophone and francophone tradition that it is pertinent to speak of three different cinemas, although the latter two naturally

outnumber the former in releases and Canada's logical film hubs are Toronto and Montreal. But Zacharias Kunuk's monumental *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), remarkably the first film entirely in Inuktitut, has had such an impact that it would not be surprising if it inspired the production of more exclusively aboriginal films in the near future. As a side note, it is, of course, also somewhat presumptuous to assume there exists one native cinema, for the term deprives the many native cultures of Canada of their diversity; but any categorization unavoidably demands a simplification of reality. The Anglophone and Francophone cinemas are also affected by this necessity of categorization.

An even simpler approach would be to identify only two major cinemas within Canada, or to “treat Canadian cinema as a single national cinema, comprised of English and French elements” (White 2) which, as White argues, tends to be the perspective of the first English-Canadian authors concerned with the subject, while French-language literature typically approaches the idea of a unified Canadian identity more sensitively. In any case, the topic of what constitutes Canadian film is still a delicate one that fuels debates and is included in any book on the subject. Buttrum suggests that “if you must have a more official sounding answer to the question, 'What is a Canadian film?', we suggest you turn to [...] the Canadian Film Development Corporation and find out how they define a 'Canadian feature' for their purposes. Better still, read about the subject as much time and interest will allow and come to your own conclusions” (14). This study, however, neither suggests a new approach, nor does it endeavor to solve a debate that has concerned authors since the first word was written on films from Canada. For various reasons, this paper will focus solely on English-Canadian feature film (although officially titled a documentary, *My Winnipeg* technically is not a documentary film) and grant only passing mention to Quebec and aboriginal filmmaking. First, this thesis takes into consideration that it was produced under the supervision of an English Department. Second, this author does not feel sufficiently qualified to make assumptions about Quebec cinema, and much less about aboriginal cinema. Most importantly, to the knowledge of this author, Quebec cinema, with its strong interest in Quebec culture and society, was shaped by *cinéma vérité*, a realist style of filmmaking that originated in documentary but transcended into feature film. *Cinéma vérité*, then, like documentary, would in part oppose what later in this text will be identified as 'otherness' in the the films of anglophone

filmmakers. For further clarification, this paper is concerned with the English-Canadian cinema which broke away from an established realist tradition with filmmaker David Cronenberg in the late 1960s. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, the term Canadian cinema whenever used in the succeeding chapters refers to anglophone filmmaking if not noted otherwise.

2. Canadian cinema as a cinema of otherness

“What's in the Canadian psyche that spawns so many bizarre films?” (qtd. in Vanderburgh 82).

Imagine a foreigner who had derived his impressions of life in Canada from an immersion course in our movies. [...] What impressions would he have gained of the feel of life – various social contexts and pockets of culture – their emotional climate and everyday texture? [...] Of course, there is no definite reality to the Canadian milieu, nor do we require of movies that they should be trying to capture such a thing. But most movies do indeed convey, inadvertently or by design, some fragmentary image of a milieu within which their stories are set. (Fothergill 347)

“After all, Canada is an endless mass of contradiction – explorer's heaven. Theorists must take their chances “(Feldman, and Nelson x).

In his 2004 book *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*, George Melnyk argues that “Canadian cinema is a cinema of otherness” (269). Melnyk sees this “otherness” to be rooted in Canada's current multiculturalism. He explains that films produced within the cultural space of one ethnic group, because they are statements of their respective culture, always carry an inherent element of “otherness” for viewers from other ethnic groups.

This paper, which is only concerned with anglophone Canadian film, takes up Melnyk's notion of “otherness” because it provides a useful umbrella term for the diversity of the Canadian national cinema. “Otherness,” in the context of this paper, expands, however, beyond cultural contradiction and refers to those particular circumstances that make Canada a unique environment for film: in a nutshell, anglophone Canadian feature film, fostered by a government-sponsored system of funding that lessened the pressures of commercial viability, influenced by the deliberate rejection of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking, and, inspired by the advent of David Cronenberg in the late 1960s, departed from a realist tradition established through the National Film Board (NFB) in 1939 and developed into a domain enabling unconventional feature filmmakers. Otherness therefore encompasses the ambiguous relation to Hollywood, which is traditionally a direct point of comparison for English-Canadian film. It also applies to unique funding conditions that shaped the national cinema. This text investigates how Canadian national cinema was shaped by these influences and how these particular production circumstances affected the nature of Canadian films.

Otherness thus extends to the content of films. A term sometimes associated with the country's national cinema is 'weird' and this paper is committed to exploring further the aspect of the 'weird' in anglophone Canadian film.

One particular element of otherness and weirdness then is Guy Maddin, a Manitoba-born filmmaker whose interest in a cinema of the past and the aesthetics of surrealist art are irregularities in modern film and are thus noteworthy. Maddin's interest regarding both content and technology is not restricted to any particular film era or style. His films may well feature images captured with devices as disparate as 8mm cameras and cell phones, and may also contain inter-titles and sound in the same frame. These films predominantly echo influences from early films, but also from musicals, B-movies as well as modern mainstream movies. One major inspiration for Maddin, however, was surrealist art and especially *L'Âge d'Or* (1930) by Louis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, a film that William Beard calls one of Maddin's “absolute touchstones” (Beard, *Past* 7). The second part of this paper is dedicated to an investigation of the surreal in Maddin's pseudo-documentary *My Winnipeg* (2007).

2.1 Atom Egoyan and David Cronenberg

Weirdness is a quality often ascribed to Canadian films in the literature on the subject, and it is possible to regard it as forming a link between the films produced within the vast space between Toronto and Vancouver. With filmmakers like David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan, arguably the two major contemporary Canadian directors, one does not have to dive deep to find unconventionality.

Egoyan, an adamant intellectual of Armenian descent who was raised in British Columbia, has directed a range of critically acclaimed films that cemented his importance for the national cinema at the latest when his seventh feature *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) won three awards at the Cannes Film Festival in the same year and received two Oscar nominations in the following year (The Internet Movie Database). In *The Sweet Hereafter* and in other films, Egoyan shows an affection for dysfunctional relationships between estranged characters who are emotionally inaccessible so that the viewer is provoked to feel excluded from the action on screen. This effect is aided by recurring non-linear storytelling.

Egoyan's films not only contain but are usually structured around (1) voyeurism and sick manipulation in the arena of sexuality; (2) fundamental delusions and “bad” substitutions in the arena of love; (3) narcissism and communicational dysfunction as personality traits; (4) severe pathologies within the family; and (5) a crisis of emptiness and over-mediation in the social realms of technology and representation. (Beard, *Thirty-Two Paragraphs* 145)

A second generation Canadian, Egoyan's personal history has contributed to the outlandish atmosphere prevalent in his films, and that manifested itself in titles like *Exotica* (1994), *Diaspora* (2001), or *Ararat*, a 2002 film about the Armenian Genocide after the first World War. *Ararat* approaches these gruesome events through the subjective eyes of a filmmaker, thereby exploring the arbitrariness of reality by rejecting the idea of an absolute truth, a further recurring theme in Egoyan films.

This, along with an ardor for emotionally inaccessible characters and a foreign-sounding name he shares with David Cronenberg, Canada's principal filmmaker. Cronenberg emerged in the Toronto of the late 1960ies into an inconspicuous feature film tradition he turned upside down. His importance for the national cinema lies in firstly breaking with the realist tradition predominant in

domestic productions before his emergence, secondly in inspiring and paving the way for generations of filmmakers after him, and thirdly in being the first filmmaker to draw greater international attention to Canadian feature filmmaking.

It was by embracing marginalized film genres that [Cronenberg] brought English-Canadian cinema to a higher artistic level. Without a serious political project like Quebec's, which provided a compelling narrative, English-Canadian cinema turned to dreams and fantasies as a way beyond the encrusted modalities of realism. Those who followed after Cronenberg would do radically different films, but always within the space of strangeness, angst, and torment that he established. His films allowed the weird to be equated with being Canadian. (Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 157)

Before Cronenberg, Canadian feature film was rooted in realism and as “[a]n enthusiastic reader of science fiction, [Cronenberg] eschewed the documentary-realist tradition of his contemporaries, and introduced unprecedented levels of fantasy into Canadian film” (Wise 51). His entrance was thus noteworthy; one author writes in 1984: “David Croneberg's films are looked upon as aberrations in the cinematic landscape of this country because they are totally alien to our artistic tradition” (qtd. In Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 148). Earlier voices are even more cautious: an entry in the 1973 *Handbook of Canadian Film* consists of two slim sentences, one of which only provides biographical information: “Severely structured, his two features *Stereo* [1969] and *Crimes of The Future* [1970] are philosophically witty comments on the relationship of the technological to the human world. Virtually a one-man unit, Cronenberg has acted as director, producer, writer and cameraman on all his independently-produced films” (Beattie 46). The first volume on his work dates from 1983 and describes the Torontonion as “a major filmmaker who has long been consigned to the periphery of [Canadian] cinema” (Handling vii), a comment that echoed positively prophetic as later voices are increasingly favorable: “[t]he Cronenberg effect is one of the great pleasures left to us in cinema: Cronenberg is our Kafka” (Rothschild, 160). Wyndham Wise wonders “can we imagine Atom Egoyan without David Cronenberg?” (52), while Beard adds in a similar tone that “Cronenberg is the most substantial and important feature-filmmaker English-Canada has produced, and if you subtract Atom Egoyan, second place isn't even close” (*Thirty-Two Paragraphs*, 144).

Cronenberg experimented with two short and two mid-length efforts before his first full

length feature *Shivers* (1975), and since then released seventeen films for cinema screens, a substantial output that also made him the country's most widely discussed director. He is a fixture in volumes on Canadian film and has several volumes dedicated entirely to his oeuvre; however, despite a career spanning more than four decades, he continues to be a controversial figure in Canadian national cinema. His affinity with the Horror genre and an appetite for controversial topics has produced an ambiguous relationship with critics from the beginning of his career up to the present day. Although his importance for Canadian cinema is no longer debated, he remains the kind of filmmaker that polarizes viewer: “[I]auded as a late-twentieth-century taboo-bashing genius by some, and loathed as a puritanical body-fearing reactionary by others, Cronenberg's emergence is without parallel in this country” (Wise 51). Clandfield argues: “[k]nown primarily for their ruthless depiction of visceral disintegration – the eruption of the inner body as it is organically transformed – Cronenberg's films have been subjected to both virulent attack and protracted academic discussion” (101-102). The director was dismissed as sensational, commercial and as a misogynist, a creator of low culture “schlock” (Hofsess 274) for his obsession with sex and violence, persisted, however, and contributed to the national cinema the overdue epitome of an auteur. Cronenberg's notion that “I have [Cronenberg has] something that has been lacking in Canada, a real artistic vision” (qtd. in Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 150) is brazen, but not inaccurate. In short, Cronenberg's first short films were received positively, but with limited distribution. The early 1970s brought his films a broader audience, but unenthusiastic critical response. Until 1983 “critical work on Cronenberg has been sporadic at best” (Handling vii), but that changed later in his career, when the “cultural blue-collar worker” (Hofsess, 278) developed an interest for literary adaptations, including William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1991), which earned him credit as a serious director and cemented deeper his importance for the national cinema. The latest phase saw Cronenberg collaborate with American companies for *A History of Violence* (2005), still shot on location in Canada, and then move out of the familiar surroundings of Ontario for the first time to set and shoot *Eastern Promises* (2007) in London.

Cronenberg's 'real artistic vision' earned him the honorary title 'King of Venereal Horror': the Torontonians' films are traditionally built on three pillars: “he [uses] pornography to arouse, horror to terrify, and science fiction to create disturbing technological fantasies. He [fuses] these three

elements into a consistent vision that [is] so singular and powerful that it brought him both acclaim and denunciation” (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 148). Katherine Monk posits that “[i]n almost every case, Cronenberg shows us uptight or emotionally repressed people altered by acts of their own imagination, or else symbolically altered by grotesque creatures of Cronenberg's own imagination” (234). Often this repression is of sexual nature, especially so in his auteur phase spanning six mid- and feature-length films between 1969 and 1983: *Stereo* (1969), *Crimes of the Future* (1970), *Shivers*, *Rabid* (1979), *The Brood* (1981) and *Videodrome* (1983). Evident in these early efforts is a struggle to eventually release the characters’ sexual repressions, usually with dreadful consequences. The human body and its transformation, caused by internal or external forces, are at the core of these films.

The initial critical rejection of Cronenberg was partly grounded on his links with the horror genre; however, Cronenberg's output does not follow genre conventions closely. As one author notes, “[t]here are no 'monsters' in Cronenberg's films – all of the horror stems from demonic exaggerations of bodily processes” (Hofsess 275) and thus the terms 'venereal horror', or body horror. Throughout his career “Cronenberg has displayed a continuing obsession for such matters as bodily mutation and grotesque growths, aberrant medical experiments, massive plagues and futuristic architecture” (Cart. *Crimes*), interests that caused a struggle for him to be accepted as more than a sensational B-movie filmmaker. Cronenberg admits that his main interest lies in the physical: “I believe the body is the central fact and everything in my films reflect that” (qtd. in Monk 236). Mathijis notes that “Cronenberg's films equip the human body with a will of its own. Amoral in the most literal sense, there is no 'good' or 'bad' body. Cronenberg asks viewers to accept a tumor, a wound, a deficiency not as a fault or flaw but a companion to the rest of a body” (6). This insight provides a key to understanding Cronenberg's world view as mirrored in his films. An outspoken atheist, Cronenberg does not believe in divine order, nor do his characters; they are ultimately forced to accept that life is chaotic in all its nuances.

Cronenberg puts the human physique at the core of this chaos and so his films display a noticeable “fascination for the accidental composition of the body and how it is 'supposed' to look” (Mathijis 6). His characters ultimately have to accept their imperfections; these are manifested in the physical, driven to an extreme in a woman with a triple cervix in *Dead Ringers* (1988), but expand

beyond the somatic to life in the metaphysical sense. What Cronenberg's characters ultimately strive for is control over their own or other people's bodies, desires and lives. Cronenberg's interest in science stems from this struggle: his characters view science as a possible means of attaining control over the human body, as demonstrated via the appearance of dubious doctors like Brian O'Blivion in *Videodrome* or pseudo-scientific institutions, such as the 'Canadian Academy of Erotic Inquiry' in *Stereo*, or a psychoanalytical technique called "psychoplasms" in *The Brood*. For Cronenberg, who is an existentialist and rejects the idea of order and instead accepts a more chaotic reality, control culminates in confrontation. In an interview the Torontonion explains his world view:

Most movies that posit a villain face have, for simplicity's sake, to posit a villain who is in control of his destiny. He wants to do evil. In fact I don't believe that anybody is in control. [...] [Things] are certainly out of human control. They are in the control of fate and happenstance. And unless we understand what is going on, right to the most extreme edge, we don't even have a prayer of controlling it – we're just fumbling around in the dark - I actually think that is the way the world works, that we are in fact fumbling around in the dark. Nobody's in control. There is only the appearance of control, or on the part of individual people the delusion of control. (qtd. in Beard, and Handling 187-188)

Perhaps this is why, as John Hofsess noted, Cronenberg's films are devoid of monsters, classical villains, or any other embodiment of absolute evil. In Cronenberg films there is no clear distinction between good and evil characters, because the director argues he does not believe in such simplicity. Instead he shows imperfect humans who challenge the traditional perception of good and bad.

The tendency to put characters who engage in various immoralities at the center of his films has traditionally been the source of controversy: these characters can be unchaste, and fascinated by sexual violence, like Max Renner who is intrigued by snuff movies in *Videodrome*, or an entire range of dramatis personae aroused by car accidents in *Crash*. Yates argues Cronenberg is an anti-mythmaker: "[w]hereas myth seeks to impose order on the unknowable, Cronenberg's anti-myth seeks to establish the unknowable as the only certainty and order as fundamental illusion" (174). But it would be too easy to dismiss the director as a sensationalist, or a destructive anarchist who identified human inadequacies, but offers no solutions. Beneath a repulsing façade of shocking images and characters unsympathetic at first sight, Cronenberg offers liberation. For him, reality is

arbitrary and ultimately what one makes of it: "I don't think I'm fatalistic. I think we were born not to be fatalistic [...]. We are condemned to be free. We have to continue to wrest control from the world, from the universe, from reality, even though it might be hopeless." (qtd. in Beard, and Handling 189). In a different interview he adds: "Nothing is true. It's not an absolute. It's only a human construct, very definitely able to change and susceptible to re-thinking" (qtd. In Yates 175).

In her aptly titled volume on Canadian film *Weird Sex and Snowshoes and other Canadian Film Phenomena*, Monk presents an 'Inventory of Sexual Dysfunction in Canadian film.' The categories are "necrophilia", "incest", "impotence", "asexuality", "somasochism", "grotesque fetishes", "sexual self-destruction", "physical sexual deformity" (Monk 145), and Cronenberg's films correspond to these labels. *Crash*, for example, gained notoriety for beginning with six sex scenes in a row and showing the penetration of a scar resembling female genitalia. The film focusses on characters who take sexual pleasure from car accidents and is without doubt the director's most controversial and explicitly sexual film, dismissed by many who saw it as little more than a pornographic film by a director who wanted to prove that he could still shock his audience. Nevertheless the film features typical Cronenberg characters who, emotionally detached from each other or themselves, or both, transform from their former self into a new, even more detached personality through the discovery and pursuit of an unusual and eventually uncontrollable sexual desire. Their transformation may be triggered by a vivid imagination that manifests itself physically; those are the phenomena that earned Cronenberg's films the categorization of 'psycho-sexual': in *Videodrome*, for example, the main character hallucinates to a point that he believes that he has a hole in his chest which he uses as a VCR. Cronenberg's characters, who are repressed and unable to communicate their inner lives, turn to an operative which helps them experience their true desires, like drugs in *Stereo*, a snuff show in *Videodrome*, car accidents in *Crash*, or video-games in *existenZ* (1999).

David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan both represented the Canadian national cinema at international film festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival. Both directors also received awards from the festival and were members of the jury, over which Cronenberg presided in 1998. Although several filmmakers who followed in their footsteps received international attention, Cronenberg and Egoyan nevertheless remain the country's primary film exports. Directors like Guy Maddin, Patricia

Rozema, Bruce McDonald, Thom Fitzgerald, Don McKellar and Lynne Stopkewich have made a name for themselves, but their popularity, nationally and internationally, does not equal that of Cronenberg and Egoyan; an experiment such as simply mentioning names of domestic directors in conversation with most Canadians is likely to prove this fact. This notion aside, when defining anglophone-Canadian cinema as a cinema of otherness, these are the directors that one must turn to; at this point, the question what, except for a common origin, connects these filmmakers becomes prominent and that will be the subject of discussion in the following chapters.

2.2 Canadian Film and its ambiguous relationship to Genre film and Hollywood

In film and in other arts, genres serve as means of categorization. Through similarities in narrative and iconography, films can be grouped into genres and thus allow for meaningful comparisons within genres, between genres and between works from one or different cultures. Genres are formulaic in their development and enhance understanding of a film as they answer to the specific expectations of their audience.

Because genre films are expected to operate within the laws of the genre rather than to provide a direct representation of social reality, they can tap into desires and anxieties normally unrecognized or repressed. Popular genres can thus be interpreted as symptoms of collective dreams and nightmares, whether these are seen as determined by the human condition or by a specific cultural environment. (Leach 50)

This is perhaps a reason why formula films have proved to be more popular in the American than in other national cinemas, including the Canadian one. Regarding genre film in the Canadian national cinema, it is again David Cronenberg who needs to be mentioned first. With early films like *Rabid* and *Shivers* he introduced the Body Horror or Venereal Horror genre to the canon of Canadian feature films; thus Cronenberg laid the foundations for ensuing horror film directors such as Hungarian-born Peter Medak and his 1980 classic *The Changeling*, or, more recently, Bruce McDonald with his 2008 film *Ponytroll*. McDonald is perhaps best known for a trilogy of road movies *Roadkill* (1990), *Highway 61* (1992) and *Hard Core Logo* (1996), a genre that had previously received a prominent contribution with Donald Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* (1970). And with *The Grey Fox* (1982) there is also a Western among Canadian film classics.

While genres do exist, as the above examples testify, the idea of genre as a familiar formula along which a film unfolds, or a set of norms expected from an audience, is frequently rejected in the Canadian national cinema. Too strong, it seems, is the belief that genre is a American; and so is the idea of a cinema based on 'collective dreams and nightmares', a means of promoting a country's unified values and morals on screen. This inevitably addresses the sensitive issue of Canadian identity, or rather the lack of one unified identity, and hence the lack of its communication through feature film in anglophone Canada. It is noticeable that in its search for identity, anglophone-Canadian cinema differentiates itself from Quebec film and American cinema. Like the Quebec one,

Anglophone Canadian cinema is shaped to a large extent by auteur filmmakers. Unlike its Quebecois counterpart, however, the anglophone-Canadian cinema has broken from the realist tradition established by the National Film Board and has produced films which are less shaped by political matters and the question of national or provincial identity than by the respective artistic visions of auteurs, who are less interested in promoting one unified vision than their own individual ideas.

In Quebec the nationalist project provided the intellectual glue for the articulation of a national cinema. The linguistic unity of this autonomous society created a strong connectivity in Quebec cinema, but in English Canada the task of creating an identifiable, vaguely unified, and distinct cinematic voice was much more difficult. [...] English Canadians [...] lacked their own project of political independence, preferring to maintain their long-running ambiguity with, and acquiescence to, American power. While Quebec society and culture gathered an internalizing centripetal strength in the first two decades of the independence movement, cultural and economic forces in English Canada tended to be centrifugal, throwing people outward in different directions. (Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 146)

When regarding otherness as a link between English-Canadian directors, Guy Maddin, Patricia Rozema, Bruce McDonald, Thom Fitzgerald, Don McKellar, and Lynne Stopkewich are anglophone directors who are linked by their production of unconventional films opposed to the realism of the Quebec cinema.

The major point of comparison for anglophone-Canadian cinema, however, is American cinema. Canada's relation to the southern neighbour is especially relevant for its national cinema as both countries share the same language and market; the latter has also enabled the former country's most successful directors, producers and actors to achieve their popular renown. James Cameron, Norman Jewison, Donald Sutherland, Jim Carrey, Keanu Reeves, Pamela Anderson and William Shatner are a few examples of those Canadian expatriates who pursued careers in the U.S and achieved worldwide fame. The Canadian diaspora resulted in a general division between those expatriates who are involved in commercially successful American films and are not perceived as part of the canon of the Canadian cinema, and those who stay and argue they value their artistic visions over marketability.

There is noticeable a difference in attitude between the two national cinemas as those

Canadian directors who remained in Canada rejected the idea of myth as central to the national identity and the national cinema, and thereby oppose the Hollywood formula.

Canada's tradition grew out of an institution [the NFB] and a socialist-minded idea of showing Canadians honest reflections of themselves. The American, or Hollywood, film tradition began as a collective dream in the minds of several Jewish immigrants who were possessed by a desire to create pure fantasy and to reinvent the American Dream as an accessible, if entirely ethereal, ideal. (Monk 13).

Film critic Brian D. Johnson explains that “perhaps in reaction to Hollywood, Canadian cinema has acquired an odd specialty: a pathological taste for dark, anti-heroic, sexually transgressive dramas” (qtd. in Vanderburgh 82) and adds that “Canadians seem uninterested in making the kind of fare that can spawn a break-out, mainstream hit.” Otherness thus extends beyond the production circumstances discussed so far and can be applied to the content of a film. Canadian film producer Michael Levine identifies a concern with marginalized topics when he argues that “Canadian film is all about Black, Jewish, one-eyed lesbians” (qtd. in Vanderburgh 82). Monk's 'Canadian Checklist' added to film reviews in *Weird Sex and Snowshoes and other Canadian Film Phenomena* recognizes the following terms as 'Canadian': “personal alienation”, “language barriers”, “identity issues”, “cerebral-spiritual split”, “internalized demons”, “landscape mirrors alienation”, “death”, “disease”, “destruction”, “pluralist perspective”, “ironic sense of humor”, “outsider stance”, “realistic treatment of over-sentimental subject matter”, “non-linear structure”, “fragmented narrative”, “potent women”, “ambiguous ending”, “the romantic ideal fails to materialize”, “layered narrative with different points of view” and “characters all missing something.” Admittedly, the list's significance is limited with regard to how meaningful it is, but it is remarkable that Monk uses it to characterize Canadian releases.

Jennifer Vanderburgh points out the paradox that “commercially successful Canadian films made with large budgets in the classical Hollywood narrative style are not perceived to be Canadian” (82). Two examples of the few obvious exceptions are Bob Clark's *Porky's* (1982), an American-Canadian co-production that is undistinguishable from American comedies depicting college life that were popular at the time, and Ivan Reitman's comedy *Meatballs* (1979); to this date, these two films rank among the highest-grossing Canadian films of all time (as a side note, after

Ivan Reitman produced *Meatballs* and two early Cronenberg features, *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1976) he moved south to become a household name in Hollywood with films like *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Legal Eagles* (1986), and the 1990 feature *Kindergarten Cop*). Similarly, Melnyk begins *Great Canadian Film Directors* (2007) by pointing out that “[u]nlike Hollywood or Bollywood with their star systems, Canadian cinema is director-driven” (IX). Consequently “[g]enre films [...] have regularly been discounted as unacceptable elements of the national cinema because of the belief that something so calculatedly commercial [...] is necessarily foreign (specifically, American), even if it was made in Canada” (Urquhart 36). David Cronenberg experienced this first-hand when he introduced the horror genre to the national cinema. But like other Canadian productions, Cronenberg's films do not attempt to follow genre conventions closely, but rather leave familiar paths for new territory. These films thematically graft into spheres outside the genre framework and incorporate foreign elements: in anglophone Canadian cinema the dominance of auteur filmmakers has effectuated a tendency to discard strict formula film for more individualized understandings of genre. Jim Leach explains that “[t]he intersection of genre and national cinema is [...] also a tension between popular pleasures and a more critical (and often elitist) response” (50). Canadian auteurs have thus proved challenging to their audience, who might be unwilling to accept that their expectations of a genre are not met.

The Grey Fox, for example, is a Western that only partially lives up to the expectations and conventions of its genre. Set in British Columbia at the turn of the twentieth century, the film tells the story of American stagecoach robber Bill Minor who ventures north after having served a thirty-year prison sentence. Minor is suave, clever and eloquent, but three decades of seclusion have left their mark on the aging criminal. In a significant scene he refuses to purchase a more modern gun and instead insists that the clerk sell him an old-fashioned colt like the ones he used for stage coach robberies before his incarceration. His attempt to continue where he left off before prison is ambitious, but troubled. Inspired by the first film he has ever seen in a cinema, Minor is determined to turn to train robbery, succeeds and goes into hiding in rural British Columbia. He then befriends a policeman and begins a relationship with a feminist photographer while investigations lead the police to his new hometown. Borsos employs this unusual character in a film that nevertheless incorporates several elements of Western films, most notably the great anticipation of a spectacular

showdown: it is supposed to be Minor's last coup, and his future bride is already on the way to New York, where they plan to retire. Borsos deconstructs the formula, however; the robbery fails unspectacularly when the train carries no money and the Grey Fox and his gang escape instead with a tiny bottle of whiskey, much to the amusement of the audience. Minor is imprisoned again, but manages to escape, as a screen caption informs the audience in the last few moments of the film. Behind rolling credits Minor hastens towards a lake in his prison garments and paddles away in a row-boat; his destination remains unknown. With the dismissal of the frontier myth and a main character who is powerless in the face of rapid technological transition, this “distinguished Canadian version of a Western” (Allan 112) is an example of a production that does not follow genre conventions closely: director Philip Borsos presents his main character not as a gunslinger and cowboy, but as a more realistic protagonist who finds himself without any means of orientation in a period of rapid transition at the beginning of the twentieth century; Minor must realize that he is overwhelmed by the arrival of new technologies which he cannot understand.

David Wellington's *I Love a Man in Uniform* (1993) takes breaking with genre expectations one step further. Henry Adler is a bank clerk who secures an acting role on a TV show similar to the popular American cop shows which fascinate him. For a while, Adler can exchange his drab reality for the rush and pretended authority he gets from the deceptively realistic police uniform. Intrigued by his new personality, Adler begins to wear the costume on the streets of Toronto, where civilians and even policemen mistake him for a real cop. With Adler's convincing appearance and an equally convincing recreation of the aesthetics of American cop shows, *I Love a Man in Uniform* “blurs the difference between genre and reality” (Leach 55) and systematically deconstructs both the action film genre and the cop show.

The aforementioned *Pontypool* offers an unusual approach to the horror film genre: the film's claustrophobic main setting is a radio station where an early morning radio talk show host Grant Mazzy and producer Sydney Briar broadcast information about a virus which has infected the small community of Pontypool, Ontario. Unable to leave the station, the staff investigate the infection through telephone calls and later with the help of an eye-witness, doctor John Mendez. In Pontypool, the spectator is as uninformed about the happenings in the village as are the protagonists, and suspense is drawn from the hovering around the gruesome events outside the radio

station. There is no second narrative to educate the audience, who thus rely on their phantasy in order to make their own sense of the chaos. The information received from outside is contradictory and unusual: violent riots that occurred in town in the early morning hours later expand to the outer town, provoking the thought that they will eventually reach the radio station which has become an accidental fortress for the few sane remaining. Eventually, Mazzy and Mendez realize that the virus spreads, most unusually, through certain words in the English language, and transforms those affected into zombie-like creatures, however; when deprived of the affected words, mostly terms of endearment and baby talk, the infected will quickly die in the hideous fashion of zombie films. When one of their co-workers, and later also Mendez, is infected, Mazzy and Briar discover that the virus can be circumvented by using other languages, most prominently French, and that it can be cured through nonsensical speech. As they arrive at this realization they immediately transmit the cure on the radio. Just then the French-Canadian military arrives to efface the virus and start a countdown as the protagonists broadcast their healing message.

With a claustrophobic setting, a most unconventional virus and suspense communicated through suggestive dialogue instead of explicit visuals, *Pontypool* offers an unusual and personal interpretation of the horror genre. This is in part due to failed attempts to obtain proper funding for the film. After several efforts to sign contracts with various studios, actors and producers failed, director Bruce McDonald was approached by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation CBC and asked if he wanted to create a radio play out of *Pontypool*, a project that inspired the economic decision to use just the one set, few special effects and a reduced cast for the film adaptation. The result is a departure from genre conventions in both narrative and iconography. McDonald explained that “the word zombie was forbidden on the Pontypool set” (McBride 14), and indeed it would be misleading to label the creatures contaminated with the virus as the classic figures of the horror genre. *Pontypool* is “a movie founded on the precarious shortcomings of language” (Teodoro 68), and focusses not on the infected but rather their infection. It is language, the quality of meaningful communication which distinguishes humans from animals; the citizens of *Pontypool* are thus dehumanized in their deprivation of speech by an unnamed source. In *Pontypool*, where “words themselves become weapons” and “communication is contagious” (McBride 12) language is a sensitive issue. With the emphasis that is placed on dysfunctional communication, the film also

offers a commentary on Canadian society. The only two languages which occur frequently in the film are French and English, a situation not without significance in a Canadian production. It is remarkable for an anglophone film that English is the infected language, and that French is the only mutually understood language that the protagonists can use to avoid the virus. Moreover, rescue comes from outside of Pontypool, Ontario, in the shape of French-Canadians. Director Bruce McDonald noted that the film depicts “emotional people who have difficulty expressing themselves” (qtd. In McBride 14) and that “we all relate to that kind of frustration of expression” (qtd. in McBride 14), a situation reminiscent of the francophone and anglophone language barrier within Canada. English becomes a “disease that threatens to colonize our minds – just as it’s historically attempted to colonize the consciousness of French-Canada” (Teodoro 69). Ultimately, in the film, both parties concerned succeed in their efforts to find a remedy for the virus, the military through eradicating the affected and Mazzy via transmitting language devoid of meaning. The primal conflict is not solved, however; it remains undisclosed whose method works, if any of the methods work, or why the virus exists in this form in the first place. Like *The Grey Fox*, the film denies closure and provokes the viewer to speculate about subsequent events.

As a final example, Lynne Stopkewich’s debut *Kissed* (1996) is a daring Canadian feature film that caused a great uproar upon its release at the Toronto International Film Festival in the same year. An ideological heir to the shocker Cronenberg, *Kissed* centers around character Sandra Larson (played by Molly Parker), a necrophiliac who embraces what developed from a morbid childhood fascination with death into an exceptionally deviant adult sexuality when she takes up an apprenticeship with an embalmer in a funeral home. Attractive and delightful, Sandra is courted by her co-worker Matt who, unaware of her sexual desires and his inability to fulfill them in his present state, is forced to accept her rejection while Sandra secretly pursues her sexual pleasures with the dead. Despite its unsettling visuals, *Kissed* is not a sensationalist film. Beneath a sexual surface, this adaptation of a story by Barbara Gowdy provides a feminist approach to the unusual sexual desire of a girl who may seem normal to the outside world, but, perfectly aware of her anomaly, is forced to give in to her overpowering sexual inclinations: once in a hearse at the carwash, or often in the morgue at night, but always in secrecy and in fear of the dire consequences she would face should she get caught. Instead of a depiction as a minor, and typically male, character who violates and

dishonors the dead, Stopkewich portrays the necrophiliac in a sympathetic light as a human being who chooses to accept her sexual urges, even if they are condemned as abnormal by society. The necrophiliac is not repulsed by her actions and when she is shown caressing stiff bodies it almost does not seem to the viewer like the non consensual violation that it nevertheless is.

Unimpressed by the controversy around *Kissed*, Stopkewich went on to shoot her second feature *Suspicious River* (2000), again an adaptation of a story by a female writer and again featuring Molly Parker in the leading role. In a bleak attempt to escape the dull surroundings of a small town, motel receptionist Leila Murray explores the dark side of her sexuality as she engages in various infidelities with guests. The film contrasts Leila's two lives, the loveless and dull existence that she leads outside the motel with her anorexic husband, and her life inside the motel where she prostitutes herself, seemingly for the thrill of it. The encounters with her clients soon turn violent, but Leila cannot stop, as she admits to her female co-worker who later comes to her rescue when a mischievous client betrays her trust and forces her to work as a prostitute for him.

Both *Kissed* and *Suspicious River* are ambitious studies of the dark side of sexuality told from a female perspective. Leila is the more passive character of the two, but she is not without culpability for her own miserable destiny. Both women are not entirely victimized, but chose to defy preconceived notions of how they are supposed to behave, even if they suffer ugly consequences from it as in *Suspicious River*. They are the architects of their own fortune and if they are victimized it is not entirely unwillingly; they are driven by abnormal sexual urges, aware of their anomaly, but unable to control themselves unavoidably steer towards tragedy. These characters defy traditional characterization, treading the line between hero and villain, but never entirely resting on one side of the spectrum. Like *They Grey Fox*, *I Love a Man in Uniform* and *Pontypool* the films do not follow genre conventions closely.

The reasons behind the Canadian national cinema's tendencies to resist genre are manifold. Often financial limitations put an early stop to projects: with only a tenth of the population of the United States and a national cinema that still relies on governmental funding, Canadian releases cannot compete financially with American productions which regularly set the mark in production values for film. Despite the efforts of the National Film Board to install a functioning Canadian film policy in order to promote domestic productions, there is currently only a meagre five percent rate

of such films playing in Canadian cinemas, hence the vast majority of films screened in Canada are foreign. Out of the foreign productions most are American and consequently “Canadian box office figures are still included as part of the American market” (Monk 4). In this respect Canada is not substantially different from most other countries. The greatest entertainment exporter in the world has communicated its values globally and established a strong idea of what a film is supposed to be like. But in Canada otherness is possible because the underlying philosophy is substantially different from that of the entertainment business to the south. In her foreword 'On Trudeau, The Nation, And Canadian Cinema' to Wyndham Wise's *Take One's essential guide to Canadian film* (2001), Patrizia Rozema, director of the Canadian classic *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987) and the film-adaptation of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1999), offers an unusual and personal characterization of Canadian film. Arguing that “we choose our stars” and that “who we pick speaks volumes about us” (Rozema X), Rozema casts former prime minister of Canada Pierre Elliot Trudeau as the central character for the “Late Twentieth Century Canadian History Movie.”

If Trudeau were this movie, what sort of movie would he be? It seems we created an art film – certainly no blockbuster this one. Not pandering to the Americans, we designed a truthful creation that played well in festivals, but not necessarily in malls. The narrative was dense, and perhaps even erratic – no clear career building narrative thrust in this number. Ours is a work of fairly elevated culture without tremendous mass marketable appeal (much to the distress of our industry types). We sense that originality and success are strangers to each other. 'Success' in the mass market is often forgotten. Originality, however, has children. It is felt. The money comes later. Something within us, within our nation, cries out for the original. We must, like our favoured leading films, speak to the new. So it was for Pierre Trudeau and so it is for all our finest cultural expressions, whether they be in collaborative nation building or in creating our own national cinema. [...] We are a country and a film industry as yet unimagined with purpose far beyond survival.” (Rozema X)

Rozema's terminology speaks volumes when she characterizes Canadian film as “original” and “fairly elevated culture.” In this she concurs with the general tone in the literature on the subject. As John Carpenter once was surprised to find out in an interview with David Cronenberg, Canadian filmmakers have a habit of referring to themselves as artists, not as entertainers. Equally, the Canadian film industry is not often referred to as an entertainment business, and this really is the crux of the matter; as will be discussed in the following chapters 2.3 and 2.4 on Canadian Film Policies and their effects, a large portion of the financing for a Canadian film comes from public

funding agencies, which for decades have provided considerable monetary aid for artists, and have thus played a major role in establishing a national cinema that is not necessarily profit-oriented. A government-funded cinema has different ambitions than privately financed productions. For Canada, this means relative artistic freedom for the filmmaker, a situation met with great praise by directors like Patrizia Rozema, but also with skepticism from members of the general public, who feel they are charged for the artistic vision of someone else. It also means budgetary limitations, for such productions cannot have at their disposal equally astronomical amounts of money as ambitious Hollywood productions which are geared at profitability. The following chapter will investigate Canadian film policies that considerably shaped the nature of Canadian cinema.

2.3 Canadian Film Policies

Because governmental contributions have significantly assisted in the creation of the national cinema as it exists today, in order to understand Canadian cinema in its present form it is necessary to examine the country's federal funding policies. Filmmakers in Canada may apply for financial support for their projects from film funds created and operated by the federal government. The most notable fund receivers are the aforementioned National Film Board of Canada (NFB), an agency focussing primarily on documentary film, and Telefilm Canada which focusses on feature filmmaking. The availability of federal funding has influenced the national cinema tremendously: because these agencies can operate either as producers, financial contributors or both, and monetary aid is drawn from the public sector, the conditions for Canadian filmmakers are substantially different from, for example, their American counterparts. In general, a publicly-funded film industry is less profit-oriented than a privately-financed one, and this situation is met with enthusiasm by Canadian filmmakers who thrive in the creative freedom they are granted. On the other hand, while a system predominately based on public subvention ensures that domestic filmmakers can bring their projects to fruition, it at the same time paradoxically implies budgetary limitations for the individual; there is, after all, only a fixed amount of financial contribution available from the annual budgets of supportive agencies. These issues, and the mechanisms behind film funding in Canada will be further investigated in the following chapters.

2.3.1 Documentary: the National Film Board of Canada

In connection with Canadian film and finances, it is inevitable to first mention the National Film Board of Canada, an institution that has made a major impact on Canadian filmmaking since its installation in 1939 (The National Film Board of Canada). Although the NFB's main focus is on documentary and animation, and its productions are thus less relevant to this study, which is mainly concerned with feature film, its importance for Canadian film overall is so great that a short discussion of its history and policies will nevertheless be included at this point.

Established in 1939 out of the former Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, the National Film Board of Canada maintained a radically different approach to film than its preceding agency. Under the leadership of Scotland-born founder John Grierson, the NFB turned its focus

away from educational films for governmental departments towards producing documentaries intended for a larger general audience; this would enable better representation of Canada to Canadians and to the world. The NFB's mandate "to make and distribute films across the country that [are] designed to help Canadians everywhere in Canada understand the problems and way of life of Canadians in other parts of the country" (The National Film Board of Canada) was taken less literally during the years of the second World War, a time dedicated predominantly to the production of war-propaganda material. This era saw the release of *Churchill's Island* (1941), the first NFB release to receive an Oscar. Two years later, the NFB recognized one aspect it had previously neglected, when more Francophone directors were hired and the number of distinctly Quebecois productions increased. This period saw the release of *Les Raquetteurs* (1958), a film about snowshoeing in rural Quebec that is considered "the seminal film in the Quebec tradition" (Monk 15) for its authentic depiction of an important Quebecois tradition celebrated in an era of rapid technological change. The film inspired documentaries similar in their underlying philosophies, such as *Pour la suite du monde* (1964), which gained widespread acclaim within Quebec for its attempt to re-enact the old tradition of Beluga-whale hunting on Ile-aux-Coudres, an island on the St. Lawrence river. Both films are now regarded as landmarks in the Quebec cinéma vérité tradition. With *If You Love this Planet* (1982) and *Flamenco at 5:15* (1983), two more NFB films won the prize for Best Documentary at the Academy Awards, and thus earned the agency international recognition for its work in the documentary area. With the help of John Grierson the NFB established a realist tradition so dominant that, until the arrival of David Cronenberg in the late 1960s, Canadian film was usually equalled to documentary filmmaking. Consequently, the NFB's efforts to screen Canadians and promote their identity through film "have made a major impact on the way that Canadians visualize themselves" (White 4).

Other achievements of the Film Board are in the field of animation, especially the work of Norman McLaren, who was summoned to Montreal from Scotland by Grierson in order to install an animation studio at the NFB. There, McLaren obtained a crucial role in the development of new animation techniques, particularly in combining sound and visuals and an animation method that creates films directly from film stock, without the use of cameras. In 1952 McLaren received an Academy Award for the critically acclaimed animated-short *Neighbours*, a much-cited film that

continues to be an example for the National Film Board's pioneering role in animation to the present date. Interestingly, the filmmaker's innovations and creative genius also sparked a new form of film in Canada that runs contrary to the empirical documentary tradition his employer and mentor Grierson introduced.

Working with the cinematic medium in entirely new ways, playfully and profoundly foregrounding the artifices of his own image-making, McLaren detonated the perceptual frameworks of the institution that employed him, and in the process, he expanded the possibilities of Canadian cinematic expression. The pursuit of possibilities remains the chief characteristic of that other essential Canadian filmmaking tradition – the experimental film. (Wise 73)

Both John Grierson and Norman McLaren laid the groundwork for what are still the two pillars of the National Film Board: animation and documentary film. Other selected animators of the NFB include Chris Landreth, Ryan Larkin and Roman Kroitor. Landreth created the 2004 Oscar-winning short *Ryan*, an animated biography of and interview with troubled animator Ryan Larkin. Larkin was a former NFB employee who, trained in animation by McLaren, directed an animated short *Walking* (1969), in which he “employed a variety of techniques (including line drawing and colour wash) to reproduce dream-like motions of people afoot with wit, humour, and individuality” (Wise 216). The film earned Larkin an Oscar nomination at the Academy Awards in 1970, but the animator left the NFB plagued by drug abuse in the late 1970s, and was eventually found homeless on the streets of Montreal; this is the tragic turn of events that Landreth investigates in *Ryan*.

The third of the selected innovators, Roman Kroitor, co-created the National Film Board's prominent documentary series *Candid Eye* that was broadcast in the late 1950s and early 1960s and gained acclaim for its observational take on a wide range of topics, such as the harvesting of tobacco or observation of the more private aspects of the life of pianist Glenn Gould. Kroitor's main achievement is, however, his involvement in developing the IMAX technologies and co-founding the IMAX company.

In addition to the accomplishments in animation and documentary that have been discussed so far, the NFB also contributed to the feature film sector, though it is not the primary funding agency that provides leverage for feature-length fiction film-production. Perhaps the most formative of NFB-produced feature films, and a major step forward in Quebecois cinema, is *Mon Oncle*

Antoine (1971). The film relates the story of an orphan in rural Quebec who, while sent to collect a body on Christmas Eve with his uncle, who is an undertaker, “quietly observes the hypocrisy, joy, despair, carnality, class tension, and strange melancholy of adults who surround him” (Wise 145). *Mon Oncle Antoine* is sometimes cited as the best Canadian feature film ever made (Toronto International Film Festival). A formative anglophone feature film produced by the NFB is *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964), which depicts the troubled life of a rebellious teenager in Toronto. Initially planned as a docudrama by director Don Owen, *Nobody Waved Good-bye* proved to be a seminal work for English-Canadian film and an important contribution to Canadian films done in the realist style. The NFB was also involved in the production of the award-winning *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (1986), a Quebec film directed by Denys Arcand that, unlike any other, received attention from an anglophone and an international audience.

The National Film Board still acts as one of the Canadian government's prime instruments in the fields of documentary, animation and technological innovation in film. One of its major achievements is the creation of a stable annual budget that assists the film, television and new media industries and supports Canadian filmmakers with their projects. The funding system of the NFB remains influenced by John Grierson's vision of an institution that is financially provided for by the government, or more specifically the Department of Canadian Heritage, but at the same time functions as an autonomous agency. Specifically, according to Tom Perlmutter, director of English programming at the NFB, the 2009 annual budget was less than ninety million Canadian dollars (Perlmutter 3); Perlmutter thus referred to the Film Board as “a small agency that is operating on an annual budget that would finance a modest Hollywood feature” (Perlmutter 6). A different source estimates an annual budget of seventy million Canadian dollars derived from the Canadian government (Transmedia Lab), excluding revenue from NFB product sales.

A further achievement of the National Film Board is that it inspired the creation of other subsidizing agencies and in doing so significantly shaped Canadian cinema as a whole. Several different Canadian funding agencies have been inspired by and modeled after the National Film Board. Although they were created at different points in time and in different locations (like in other national cinemas divisions can be made into national and regional funding agencies), and although

their respective missions are phrased individually, their collective aim can be summarized as the stimulation of and control over Canadian productions and the promotion of these productions nationally and worldwide. The model pioneered by the agency has influenced Canadian film to such an extent that the creation of the NFB was referred to as “the central event in the history of Canadian cinema” (Wise 150). In a similar vein, Jerry White argues that “[a] sustainable, indigenous Canadian cinema was born of government intervention via the creation of the... NFB, and that set the stage for the country's cinema overall” (5). In his significantly named *In the national interest: a chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989* Gary Evans describes the NFB's achievements in a similar manner before he continues as follows:

The Film Board has been a provisioner of sorts, a living example of modern Canada's commitment to find unity in its social diversity, particularly by providing French Canadians with the means to develop an authentic Quebec cinema on their own terms and to secure their place in the English-language cultural sea of North America. The institution has also provided English Canada, particularly its schoolchildren, with the tools to survive distinct from the monolithic culture of the United States. Finally, the organization has provided a platform for minority or non-mainstream groups to express their legitimate needs nationally, encouraging them to find their rightful place in a complex and alienating society. As a national provisioner then, the Film Board has stood outside the capitalist paradigm that drives the rest of North America, thereby effectively denying the concept of a mass-consumer audience. (Evans ix)

But although the National Film Board still constitutes a decisive factor in Canadian film, especially in its traditional areas, its importance has been diminished systematically throughout the past decades: the NFB first saw its monopoly crumbling with the growing importance of television productions in the 1960s; in the 1990s then, cutbacks in budget led to reductions in staff and consequently in releases. The exclusive position the board obtained previously, most prominently during the war years and after, is now past and “filmmakers are resigned to the fact that private or other institutional funding is necessary for many productions to materialize” (Evans, xiii). The Board responded to the changes by reassessing its mission and putting more emphasis on new media and technologies and on increased profitability. An excerpt from the 2002 strategic plan reads as follows:

...to define and position the NFB in its essential role in the Canadian audiovisual landscape in the context of a new global reality; to connect Canadians with the NFB of today and its audiovisual legacy; to make the NFB a more relevant reflection of Canadian society; to confirm the NFB's role as an incubator of creative excellence and innovation; to maintain and nurture the NFB's human capital; and to demonstrably increase the NFB's return on investment. (The National Film Board)

In the same year the agency gave access to part of its productions when it opened a Médiathèque in Toronto, the second of its kind, formed after the model in Montréal. Over the course of the following years the institution took another step toward increased accessibility when a large number of its productions were made available through its website. According to the website www.nfb.ca, the board “created over 13,000 productions and won more than 5,000 awards at festivals, including 12 Oscars” and thus received “more Academy Award nominations than any production company or organization outside of Hollywood”.

2.3.2 Feature Film

The major subsidy source for feature film on a national level is Telefilm Canada, a federal cultural agency with offices in Halifax, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. Launched in 1967 as the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), it was officially dedicated to “to support the Canadian feature film industry” (Telefilm) and given an initial budget of 10 million Canadian dollars. The CFDC sponsored several important domestic productions such as *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974), an adaptation of Mordecai Richler's novel by the same name and the early Cronenberg film *Scanners* (1981). In 1984, the CFDC was renamed Telefilm Canada and officially pronounced that its mission is

to foster the production of films, television programs and cultural products that reflect Canadian society, with its linguistic duality and cultural diversity, and to encourage their dissemination at home and abroad. By funding high-quality productions and strengthening its industry support to facilitate the transition to the new multiplatform environment, Telefilm Canada is aiming for the long-term viability and development of Canada's audiovisual industry. (Telefilm)

In contrast to the National Film Board, however, Telefilm Canada's fields of responsibility do not

include production and distribution of films. Instead the organization provides financial support in order to promote Canadian content. Since 1984 Telefilm Canada inaugurated several other agencies such as the Feature Film Fund, the Feature Film Distribution Fund, the Canada Television and Cable Production Fund and the Canada New Media Fund, each answering to the specific needs of filmmakers and the film industry. In 2000 a new Canadian Feature Film Policy saw an increase in funds to \$ 100 million annually (Telefilm). With several daughter agencies and a substantial budget, the influence of Telefilm Canada on the domestic cinema is enormous: the agency has, often on multiple occasions, been involved in productions of almost every major English-Canadian film director, such as Gary Burns, David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, Thom Fitzgerald, Guy Maddin, Bruce McDonald, Don McKellar, Patricia Rozema, Lynne Stopkewich and Anne Wheeler, and has thus supported almost all of the directors and films mentioned in this paper.

Besides Telefilm Canada and its various sister-organizations the Canadian government operates other agencies that cater to particular niches in filmmaking, such as The Canadian Independent Film & Video Fund (CIFVF), which is unique in its focus on the non-theatrical market. In addition to these institutions, the government also offers several grants to independent filmmakers, such as the Grants to New Media and Audio Artists program and the The Grants to Film and Video Artists program, both operated through the Canada Council for the Arts and both meant to aid in the support of emerging artists.

On a regional level several institutions similar in their endeavours to the national agencies encourage the work of artists in their respective provinces. A short selection includes the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Film Nova Scotia and British Columbia film. Funding through these institutions is usually only available to citizens of the specific province, and supports and sometimes even demands the hiring of local staff. Since these corporations function on a regional level, they are usually not able to sustain one project on their own, however; they instead constitute one of multiple contributing factors to a film project.

2.4 The effects of Canadian film policies

Publicly-subsidized agencies have enabled the existence of many filmmakers on a national and a regional level and have thus contributed significantly to a national Canadian cinema; however, the aforementioned reductions in funds for the National Film Board have also affected other agencies and denote a new reality for filmmakers. At the time of its peak, the National Film Board acted as the sole producer of a film and the filmmakers were full-time employees of the Board. As Evans predicted, the diminution of financial means triggered a tendency towards semi-private film funding, because funding agencies can now no longer support projects on their own. The reactions are mixed: while Evans notes that the change “has had a beneficial effect, because the scarcity of production funds has taught filmmakers to take nothing for granted” (xiii), filmmakers lamented the loss of security, among other things. When three filmmakers at the National Film Board were interviewed on the matter in 2000 they “agreed that radical changes had been necessary and that in many ways the new production process [was] more efficient” (Jones 42), hence concurring with Evans' statement nine years previously. They then went on to comment on less-quantifiable effects, perceptible perhaps only to those involved in filmmaking: “but they also say, in one way or another, that something deeply valuable has been lost to the board - its soul, in the words of one.” (Jones 42). This statement reveals much about the atmosphere at the NFB before and confirms the creative freedom artistic staff at the Board enjoyed. What is possibly the most valuable insight from the interview is that the filmmakers, despite their disappointment over restructuring, still argue that “there is no place in the world where they could make the films they do” (Jones 42). This statement can be expanded beyond the firmaments of the NFB as a general statement about Canadian cinema. While there is, to the knowledge of this author, no other Canadian subsidiary agency that like the NFB acts as producer and distributor on a national level and that thus had a similar impact on Canadian film, the fact that there are other agencies giving assistance to feature film still means that filmmakers are privileged with artistic liberty, a situation met with enthusiasm by filmmakers like those interviewed. Although the number of private producers is increasing, governmental subsidy is still a stable resource that filmmakers can count on, at least judging from the producers involved in films relevant for this study: almost every film mentioned here was in part subsidized by governmental agencies, primarily Telefilm Canada.

Paradoxically, however, in spite of the efforts of the National Film Board, which operates since 1939, and Telefilm Canada, which since 1984 supported most of Canada's range of award-winning directors, the agency's achievements are not as widely known within Canada as one might assume. Despite the strong international praise they receive, NFB productions in the past ran the risk of being dismissed by a Canadian audience, who thought of them as “dry or overly-didactic, if heart-warmingly patriotic” (White 4). The same concern plagues feature films and consequently the main problem that the Canadian film industry faces, in the past and today, is a lack of audience for domestic films: “[e]very year, around the time of the Genies [the Genie Awards], there is no shortage of reminders that relatively few paying customers have actually seen the films being celebrated” (Feldman, *North* XII). The governmental undertakings to build a national cinema were only partially successful: while the creation of subsidiary agencies effectively stimulated the production of Canadian films, attempts to promote these films domestically have, in equal measure, been futile. Attempts to build larger Canadian audiences for domestic product through improved distribution and marketing have proved to be disappointing for filmmakers and distributors. Not unlike other national cinemas, the Canadian cinema is vulnerable especially to the overbearing presence of American films, which traditionally account for the majority of screen time in Canadian cinemas. The dominance of American studios on domestic Canadian screens is so great that Charles Acland began his 2002 essay on the topic with the following fastidious entry:

Open a newspaper and turn to the Movie listings. Can you spot any Canadian films currently showing in your area? Chances are you will spot a couple [...] but most of the listings will be films from our southern neighbour. This simple exercise has introduced you to one of the most troublesome dimensions of Canadian cinema culture: the dominance of US film in Canadian theatres. (2)

Four years later White added in a similar vein: “as I write this sitting in Edmonton - the capital city of the province of Alberta, a city with a population of approximately 800,000 - not a single Canadian film is playing within the city limits” (6). With figures ranging between 95 and 98 percent (Acland 10) the preponderance of annual screen time is occupied by foreign, particularly American, releases. To include a more specific example, the Canadian share of the theatrical market, in percent of distribution revenue, between 1988 and 1993 was a meagre 4.3 to 6.4 (Acland 10).

Canadian cinemas traditionally are and remain a hostile environment for Canadian films. The government acts in this particularly pestered scenario of Canadian film as both hero and villain for the ambiguous position it puts filmmaker in; for what good is creating a cinema without an audience? A major point of criticism is the lack of a functioning quota to secure a fixed share of Canadian releases in Canadian cinemas and in doing so defend indigenous content against foreign dominance.

The real failure of Canadian film policy is that it has not been able to address the debilitating problem that is the lack of screen space for Canadian films [...]. Canadian films are, to a great extent, foreign films in their own country. [...] Any attempts to impose quotas for Canadian films on Canadian screens – the likes of which have been extremely successful, if not indispensable, in building a Canadian music industry - have been met with furious resistance from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), resistance which has in turn been met by almost instant capitulation from the Canadian government. Quebec had some success on this front starting in 1983 by regulating distribution [...] but the MPAA managed to negotiate exemptions to the law for its members. (White 6-7)

These drab realities have led to disenchantment and resignation among observers, and so it comes that the unfortunate situation of Canadian films being marginalized at home is “taken as part of the general knowledge about film in Canada” (Acland 10). Monk illustrates this powerfully when she begins the introduction to her popular volume on Canadian film, *Weird Sex and Snowshoes and Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (2001), with the claim that “[t]he problem with Canadian film is ... fill in the blank with anything from Telefilm policy to regional funding formulas to the lack of private investment or Canadian theatre chains – it doesn't matter. That's generally the way any conversation about Canadian film begins” (3).

It is indeed striking to observe that this weak spot of Canadian cinema is addressed in the introductions to most reference works pertaining to the subject, but with little room left for positive interpretation, or even a positive outlook. In the early 1970s Keith Buttrum noted that “[i]t has always been claimed by Canadian film makers that it is almost impossible to get their films into theatres and thus before the viewing public. This is one of the oldest problems of the industry and is as true today as previously” (47). His statement is complemented by a cartoon of a man running

towards the projection room of “Superluxor Theaters – A division of Bigbucks (Can) Ltd.” and the inscription “A Canadian film maker finally manages to get his film into a Canadian theatre!” accompanies the image. In 1983 Piers Handling explains in the first book on David Cronenberg *The Shape of Rage: the Films of David Cronenberg* that “[m]ost of us who think and write about Canadian Film are extremely concerned with the problem of visibility. Our films are not seen and our directors and stars are not known” (vii). Decades later, it seems, not much has changed. In the opinion of Seth Feldman in 2002 “Canada [was] still the home of a truly marginal cinema” where domestic releases were “treated as foreign films when – if – they [appeared] on Canadian screens, usually at art houses and usually for short runs. (*North*, XII)”. In 2007 George Melnyk claimed that “mainstream Canadian audiences find Canada cinema terra incognita” (*Directors* XIII) and that “the main audience for Canadian cinema in English Canada is the art house cinema circuit, which involves only several dozen screens across the country. Occasionally an English-Canadian film is promoted through the mainstream theatres, but such a film is the exception that proves the rule” (*Directors* X). One year later Wolfram Keller and Gene Walz lamented that “it is striking, and perhaps somewhat symptomatic of the Canadian film predicament, that other nations and other nations' audiences played (and continue to play) a major role in the success story that is Canadian film” (1); they also argue that “Canada has not successfully 'branded' itself” (4). While it is correct that this is the regrettable fate that plagues domestic releases, David Cronenberg's directorial work has to be pointed out as a regular exception, as he is the one filmmaker familiar to an audience outside 'the art house cinema circuit'. It is also striking that the increasingly present cinematic persona of Sarah Polley, who as an actress has worked with Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan and Don McKellar and whose 2006 directorial debut *Away From Her* grossed \$7,674,385 with an estimated budget of \$4,000,000 CAD (The Internet Movie Database), is unquoted in this context, as is Zacharias Kunuk's aforementioned *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001).

A more positive comment on the matter, however, comes from one of the filmmakers; because it offers a different point of view and because Atom Egoyan is an established director, the comment shall be included at this point in its entirety.

While it may sound perverse, we benefit from not having a strong internal market. We

don't compete with each other over box-office share, gigantic fees or star treatment, because it's simply not an issue. This is both a blessing and a curse. As artists, it means that our survival is not set by public taste, but by the opinion of our peers – festival programmers [...], art council juries, and even Telefilm, which labels itself a 'cultural investor' (try using that term in Hollywood!). We can't permit ourselves to rest on our laurels (since they are not productive enough), and consequently we have to keep working in order to survive. Since we're not seduced or deformed by market pressures, we continue to make our films in a highly idiosyncratic and distinct way. We experiment with form, tell unconventional stories, use brilliant actors who aren't 'stars' (though they really are), and are generally free of the test screenings, market research, and all the other industrial processes that have homogenized film culture. If this has made our films less 'commercial', this has been the result of getting away with making our films less commercially. This is something we cherish. We started making our films outside the 'system' and – if I can be so presumptuous to speak for any group – we'd prefer to go back to the margins than run the risk of becoming banal. Stated bluntly, if we act like we've been spoiled, it's because we've taken full advantage of a culturally subsidized environment. (Egoyan 1-2)

Egoyan here confidently paints a scenario that clearly favors the artist. If there really is such great artistic freedom for filmmakers in Canada, and as an active director and screenwriter his commentary should be taken as a valid insight, then it seems that the system of public funding indeed constitutes a contributing factor to the otherness of Canadian cinema. The Canadian national cinema produced a large number of auteur filmmakers, a range of unconventional artists whose films, as Egoyan expounds, are exposed primarily in selected cinemas and festivals and thus stand 'outside the system'. Egoyan concurs with the filmmakers at the National Film Board who praise the fact that Canada is a unique place for filmmakers because it allows them to make the kind of films they want to make. Judging from their enthusiasm, it must be satisfying to work as an artist in an environment that prefers creativity over revenue. Nevertheless, as much as this situation is applauded by the artistic side, it inevitably bound to result in discrepancies of philosophy between the parties involved. A publicly-subsidized and unprofitable system must naturally be subject to controversy: while Egoyan claims the filmmakers get away with making their films less commercially, “[t]he political right begrudges every cent of public funding that goes into filmmaking” (Feldman, *North* XII) and, paradoxically for the benefit of filmmakers, “the left protests any profit that comes out of it” (Feldman, *North* XII). This basic conflict is the national

cinema's constant companion; it is a byproduct of the launch of the Film Board in 1939 and has not dissipated since.

Increased profitability was a major driving force behind the restructured National Film Board and it might only be a matter of time until the governmental agencies concerned with feature film will be affected. For a part of the Canadian public, this would be a welcomed turn of events. The aforementioned Canadian-born Hollywood household name Ivan Reitman sees things pragmatically: “[t]he best way for Canada to have a successful film industry that can compete with Hollywood is for it to make movies that people want to see. It's that simple” (qtd. in Vanderburgh 87). Vanderburgh confirms the perception of Canadian cinema as peripheral, but identifies an identity problem in turning towards a more conventional yet lucrative narrative as pioneered further south.

In popular discourse, it is widely presumed that English Canadian cultural specificity and the classical narrative form are diametrically opposed. The logic of such a discursive paradigm results in a self-fulfilling prophecy that renders English-Canadian cinema, if divergent from classical Hollywood narration, marginal. As a result, the general characterization of culturally specific English-Canadian cinema considers it to be inherently uncommercial. (82)

Along with the lack of success in implementing a quota for Canadian content in cinemas, the initial hope for Canadian cinema to help promote national identity has lessened over the past decades. While those concerned with filmmaking in Canada tend to share Egoyan's passion, a large part of the Canadian public prefer American releases and are unaware of the efforts and international plaudits Canadian films received: “since the 1970s and early 1980s, most Canadians lost whatever expectation they may have had that film would serve as a nation-building tool. In fact, just the opposite has happened. The American studios didn't leave our movie theatres. [...] The very idea that any nation could sustain an independent national cinema is now treated with some nostalgia” (Feldman, *North* XII). Like Egoyan's sentiments, Feldman's notion is followed with a rationalization of reality when he explains that “the nationless Canadian state serves us well enough that we might ask if we really want to live in a nation that, like the United States, has placed the national fantasy at the nexus of daily life” (XII”). Again echoing Egoyan, Feldman provides a negative definition of the Canadian cinema by comparing it to its American counterpart,

emphasizing again the importance that the Southern neighbour has on the national cinema. When Egoyan states that Canadian filmmakers “prefer to go back to the margins than run the risk of becoming banal”, he, like Melnyk, who explains that “the breadth and depth of Canadian cinema is outstanding, (*Directors* XIII)” confidently assigns high value to domestic films. It seems that Canadian filmmakers have a clear vision of what they want their cinema to be, and an even clearer one of what they do not want it to become; and it would be what they envision were it not for the blot of a small audience that tarnishes an otherwise functioning system. Monk sees a miscommunication between the audience and the filmmakers that is responsible for certain false expectations from the national cinema: “[i]t’s absurd to think Canada should be turning out multi-million dollar blockbusters, but somewhere in the depths of the colonized Canadian psyche – colonized [...] by American popular culture – we’ve come to believe we don’t measure up to the American watermark” (3). Canadian films “are shot, on average, in three weeks and on about one-tenth the budget of their Hollywood competition” (Feldman, *North* XII), and that is not a surprising situation given the country has only about the tenth of the population of the United States. With a lack of interest from the Canadian public, the idea of increasing revenue budgets is not realistic and thus “the feature film industry continues to be dependent on state support, now more than ever” (Melnyk, *Directors*, X). Egoyan counters: “[g]reat art needs patrons. It always has, and it always will. In return for this support, we have brought honour and glory to our national film culture” (2). It is for the future to see whether or not a larger domestic audience for Canadian productions can be built.

3. The Surreal in *My Winnipeg*: Filmography and Surrealism

3.1 Guy Maddin: introduction, Biographical Sketch and Filmography

Guy Maddin is a filmmaker from Winnipeg who is credited with being either “the most eccentric of mainstream filmmakers [...] or the most accessible of avant-gardists” (qtd. in Beard, *Past* 3). Maddin’s artistic career began comparatively late: in his earlier life he held more conventional employment as a bank teller and occasional house-painter after obtaining a degree in economics at the University of Winnipeg (Church 5). It was not until 1989 that Maddin, almost 30 years old, now married and the father of one child, became actively involved in filmmaking. In 1989, three years after his first attempt, *The Dead Father*, a short film that granted him early cult-status among cinephiles, and with support from the Winnipeg Film Group and the Manitoba Arts Council, Maddin released the first in a series of bizarre feature films, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*. Maddin’s style is characterized on the visual level by his recreating the aesthetics of early motion pictures and on the narrative level by telling original and outlandish stories.

On the visual level, there is noticeable in his films an “absurd fluency in the vernacular of early motion pictures” (Lim par.1) that makes his films obtrusive in a filmic landscape that has long abandoned such iconography as antiquated.

Maddin gamely recovers and resuscitates the past, giving it a fuller life beyond that which it has known. This is most readily apparent in his film aesthetic, which evinces an almost encyclopaedic command of cinema history, nimbly appropriating the vocabulary of the early masters (Méliès, Feuillade, Murnau, Dreyer, Vigo, Sternberg and Eisenstein, to name a few. (Bromberg 89)

Maddin himself claims that “if anyone inspired me to make movies it was [Luis] Buñuel” (Monk 42), the surrealist filmmaker who gained notoriety with *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L'Âge d'Or* (1930). Drawing influences from both avant-garde and mainstream filmmaking, but not properly belonging to any specific category or genre at all, Maddin’s output defies unequivocal description and categorization. It thus “[bridges] the gap between unconventional and conventional cinema” (Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 193) and is unique, as Beard points out: “Maddin’s work, no matter how many influences it may contain, resembles no one’s at all” (Beard, *Past* 3).

Maddin is an autodidact and received no professional film training throughout his career.

When he began working on his own films, the Winnipegger extended his theoretical interest in early motion pictures to the application of those primitive practical techniques used to shoot these films some decades ago. The final product is remarkable to viewers accustomed to the iconography of modern film.

[s]ilent movies [...] were a gold mine of simple methods to create ambitious, dramatic and emotional effects. Irised and vignetted shots are easy to achieve, and give instant access to a more elevated form of portraiture. Double exposures – in Maddin's case conducted in the camera just as in pre-1920s cinema – not only allow an easy as pie entry into the realm of mental and spiritual events but are always already poetic. (Beard, *Past* 6)

Dennis Lim concurs, arguing that “[e]very Guy Maddin movie creates the illusion of a secret history. His wilfully primitive cut-rate spectacles seem like artefacts, reanimated bits of cultural detritus, but also like hauntings, the return of the cinematic repressed” (Lim). *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's diary* (2002), *Cowards Bend The Knee* (2003) and *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006) are three Maddin feature films which are silent; all of them use title cards either as a substitute for dialogue or to emphasize specific information. Their cinematography is achieved through the use of 8mm and 16mm cameras which are often handheld, by shooting through filters, as well as through the use of projection, shadows and multiple exposure. Moreover, with the exception of *Twilight of The Ice Nymphs* (1997) all of Guy Maddin's feature films are shot in black and white; a remarkable decision to make several decades after the invention of colour film. *Twilight of The Ice Nymphs* was also Maddin's only release shot on 35mm film, an unsuccessful experiment that caused him to not only call the film “stillborn” but also to almost abandon filmmaking, as documented in Noam Gonick's documentary *Guy Maddin: Waiting for Twilight* (1997). Here, Maddin explained on the set: “just close the mausoleum lid on me. I don't really feel like working on movies anymore.”

As regards the narrative level, the contents of Maddin's films are as unconventional as the techniques he employs to produce them. Defiant of easy synopsis, absurd, and not seldom vile, Maddin's films are an acquired taste and unlikely to ever enter mainstream cinemas. A recurring theme in Maddin's films is amnesia, already present in the debut *The Dead Father*, which takes place in “the dominion of forgetfulness,” but most dominant in the second feature *Archangel*

(1990). Set in post-World War I Russia, *Archangel* is also typical of the time and setting of many Maddin films: if at all specified, most are set before 1930. Regarding setting, Maddin's films frequently take place in exotic locations outside Canada, such as Germanic-sounding Tolzbad in *Careful*, Eastern Europe in *The Heart of The World* (2000) and *Archangel*; they are also often set in Winnipeg, a remote location within Canada, as in *The Saddest Music in The World* (2003) and *My Winnipeg* (2007). Another recurring trait is the blur between truth and fiction that provokes the viewer to speculate about how many of the autobiographical splinters in Maddin's films are phantasy, and if they actually contain information that can be traced back to the biography of the filmmaker; this is something that will be of further importance in the discussion of *My Winnipeg*. With regard to *Brand Upon The Brain!* (2006), for example, Maddin estimates that it contains as much as "97 percent literal autobiography—a statement that itself seems less than literal, given that the film is set in a lighthouse that doubles as a 'mom-and-pop orphanage' where the hero's parents engage in the vampiric harvesting of 'orphan nectar'" (Lim).

Tales from the Gimli Hospital (1989) was Maddin's first feature-length release. "A brave first feature that has built-in marketing limitations" (Cadd.), the film tells the story of two Icelandic Canadian neighbours Gunnar and Einar. While confined to their hospital beds during a smallpox epidemic in the Icelandic outpost of a Gimli, Manitoba "that we no longer know," the neighbours compete for the attention of the beautiful nurses who care for them. Gunnar and Einar rival each other in telling tales about their past, one more peculiar than the other, before the conflict ends in a tragic "butt-pinching fight." With an unusual setting and story, exaggerated romantic competition between the main characters and stunning cinematography, the film already contains several trademarks of the director. Still firmly rooted in Canada's film underground, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* cost \$22,000 to produce, \$40,000 to market, and by 1992 had grossed \$116,000 in Canada (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*).

Archangel (1990) continued Maddin's passion for imaginative relationship dramas in unusual destinations: in *Archangel*, a remote village in northern Russia, a number of characters who forget who they are in love with meet. Canadian Lieut. John Boles lost a leg in the recently-ended Great War and now searches for his true love, Iris. He has, however, forgotten that Iris is dead, just as he is unaware of the end of the war. When Boles meets Veronkha, he believes her to be Iris, and

they pursue a relationship; Veronkha is equally oblivious to the fact that she is married to a different soldier. Veronkha's amnesiac husband Philbin believes throughout the film it is his wedding night. Adding to their personal tragedies, the rest of these delusional characters are equally unaware of the end of the First World War and continue with their respective professional responsibilities. Set against the backdrop of the Great War, *Archangel* "shared the same thematic terrain as *Tales* and *Dead Father*: death, sickness, alienation and a confused sense of identity" (Monk 43). Wise called it a "masterpiece – a wistful, luminous, conflation of absurdity, high romance and romantic delusion" (205) and the film earned Maddin his first award for Best Experimental Film at the 1992 National Society of Film Critics Awards in the United States.

Both *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* and *Archangel* were popular among underground film aficionados, but it was *Careful* (1992) that earned Maddin a growing budget and more recognition as the Winnipegger "turned what was once conventional film-making (the silent film) into a new avant-garde" (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 200). The director again displayed an interest in the lesser known European folk in this Alpine-family drama; the film depicts a psychotic mother and her equally defunct sons, and is set in fictional Tolzbad- a pun on frequent collaborator and University of Manitoba professor George Toles. Tolzbad is a mountain hamlet where people live in constant fear of triggering an avalanche should they speak too loudly. One son is confined to the attic as punishment for resembling too much his deceased father, one is haunted by the said father's ghost, and the other, estranged by his attempt to sleep with his own mother, is driven to suicide. As a side note, this was the second time after the 1986 short *The Dead Father* that the "deceased-father" theme was employed in a young career. Beard observed that Maddin's films are unique because they are the unprecedented products of a multitude of influences. In this vein, *Careful* is not a classical alpine-drama: Will Straw notes that

Reviewers who applaud Maddin's insight into the Bavarian mountain film are unlikely to have seen a great number of these, but that is the point. Maddin's films are both interventive and revisitings of genuine past styles and imagined versions of such styles, seemingly drawn (in *Careful*'s case) from such an ephemera as the illustrations of children's fairy-tale books or early sound-era operetta. (310)

Despite the exotic setting, Monk sees many things typically Canadian in the "pro-incest, pro-

repression” (Bromberg 88) feature: “[a] perfect mixture of weird sex, snow and Oedipal tragedy, *Careful* digests almost every single Canadian archetype (except hockey) and spews them out in swatches of stylized colour and old-time technique to make for a strange and entirely surreal voyage into the deepest crevasses of the Canadian psyche” (Monk 281). *Careful* contributed to Maddin's growing popularity when it earned the filmmaker his second official decoration, an award for “Best Canadian Film” at the 1992 Sudbury Film Festival. In 1995, having released only three feature films and eight shorts (Church *Filmography* 266-267), Maddin was awarded the Telluride Film Festival's medal for lifetime achievement. In the same year Maddin's short *Odilon Redon or The Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts Toward Infinity*, a film inspired by French symbolist painter Odilon Redon was named the Best Canadian Short Film - Special Jury Citation at the Toronto International Film Festival, arguably the most influential of Canadian film festivals. Further achievements of Maddin include a Genie award for Best Live Action Short Drama for *The Heart of The World* (2000) before *My Winnipeg* (2007) earned the director his most important accolade so far, a \$25,000 prize for Best Canadian Feature Film, his second win out of three nominations at the Toronto International Film Festival.

The short *Sissy Boy Slap Party*, like *Odilon Redon* released in 1995, holds what the title promises: a few minutes of film in which visibly bored and decadent young sailors slap each other's naked torsos with their bare hands in an absurdly homoerotic and girlish manner after they have been told not to do so by an old, equally naked man who left “to buy condoms” in the first moments of the film. Supporting these bizarre images are fast, comical noises of the doltish slaps. *Sissy Boy Slap Party* is different from most of Maddin's other work in its simplicity, and is useful in understanding the artistic range of the director. Like the 2008 short *Spanky – To The Pier and Back*, – a few minutes of film capturing dog Spanky walking to the Pier and back, which is remarkable only because it is dressed in the filmmaker's usual aesthetics - the film is far from being serious and it might be moot to search for any deeper meaning in it (it is, however, Maddin's most explicitly homoerotic film in a back catalogue of films that frequently provoke the viewer to wonder about the director's own sexual preference).

The feature *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997) again employs the melodramatic-tragedy theme through a scenario of unrequited love in eccentric surroundings: the film is set on an island

“where the sun never sets and the air is full of falling ostrich feathers” (Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 197).

With the ensuing *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002), a ballet interpretation of the novel by Bram Stoker, the director explored new screens and reached new audiences when the film was broadcast on national television by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). With a budget of \$1.6 million (Melnik, *One Hundred Years* 197), the film also had the highest budget to this point in Maddin's career at its disposal. *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's diary* won three awards, including an Emmy for Arts Programming in 2002. *Cowards Bend The Knee* (2003), originally designed as an installation in Toronto, was the second silent feature film after *Dracula*. *Cowards* forms the start of an introspective phase that culminated in the release of two more features: *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006) a “Maddin-esque amalgam of the autobiographical, Freudian and willfully absurd” (Foundas 123), and *My Winnipeg* (2007).

For *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003), Maddin interrupted the work on the informally-titled 'Me-trilogy' to produce his most accessible feature film to date. A loose adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, the film centers around the uneasy relationship between two estranged expatriate Canadian brothers, Roderick and Chester Kent. Both compete in a contest to present the saddest music in the world; in the contest Roderick represents Serbia and Chester the United States, which is absurd, given that they are both Canadian. The contest is sponsored by a beer fabricant and is held in the Winnipeg of the Depression era. In typical Maddin fashion, and captured in the usual black and white aesthetic, the film centers on melodrama which, in the hands of the director, becomes ludicrous. The film was produced by Atom Egoyan and with Mark McKinney and Isabella Rossellini stars two accomplished international actors and is among the director's best-known releases to date.

As mentioned above, Maddin's first feature, *Tales from The Gimli Hospital*, became a fast success among film enthusiasts, and it turned Maddin into the type of filmmaker that film-aficionados would pride themselves to know. Although the film was also generally well received by critics (Cadd.), Maddin's story is the typically-Canadian one of the artist who must be recognized abroad before being accepted in his home country. In Maddin's case it was distributor Ben Barenholtz who brought him this necessary international acknowledgement by showing midnight

screenings of *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* for a year in New York after the film had been rejected by the Toronto Festival of Festivals, now the Toronto Film Festival. Maddin commented on the unfortunate circumstances he and other Canadian artists find themselves confronted with: “[i]n Canada, I don't get negative reviews, really. They just don't say anything. For the most part, my films don't even get reviewed here, but elsewhere, I'm fair game” (Monk 43). Despite a career now lasting for over two decades and the considerable output of almost 40 short and feature films (Church 266-267) as well as two wins at the Toronto International Film Festival, Maddin has not reached the name recognition of fellow Canadians Atom Egoyan and David Cronenberg. Yet, the Winnipegger's popularity continues to grow over the years, and this may be due to the fact that the second span of his career has seen a change in attitude: while the films released until 2000 were more experimental, the releases after the turn of the millennium became more accessible to a broader audience.

The fact that the director left the familiarity of Manitoba twice for the United States of America might also have contributed to his growing popularity: in 2006 Maddin accepted to work on commission for the city of Seattle for *Brand Upon The Brain!*, on the condition that he must use a Seattle crew and studio. Later he accepted a teaching position at UCLA in California. It are, however, primarily the stylistic changes which bring the films closer to an audience less acquainted with the aesthetics of early film. Maddin “[began] as a kind of primitivist working in 16mm and taking up the early-cinema methods of long takes, simple shot assembly, reductive low-key lighting, and elementary special effects” (Beard, *Past* 13). This might be called the first phase of the author. When experimenting with colour and 35mm film in *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* failed, the director returned to his traditional peculiarities, but added changes in editing in the second phase: after the unsatisfactory *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*, Maddin explained that an increase in pace is what he then pursued.

Now, I want to make a faster movie. I sat down and watched a whole bunch of American movies and I realized that it all comes down to conflict. You have to have conflict in every single frame [...] the more conflict, the faster the movie goes. [...] Next time out, I'm going to leave all this meditative lethargy behind. I want to make a fast-paced film that's so fast, it's damn near electric [...] This won't be one of those classic passive Canadian protagonists, he'll be charged (qtd. in Monk 44).

The opposite of the 'passive Canadian protagonist' is Anna, heroine of the 'fast-paced' 2000 short *The Heart of the World*. “[A]n action-packed neo Constructivist send-up of pre-millennial anxiety” (Bromberg 88), the film screens the melodramatic rivalry of two brothers: Nikolai, a mortician, and Osip, an actor portraying Christ in “The Passion Play.” Both are wooing Anna, an attractive “state scientist studying the earth's core - the very heart of the world.” Unable to make a decision between her suitors and bewildered by her discovery that “the world is dying of heart failure,” possibly on account of her indecisiveness, she agrees to marry the abhorrent and prurient industrialist Akmatov. Anna is horrified by her mistake and rejects her gruesome husband on their wedding night. She descends to the core of the planet to save the Earth, and with it Nikolai and Osim, by becoming “the new and better heart” of the world. Like any Maddin feature, *The Heart of The World* is exaggerated melodrama and the emotionally 'charged' characters are more likely to provoke laughter than compassion. Swiftly edited, the short film is highly entertaining and typical of the second and faster phase in Maddin's directorial career. Most obviously through the choice of the character's names, the film is also an homage to Soviet montage cinema of the early twentieth century.

Despite the success of *The Heart of The World* and his subsequent films, Guy Maddin remains an auteur filmmaker whose films are likely to never be discovered by a mainstream audience. The distance from high grossing box office hits to Maddin's 'wilfully primitive cut-rate spectacles,' as action packed as both may be, is too great and obvious to anyone who has seen at least one film from each end of the spectrum. This has resulted in positive echoes as well: Derek Hill praises that “[f]rom his home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Maddin is isolated from the facile preoccupations and coarse trends which plague the majority of Hollywood films nowadays” (par.1). Despite a growing budget, most of Maddin's films were no shot in professional studios, but in old warehouses in Winnipeg, and although he collaborated with renowned actors such as Isabella Rossellini, usually lesser-known actors are cast, as was the case with Ann Savage, a former B-movie star who was hired to play Maddin's mother in *My Winnipeg*. It may also have been Maddin's obstinate refusal to leave Winnipeg for the more logical city of Toronto that prevented better marketing and distribution. Yet Maddin is still of great importance for Canadian film, and his status as a cult-filmmaker remains undiminished. “If not a household name, Maddin has achieved a certain

international celebrity, among cinephiles at least, for his dense, eccentric, and deeply personal work – a peddler of the prurient, a purveyor of the bizarre, and a scholar of the screen” (Bromberg 88). Furthermore, Melnyk notes that “Maddin's escape from the gravitational pull of cult sensibility is not assured, but it is possible” (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 200).

3.2 Surrealism

The term “Surrealism” is derived from Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles des Tirésias - a drame surréaliste*. *Les Mamelles des Tirésias* was written in 1903, roughly two decades before the Surrealist movement began to form in Paris, and was staged for the first time in 1917. The Surrealists adopted the term 'surréaliste' coined by Apollinaire and because of this and a partial thematic accord with what the movement proclaimed later, *Les Mamelles des Tirésias* can be counted among the earliest surrealist works. As a movement, Surrealism emerged from the ashes of its predecessor, Dada, in Paris in the early twentieth century. Dada was an ‘anti-art’ counter-reaction to contemporary society and artistic tradition and a movement which, frustrated with both the decadent bourgeois values held responsible for the disillusionment and the evil inspired by World War I, questioned absolutes and reason. Dada alternatively promoted a nihilistic worldview that centered around protest and revolt. The future pioneers of Surrealism felt the urge to move toward a more constructive world view that allows for the genesis of new product and thought. Thus the departure from destructive Dada followed: “it dawned on these young writers and artists that perhaps it was not man's mind that was wanting, or even the world of realities that was absurd, but the limited utilization of the mind and of the objects of its experience” (Balakian 124). This insight lay the foundations for the formation of a new movement.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis studies also significantly influenced Surrealist philosophy. As a former psychiatrist André Breton, the driving force behind the surrealist movement, took a professional interest in Freud's findings. Moreover, it is known that they had on one occasion met personally. For a movement that puts great emphasis on the unconscious, Freud's findings were essential. Psychoanalysis inspired Breton to define the ultimate goal of surrealism as “the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality” (Breton 14). Moreover, psychoanalysis was an influence on the group's earliest strategy: automatism. Hoping to overcome “the limited utilization of the mind,” Breton and the poet and future co-founder of the Surrealist movement, Philippe Soupault, experimented with a mode of writing through which they attempted to minimize the influence of rational thought of the conscious mind and access and reflect the unconscious. This was achieved through putting sentences on paper in the random order and composition in which they entered their minds. The idea of this

automatized writing, or “écriture automatique,” and its aim of triumphing over the censorship of rational thought was at the core of Surrealist thinking.

3.2.1 Definitions of Surrealism

In 1924 Breton composed the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, in which he defines the term as follows:

Dictionary: Surrealism, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation.

Encyclopedia: Surrealism. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Durozoi)

Surrealist artist Frida Kahlo provides an unconventional definition of Surrealism as “the magical surprise of finding a lion in a wardrobe, when you were 'sure' of finding shirts” (qtd. in Mahon 55), while Michael Gould explains that “[i]f Surrealism is anything, it is not what one would expect it to be; it is something else” (11); Gould’s statement is a puzzling one, akin to Michael Richardson’s notion that Surrealism “refuses to be here, but is always elsewhere” (Richardson 3).

A more concrete definition is another by Gould, who personalizes Surrealism as “a man who would walk a live lobster on a ribbon about the Jardin du Luxembourg (12)”, an action performed by French poet Gerard de Nerval decades before the birth of the Surrealist movement. The image of walking a pet lobster is reminiscent of the works of Salvador Dalí or René Magritte which have become the archetype of Surrealist art in popular perception. As a movement, Surrealism is concerned with “the transience of life, otherness of encounter and the difficulties of communication” (Richardson 75) and characterized by a refusal to “separate what they call dream from life” (Matthews 4). Melnyk provides a useful description of the movement’s underlying principles, which will be discussed again later in this paper, when he writes that “Surrealists rejected faithful representation of reality as a goal of art, or even the impressionistic interpretation

of external reality centered on light and colour. They were more interested in internal mental space, where the psyche and the senses created symbolic meaning and imagery through the contrast and juxtaposition of objects” (*Directors* 185).

Surrealism can also be defined as a departure from traditional art in order to create new realities and thus “to play on the level of existence and not of essence, of beings and not of being” and to give “imagination a leading role: not to recognize something that has previously been veiled, but to give existence to its own unprecedented forms” (Chénieux-Gendron 4). A further comprehensive insight comes from Anna Balakian:

The objective of surrealism was the infinite expansion of reality as a substitute for the previously accepted dichotomy between the real and the imaginary. Acknowledging the human need for metaphysical release, the surrealists believed that through the exploration of the psyche, through the cultivation of the miracles of objective chance, through the mystique of eroticism, through the diverting of objects from their familiar functions or surroundings, through a more cosmic perspective of life on this earth, and finally through the alchemy of language that would learn to express this more dynamic reality, man might be able to satisfy his thirst for the absolute within the confines of his counted number of heartbeats. (14)

3.2.2 Surrealist Art

Surrealism has entered the popular vocabulary predominately in association with the arts although it actually developed as a theoretical construct which sought to broaden human perception and question logic by embracing the unconscious as a part of human reality. In public the pioneers of the movement may have acted much as an artistic collective: their headquarters was in Paris where, in 1924, they founded a 'bureau for surrealist research' and a journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*, and to where many foreign artists relocated to join the group. As is well documented through photographs, the Surrealists appeared as a group at vernissages of Surrealist exhibitions, and drew attention to the movement through participating in public debates. They also used their newspapers *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and *La Révolution surréaliste* to promote surrealist ideas. Yet the central aspect uniting Surrealist artists is not art, much less a particular artistic style or a particular medium, but an underlying philosophy. Surrealism is thus first and foremost an attitude radical in nature that

applies to life in general, that is not subordinate to specific rules and not restricted to the arts.

Surrealism has never been concerned with the production of works, even if this is what it most noted for. The works of surrealism must rather be seen as a residue, a mark of the practice of surrealism. [...] Surrealists are not concerned with conjuring up some magic world that can be defined as 'surreal'. Their interest is almost exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence. (Richardson 2-3)

This is a point often misunderstood, although Breton expressed the Surrealists' viewpoint on the subject in the Déclaration du 27 janvier 1925.

We have nothing to do with literature. But we are quite capable of, if need be, of making use of it like everyone else.

Surrealism is not a new means of expression, nor a simpler one, nor even a metaphysic of poetry. It is a means of total liberation of the mind and of everything resembling it.

We are determined to create a Revolution.

We have bracketed the word Surrealism with the word Revolution solely to show the disinterested, detached and even quite desperate character of the revolution.

We lay no claim to changing anything in men's errors but intend to show them the fragility of their thoughts, and on what shaking foundations, what hollow ground they have built their shaking houses.

We hurl this formal warning into the face of society; whatever protection it affords its disparities, each of the false moves of its spirit, we shall never miss our aim...

We are specialists in Revolt. There is no means of action we are not capable of using if the need arises... (qtd. in Bigsby 37)

Although surrealism is not primarily interested in art, artists were the ones who brought the movement to fame. Surrealist art in general negates traditional concepts of the arts and emphasizes the illogical and irrational. It was particularly dreams and dream analysis which interested the Surrealists and became a source of inspiration for them. The Surrealists analyzed their dreams and published their accounts in journals.

There were various categories of dreams: the natural dream, the prophetic one, and most often the self-induced one, such as the flamboyant, libido ridden dreams of Dali. [...] In observing the effect of the dream on imagery he [Breton] found the same type of displacement of objects and things, and verbal condensations in the poet's dream-thought as

Freud had observed in his clinical cases as well as in his own dreams. (Balakian 127)

The dream was also essential in forming a visual Surrealist aesthetic, achieved above all through the juxtaposition of objects in foreign surroundings. It is this dreamlike quality that is present in many visual Surrealist works which often conjure dreamscapes which are familiar to anyone who has ever had a dream. By refusing to distinguish between reality and fantasy, the notion of reality is challenged and a new form of perception, the surreal, is achieved.

The first art form the Surrealists turned their attention to was literature: Benjamin Péret, Robert Desnos, Jaques Baron and pioneers André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon were among the first to experiment with surreal ideas in writing. The Surrealist Manifesto already includes a discussion of various literary techniques such as 'écriture automatique'.

The visual arts, however, only received a passing mention in the *Surrealist Manifesto* and attracted notice only later. “Kriterien für einen Surrealismus in der bildenden Kunst wurden erst ansatzweise formuliert, als Breton 1925 in Zusammenarbeit mit Robert Besnos für den Katalog einer Ausstellung ein Vorwort mit dem Titel Die surrealistische Malerei schrieb” (Bradley 22). Early contributors in visual art include André Masson, Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duchamp, American-born photographer Man Ray and German painter and sculptor Max Ernst. Later Salvador Dalí moved to Paris from Spain and René Magritte came from Belgium. Both went on to bring great attention to the Surrealists, but it was not until 1929 that their works were published for the first time in *La Révolution surréaliste* (Bradley 9). In their search for adequate techniques equivalent to écriture automatique, Surrealist painters developed new strategies and opened up new perspectives. Surrealism received greater attention from the general public when the movement's artistic focus began to broaden.

The establishment of the Galerie Surréaliste in 1926 underlined the growing importance of surrealist art – a phenomenon which, in skirting problems of translation and conveying directly the visual element only obliquely reconstructed in the written text, proved far more suitable for export and, arguably, more effective in expressing the paradoxical images of the subconscious. (Bigsby 47)

The painter and sculptor André Masson developed automatic drawing as a response to écriture

automatique: he let his pen glide on paper absentmindedly and in doing so produced results free of rational control. Personal taste and artistic pretension had to be subordinated in this process.

In 1921 Max Ernst relocated to Paris and brought with him techniques that proved to be influential for a surreal aesthetic in visual arts.

In 1925 Ernst discovered a process which he equated with automatic writing. Using a method similar to that which produces brass rubbings he secured a tracing of the texture of wooden floorboards. This in turn, rather like a Rohrschach ink-blot test, suggested certain forms to him. He calls the process frottage and, perhaps somewhat spuriously, saw the artist as displaying the passivity associated with automatic writing. [...] Ernst's frottages, the first of which were published in 1926, effectively mark the birth of surrealism in art – an occasion celebrated by the establishment in the same year of a Surrealist Gallery which became the scene of a number of subsequent exhibitions of surrealist art. (Bigsby 49)

Ernst also introduced collage to the surrealists. A collage combines new, foreign elements on an original piece and in doing so creates new relations between them. He explained that “Collage-Technik ist die systematische Ausbeutung des zufälligen oder künstlich provozierten Zusammentreffens von zwei oder mehr wesensfremden Realitäten auf einer augenscheinlich dazu ungeeigneten Ebene – und der Funke Poesie, welcher bei der Annäherung dieser Realitäten überspringt” (qtd. in Bradley 27). The principle of a collage spoke to the Surrealists. Unrelated objects are combined on a medium foreign to both, an act devoid of rationality which challenges conventional perceptions of the objects and the medium used.

Initially, automatization was put at the nexus of Surrealist thinking and Surrealist art. It is, however, only one of a few strategies that aims at the liberation of the mind from rational control. Moreover, as the Surrealists later admitted, 'pure' automatization as proclaimed in the first *Surrealist Manifesto* cannot be achieved because the influence of the conscious mind cannot be entirely discarded. Thus “by 1932 Breton was ready to confess that a minimal amount of rational control had marked virtually all automatic writing and was even prepared to grant such control might indeed have a role to play – a far remove from the positive assertions of the First Manifesto” (Bigsby 66).

The intricate techniques of painting and film constitute a further obstacle as the spontaneity

of automatic writing and drawing, both of which require merely paper and pen, cannot be reached as unproblematically. Visual surrealist artists accepted the complexity of their media, however, and responded by attributing greater importance to the element of chance. Masson developed a form of sand painting for which he spread glue on a sheet of paper onto which he randomly scattered sand. He then used these random shapes as sources of inspiration. Miró applied a similar principle when he began to paint without any particular outcome in mind and developed images further as they suggested themselves to him on paper.

The approaching Second World War marked the end of the Surrealists' most influential phase. The core of the movement, including Breton, Max Ernst and Dalí, saw themselves forced to leave France and settled in the United States where they influenced a new range of artists such as the American-born Latvian Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Moreover, "the impact of surrealism is observable in pop art's concern with the object, its fascination with photographic images and its attraction for linguistic games" (Bigsby 77). Although the Surrealist artists continued their work in Europe after the Second World War, they did not succeed in restoring their former influential position in the arts there. It was not until a few decades later that their ideas were raised to public awareness in France again, when Surrealist slogans were used at the French May 1968 protest. At roughly the same time, Surrealist ideas had an impact on the American Beat Generation, with writers like William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg among them, while in South America those artists concerned with Magic Realism also explored the dream-like aspect that Surrealist art pioneered. Although the movement peaked in Europe in the 1920s, it proliferated internationally and has since then influenced a broad range of artists globally.

4. The Surreal in *My Winnipeg*: the Film

4.1 Introduction

Maddin's work is indisputably dreamlike, and sleepwalking, delirium, and amnesia are constant features of his work, together with a gleeful Surrealist desire to deliver savage thrusts of perverse and destabilizing humour. Surrealism with a lower case 's' has become so generalized a term that it can be applied to some aspect of practically everything, but Maddin's allegiance is to the original brand. (Beard, *Past* 8)

“I got one fact wrong in the movie. It's not the coldest city in the world” (qtd. in Nadeau 178).

My Winnipeg is Guy Maddin's ninth feature length film and is the third part of the autobiographical 'Me-Trilogy' after *Cowards Bend The Knee* (2003) and *Brand Upon The Brain!* (2006). The three films share a focus on Guy Maddin's upbringing, but are only loosely connected beyond this point. Most importantly, they are not connected through a joint narrative and thus *Cowards Bend The Knee* and *Brand Upon The Brain!* will be disregarded in this paper.

My Winnipeg is the product of a collaboration between CBC's Documentary Channel and American Film distributor IFC Films. The film was produced in 2007 in association with the Government of Manitoba, the Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit, The Canadian Film and Video Production Tax Credit and the Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit. Thus no financial aid was received from The National Film Board of Canada or Telefilm Canada.

Bill Gosden notes, however, that the fact that the film was issued by the Documentary Channel is “where any resemblance to documentary as we know it ends” (par. 1). Although officially marketed as a documentary, the film's title adumbrates that instead of meeting the conventions of the documentary film genre, objectivity and factuality, *My Winnipeg* delivers a personal gaze on the filmmaker's home town. When the president of the Documentary Channel and executive producer for *My Winnipeg*, Michael Burns, commissioned Maddin to “make a documentary about your Winnipeg and enchant me” (Nadeau 180), Maddin apparently obliged: the “docu-fantasia” (Naremore 23), originally titled *Love Me, Love My Winnipeg* (Fletcher), presents statements about Winnipeg that are so bewildering that they inevitably prompt the question of how much truth they hold. Some claims, like the one that Winnipeg is “the coldest city in the world”, are

more easily discredited than others and so the viewer is often left in uncertainty, and must wonder whether or not, for example, Winnipeg actually “has ten times the sleepwalking rate of any other city.” The city of Winnipeg is not the film's single point of interest, however; achieving what Semley calls a “pointed mythologizing of the self” (66), the film's principal subject of interest and analysis is Guy Maddin himself. Maddin is the narrator and main character (although he is actually played by actor Darcy Fehr) and it is him who informs the audience about Winnipeg, his own personal history and his ambiguous relationship with his home town.

Although *My Winnipeg* is Guy Maddin's first “documentary”, the film does not depart stylistically from the director's previous work; like Maddin's feature and short films, *My Winnipeg* borders on the ridiculous and absurd, all the while clothed in the familiar aesthetics achieved through a range of Maddin's trademark, antiquated film techniques. Will Straw observed that Maddin “reinhabits the lost languages of minor, transitional moments in film history” (309), and this is also the case with *My Winnipeg*. On the visual level *My Winnipeg* features grainy images captured with obsolete devices like 16-mm and Super-8mm cameras, or with more modern devices like High Definition Cameras and cell phones that are made to look passé or even damaged through projection, low lighting, dated decor, shadows, scratched and obsolete lenses, multiple exposure, and the use of inter-titles. Moreover, as mentioned before, with the exception of *Twilight of The Ice Nymphs* and a few short films, Maddin's entire oeuvre was captured in black and white and the director also keeps to this unwritten rule for *My Winnipeg*.

Regarding the narrative of *My Winnipeg*, dialogue is as sparse as in other Maddin films, and it is limited in this case to one of three narrative frames. The film's narrative focal point is not dialogue but the voiceover narration. The filmmaker claims that he decided to provide the narration himself only when his producers, arguing that “no one is going to believe what's in this movie anyway; you've got to be you” (qtd. in Nadeau 180), urged him to do so. The screenplay was created in collaboration with frequent contributor George Toles, Professor of English and chair of Film Studies at the University of Manitoba. The fact that Toles wrote all of the dialogue for the Maddin family reenactments, which are by far the film's most personal moments, adds to the mystification of Maddin's persona as presented in the film and the incredulity it evokes in the spectator.

My Winnipeg premiered in September 2007 as a special presentation at the Toronto International Film Festival, where it won the award for Best Canadian Feature Film. It was later nominated for another four awards and won two: one for Best Documentary from the Francisco Film Critic's Circle 2008 and a \$10,000 prize for Best Canadian Film from the Toronto Film Critics Association Awards 2008 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). The film was the Opening Night Selection at Berlin International Film Festival, where Maddin provided a live narration in the theatre. Further special screenings with live narration took place throughout Canada, also in Winnipeg. 2008 saw the film's theatrical release in North America where the film was screened in selected art-house cinemas, typically for short periods of time only. The film was also televised in Canada by the CBC after internal restructuring prevented the co-producer, the Documentary Channel, from doing so. Between 2007 and 2009 *My Winnipeg* also entered selected theatres of Argentina, Australia and a small number of European countries including France, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom (The Internet Movie Database).

In general, *My Winnipeg* echoed positively with critics and found its way onto several film critics' Top 10 film lists for 2008, including Richard Corliss's at *Time Magazine* and Liam Lacey's at *The Globe and Mail*, making it arguably Guy Maddin's most popular feature film to date. William Beard, who is an authority on Canadian filmmakers David Cronenberg and Guy Maddin, and so far the only author who published a volume on Maddin's complete works, explains that the film "reaches audiences in demographics that would normally not go near his work, especially older people" (Beard, *Past* 314), and attributes this to the aura of nostalgia that pervades the film. In a similar vein, it can be assumed that a film titled *My Winnipeg* would have been noticed by audiences in the province of Manitoba. In addition, IFC Films is an offspring of established American entertainment giant Rainbow Media, and thus the choice of distributor might have been a further contributing factor to the film's relative popularity. Although the film presumably managed to expand its circle of spectators beyond film enthusiasts, it nevertheless has probably not changed the situation that the name Guy Maddin, when dropped in conversation, is still likely to prompt a blank face, in Canada and elsewhere.

Despite strong national and international praise, *My Winnipeg* remains unnoticed by a larger audience, and thus adds to the prevalent problem of the marginalization of the Canadian national

cinema, as was discussed in Chapter 2.4. The film's entry in The Internet Movie Database, for example, estimates an initial budget of \$600,000, which stands in evident contrast to a current gross of slightly more than a quarter of this sum, a deficit not uncommon among Canadian releases.

4.2 Synopsis

Guy Maddin (Darcy Fehr) is a filmmaker who wants to leave Winnipeg, the city in which he has spent his entire life. In order to discover what keeps him from leaving, he decides that he must take one final tour of his home town. Throughout the film Maddin is never seen outside of a train bound for out of town, and so the tour is suggested to happen only in Maddin's imagination. The majority of the film's running time then is comprised of episodes that Maddin remembers about the city of Winnipeg and episodes that concern his own past, with personal and civic history often mingling with local myth. At first the episodes concerning only Winnipeg are told in chronological order, but that changes later in the film. Their timeline ranges from the formation of the city at the junction of the rivers Red and Assiniboine to the destruction of Winnipeg's major-league indoor hockey venue, known as the Winnipeg Arena, in 2006. The latter episode is given special prominence because of a personal connection between the Maddin family and the arena and because Maddin claims he was born there. Other selected episodes concern the general strike in 1919 and "If-Day," a mock invasion of Winnipeg in 1942 in which five thousand performers disguised as National Socialists captured and renamed the city "Himmlerstadt." Further prominence is given to Maddin's mother (Ann Savage) and family in general, and so the narrator visits his former home on two occasions: first to express his attachment to his old house and his aunt and mother's beauty salon on 800 Ellice Avenue and then again to conduct family reenactments in order to expose the family ties that hinder his departure. Shortly before the film's end, Maddin finds comfort in "Citizen Girl," an imagined pin-up girl whom he installs as a safeguard for the city for after his departure. It remains uncertain whether or not Maddin leaves Winnipeg.

4.3 Opening Scene and Opening Credits

My Winnipeg begins with the close-up shot of an old woman performing a line reading in front of a black background. She repeats after a male voice from off-screen: “I wasn't born yesterday, deary. Where did it happen? In the back seat? Did he pin you down, or did you just lie down and let nature take its course?”. The effect of this ‘in medias res’ opening is that the audience cannot make sense of the situation at first. This fragment of dialogue appears again later in the film, but acted out as part of a “family-reenactment.” In the meantime it is revealed that the woman from the first scene is Guy Maddin's mother (she is referred to always as 'Mother'; her full name is never revealed) and that the off-screen voice is that of the narrator, Guy Maddin. The line reading demonstrates that, from the first scene on, *My Winnipeg* presents a distorted notion of “the truth”. As in any other documentary, the audience relies on the information presented in the film, and the responsibility of questioning what is communicated lies with them. In *My Winnipeg*, the first scene already suggests that the viewer ought to approach the presented information with caution: a line reading in a film marketed as a documentary insinuates that the dialogue is not reality captured with a camera, but scripted like in a fictional feature film, and this provokes the audience to reassess the information presented to them.

The line reading provokes the thought that Mother is not Guy Maddin's biological mother, but an actress, yet at this early point in the film there is little evidence to support this thought. That her role is in fact played by actress Ann Savage is disclosed only at the end of the film, and only to those who can reach the right conclusion from her name appearing first in the closing credits as these do not reveal the roles of the actors. On a side note, Maddin, who throughout his career displayed a preference for performers unnoticed by mainstream cinema, expressed that Ann Savage was the actress of choice for the role (Rossellini 191). Savage is known to film enthusiasts as femme fatale in the 1944 film noir *Detour*, one of several B-movies in which she starred in the 1940ies. Although Savage did not withdraw from the film business after her early heyday, she appeared on screen in only minor roles afterwards. It can thus be assumed that her relative anonymity has served the purpose of her role as Mother because few will have recognized her as an actress.

The confusion of the viewer is continued in the opening credits: in the tradition of a

documentary, which requires no actors, only the producers, production designer, editor, cinematographer and director are mentioned; this leads the audience to believe there are no actors involved in this production. In the title sequence two recurring particularities of the film are also introduced: nostalgia and ambiguity. Heart filled with pathos, the Swinging Strings sing an ode to their city “Winnipeg, Winnipeg / wonderful Winnipeg” and the song sets the mood for the film. Both the Swinging Strings, through their song, and Maddin, whose footage of Winnipeg accompanies the song, admit to the lack of beauty in the nonchalant city that they are apparently nevertheless proud to call their home. The sympathy for Winnipeg lies, however, not in quality of life, but in familiarity. “Here are friends and kindly faces, folks I’m glad to know / memories, familiar places to cherish with a glow”. The lyrics are carefully coordinated with the accompanying images: a deep and haunting male voice sings ”hail my town / hail my home” when a group of men cheerfully lift their hats in a salutatory gesture and a young man pirouettes on ice skates as “the world [...] moves round and round”. The audience learns that “Wonderful Winnipeg” offers heaps of dirty snow, lines of freight trains at Union Station and snow plows - hardly a flattering first impression of a city. The result is a humorous discrepancy between the city as described in the song and the ironic images which accompany it. This ambiguity concerning Winnipeg later reverberates in Maddin's narration and the realization that the city is “no Eden that you would see yet it's home sweet home to me” becomes the film's main dictum.

4.4 Main narrative

Three narratives are noticeable in *My Winnipeg*. The main narrative accounts for only a fraction of the film's running time, but functions as a link between the other two narratives. The other narratives are the episodes narrator Maddin tells about Winnipeg, and the anecdotes that concern his family. Frequently the film returns to the main narrative, in which a beleaguered young man dozes in a train compartment, then abruptly wakes before he drifts off to sleep again. The narrator appears for the first time and makes the audience believe the lethargic young man is Guy Maddin. But that he is in fact actor Darcy Fehr is the next prank of the actual Guy Maddin, who narrates the film; on a side note, it is Fehr's second performance as Maddin after *Cowards Bend The Knee*. The narrator introduces the film's raison d'être in a poetic tone: "Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Winnipeg. Snowy, sleepwalking Winnipeg. My home for my entire life. My entire life. I must leave it. I must leave it. I must leave it now. But how to escape one's city? How to wake oneself enough for the frightening task? How to find one's way out?". The scene establishes the film's purpose and main conflict: Maddin is a citizen of Winnipeg whose sole purpose is to leave the city, apparently with no specific destination in mind. Whether or not he will succeed is the main conflict which not only gives existence to the other narratives, but which also serves to maintain the audience's interest in the film by building up expectation of an outcome. The film's plot is that Maddin, who is submerged in a slumber aboard the train, must take one final tour of his home town before being able to determine if he can leave it behind. The narrator explains: "I just have to make my way through town. Through everything I've ever seen and lived, everything I've loved and forgotten." Maddin's relationship to his home town is ambiguous: he is emotionally attached to Winnipeg, but at the same time wishes he could escape. The greater part of the actual film is thus comprised of Maddin's voyages, the one he is undertaking aboard the train, and the imagined one in which he reflects on his home town and family.

4.4.1 Narrative Level

The main narrative is central to a discussion of surreal elements in the film. As was established above, this study regards Surrealism as a major influence on Guy Maddin, and argues that certain surrealist techniques are used in this film to achieve specific effects. As previously

noted, Melnyk claims that “Surrealists rejected faithful representation of reality as a goal of art, or even the impressionistic interpretation of external reality centered on light and colour. They were more interested in internal mental space, where the psyche and the senses created symbolic meaning and imagery through the contrast and juxtaposition of objects” (*Directors* 185). In *My Winnipeg*, Maddin too rejects a faithful representation of reality in favor of his own internal mental space. The main narrative strongly suggests the state of a dream. We dream when we sleep, and the importance of sleeping is emphasized from the beginning on, when Darcy Fehr dozes aboard the train and the narrator wonders “how to wake oneself enough for the frightening task” of leaving “sleepwalking Winnipeg”. Fehr as Maddin is the film's principal persona, but throughout the film's eighty minutes of running time he does not utter even one word. We watch him in a near comatose state as the train is rocking him soothingly in his seat. “Always sleepy” like Winnipeg, he rouses only briefly from his 'hibernation', and dozes off again shortly thereafter. Due to the fact that the main narrative accounts for only a fraction of the film's running time, most of what the audience actually sees in the film happens in the main character's mind while asleep. The members of the audience become the witnesses of his dreams, including both the images and thoughts occurring in the mind of the sleeper, as well as his wishes and desires.

The primary subject of *My Winnipeg* is thus Guy Maddin's inner life and the other narratives are the mental offspring of the protagonist. This implies that information coming from such an unreliable source must be approached carefully. In an interview Maddin remarks about the film that “[t]hese are my unrepressed longings brought to light and packed into eighty minutes” (Rossellini 192), explaining what becomes obvious a few minutes into the pseudo-documentary: *My Winnipeg* is a personal portrait of both city and filmmaker, and one that is not faithful to reality. In doing so the film rejects the conventions of documentary, a genre pioneered in Canada, and moves contrary to the realist tradition which put the country on the global map of filmmaking to begin with. Instead, the film “shifts and bends according to [...] the logic of Maddin's unconscious processes” (Horsley, 47) and that, in combination with its cinematography, is where the film cradles a great part of its surreal potential on the narrative level.

4.4.2 Visual Level

The theoretical illustration of the straightforward scenario of the main narrative stands in contrast to its unorthodox visual execution. Central to this scene, and to Surrealist imagery in the film, is the train which carries Maddin through Winnipeg. The “dream-train” is apparently powered and steered by Maddin's thought, and on account of his indecisiveness, it is caught in a loop through the town. Unable to go beyond the city limits until Maddin makes up his mind, the train becomes a metaphor for Maddin's own inability to leave. The metal train tracks are the city's pulse, “arteries” and “iron veins” and Maddin's only path out of Winnipeg. “Juggling, dreaming, sleep-juggling” the loop delivers Maddin to all of the important stations of this personal journey through past and present. “The train tracks cross the streetcar tracks and then turn across the streets and the alleyways. Everything beneath thin layers of time, asphalt and snow,” the narrator explains as the train goes anywhere its sleeping passenger dreams of: through downtown, narrow alleyways, residential areas, parks, through fields covered in knee-high snow and over highway bridges, signifying visually as well as through the poetic narration that a faithful representation of reality is not the aim of the documentary.

The compartment itself comes from a period of time long passé and appears absurd in modern day Winnipeg; it is dilapidated, the windows are stained, broken and mended with adhesive tape. Some silent passengers accompany Maddin on his journey and one wonders if they too are trapped Winnipeggers haunted by a desire to leave their city. Like Maddin, they are dressed in dated winter clothes to protect them from the cold coming in through the broken windows; they are as out-dated as the steam locomotive that carries them. A bottle of vodka and some provisions scattered loosely on a solid wooden table indicate a long journey. As Beard observes, “the atmosphere begins to resemble something from an Eastern European railway car of a century ago” (*Past*, 315), and indeed the scenario is reminiscent of a bygone era: the locomotive, young Maddin and his silent companions seem like artifacts catapulted into Winnipeg not only from a different time, but also from a strange place.

4.4.3 Surrealist Techniques

In *My Winnipeg*, and in other films directed by Guy Maddin, it is the combination of an

outlandish story and a visual representation that bears Surrealist traits: on a visual level, Maddin's films are “[rooted] in a recognizable archaic cinema tradition” (Melnik *One Hundred Years*, 194), as their cinematography relies on old and primitive film techniques. Throughout his career Maddin displayed a preference for these outdated mechanisms which he used for the recreation of the aesthetics of early motion pictures. Michel Remy notes, however, that “no writing, or painting, can be analyzed from a purely aesthetic, technical angle” and adds that “[i]n surrealism there is no technique as such, but only an unbounded series of strategies, aimed at destabilizing the gaze and conducted from as many angles as possible, with the object of involving the whole individual” (20). For the sake of simplicity, and because in other literature on the subject there is made mention of Surrealist techniques, this paper uses the term “technique” in reference to what Remy calls “strategies”.

One technique that finds application in Maddin's films is projection, which is also extensively used in *My Winnipeg*. Projection is applied in order to create artificial imagery resembling a collage, the Surrealist technique pioneered and created by Max Ernst: “[s]chon 1919 [...] entdeckte er [Ernst] die halluzinatorische Wirkung, die aus der Kombination von – in diesem Fall bildhaften – Elementen, die aus unterschiedlichen Sinnzusammenhängen stammten, hervorging” (qtd. in Klingsöhr–Leroy 9). Before a Surrealist aesthetic developed in the visual arts, however, the movement's principles found their first artistic application in literature. As a poet and writer, André Breton was involved in the development of 'écriture automatique', a form of writing that attempts to disregard the dictation of rational thought and thus reflects thought on paper as it actually occurs in the mind. An excerpt on the subject from the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* reads as follows:

Versetzen Sie sich in den maximal passiven und rezeptiven Zustand, dessen sie fähig sind. Sehen sie ab von ihrem Genie, ihren Talenten und denen aller anderen [sic]. Halten sie sich vor Augen, dass die Literatur einer der trostlosesten Wege ist, die überall hinführen. Schreiben sie schnell, ohne vorgefasstes Thema, schnell genug, um nichts zu behalten, und nicht in Versuchung zu kommen, ihren Text zu überlesen. (qtd. in Pierre 61)

In other words, the wordsmith uses *écriture automatique* to access and unleash the creative potential

hidden within the depths of the mind from the modes of control, reason and logic. Max Ernst, who was primarily a graphic artist and sculptor, then expanded the attempt to access and express the irrational in the visual arts through collage. In essence, a collage combines new constituents on an original piece. These new elements might be cut from one piece and then added to another, or they might be directly painted onto the original work. "Im einen wie im anderen Fall zwingt der Wunsch des Künstlers seine Erfindung einem oder mehreren vorher schon bestehenden Bildern und deren Bildzusammenhängen auf. Die Collage kann unter dem weiteren Aspekt eines dichterischen und sogar philosophischen Verfahrens betrachtet werden: das Bekannte zur Entdeckung des Unbekannten nutzen" (Pierre 41). The media for collages are manifold and can include erasures just as well as paintings and drawings.

Maddin's use of projection then can be seen as the extension of collage into a different art form, film. As in a collage, Maddin adds new elements to an original image: in the compartment scene, images showing the cityscapes of Winnipeg are projected onto a screen in the background. With the compartment in the foreground, the screen forms the train compartment window. The scene is reminiscent of visual Surrealist art because of the characteristic use of projection: through projection the illusion of movement is created and the train may leave its tracks and explore areas that a railway vehicle could not reach in reality. Moreover, the footage shown in the compartment window was filmed from different angles, and was obviously filmed from a car: several times there are visible parts of a car as filmed from inside, but seemingly no effort was made to conceal that. Instead the absurdity of such situations and supposed dilettantism are embraced, as in the few seconds of film in which we observe through the window the train apparently moving sideways in a heavily trafficked main street and with no tracks in sight. The artificiality that dominates these images forms a stylistic link between Maddin's pictures and the aesthetics of visual Surrealist art. Similar to collages, Maddin's images are often formed through an assemblage of various things and objects. The train and its carefully designed interior, for instance the remarkable and odd combination of a banana and sausage roll, are testimony to a miscellany which is nevertheless meticulously crafted.

Like the Surrealist artists, Maddin assembles familiar objects in one picture to create an unfamiliar outcome. Everything in these images is artificial: a steam locomotive in a modern city of

the twenty first century, the outdated compartment decor, the use of a single light source which makes faces look unnaturally pallid and sets them off against a darker background, the exaggerated performance of the actors who are tricking the viewer into thinking that they are members of the actual Maddin family, and the choice to capture it all in black and white on trembling handheld 8mm cameras at a time when film techniques had improved beyond that. These are the graphics that dominate the film, while the unaltered image gets little attention and is used mostly for intermittent contrast. The image of the steam locomotive contrasted with modern surroundings puts in mind Melnyk's notion again that "surrealists created symbolic meaning and imagery through the contrast and juxtaposition of objects" (*Directors* 185). Max Ernst was aware of the symbolic meaning and visual quality that such a juxtaposition of unrelated objects creates: in his 1934 text, *Was ist Surrealismus*, Ernst cites Lautréamont's simile, "as beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella," as an influence, and explains its significance for Surrealism.

Allein dadurch, dass eine fest umrissene Realität, deren natürliche Bestimmung ein für alle Mal festzuliegen scheint (ein Regenschirm), sich unvermittelt neben einer zweiten, weit entfernten und nicht weniger absurden Realität (eine Nähmaschine) an einem Ort findet, wo beide sich fremd fühlen müssen (auf einem Seziertisch), tritt sie aus ihrer natürlichen Bestimmung und ihrer Identität heraus (qtd. in Klingsöhr – Leroy 9)

Likewise, the first reality in the main narrative of *My Winnipeg* is the locomotive that was taken from a bygone century, and the second is a street with no train tracks, and the place is modern day Winnipeg. A steam locomotive is out of place on a street without train tracks in modern Winnipeg and inevitably causes amazement.

A further bygone-but-restored technique is the use of isolated sound, familiar from semi-sound films of the late silent and early sound film era. Maddin explains his affection for these films:

I [...] love the part-talkie because that will have people running down the street and you don't even hear their footsteps. You can see them running; you don't need to hear it. Then it will include just the sound of a horn honking and then a gun going off, but you don't hear anyone falling. It's selective sound [...]. I like to leave out and to isolate a lot of sounds. [...] It [creates] more dreamlike effects [...] Ever since film was invented, there's been a strong gravity pull from the public to make it literal-minded (qtd. in

Beard, *Memories* 246).

The 'selective sound' in the train sequence is the ever-present rattle of the train on its alleged tracks. Maddin explains that the film's editor, John Gurdebeke, supports this with appropriate cuts: “[m]y editor [...] treated the narration like editors usually treat temp [sic] music. Instead of cutting to music to get the rhythm of the film, he cut to my narration” (qtd. in Nadeau 180). In combination with a repetitive narration, the sound of the rattling train is soothing and thus supports a dreamlike atmosphere. The peculiar treatment of image and sound in the main narrative brings attention once again to Maddin's disinterest in a “faithful representation of reality.”

4.4.4 Maddin's Surrealist Influences

In many ways the main narrative bears resemblance to the aesthetics of visual Surrealist works. Maddin admits that “right from the first time that I picked up a camera, I was thinking along the lines of the shortcuts the Surrealists were able to get through intentionally illogical combinations of things. I wanted to take something that was truly felt, and then just use kind of illogical, hysterical episodes to make a connection with audiences” (Beard, *Conversations* 247). In addition, his notion that “if anyone inspired me to make movies it was Buñuel” (qtd. in Monk 42), is in accordance with what we see in *My Winnipeg* and with how those concerned with his works generally interpret it. Melnyk observes that “Surrealist film-making in the 1920s, when silent cinema peaked [...] fascinated and inspired Maddin” (*One Hundred Years*, 199) and that “Maddin's films can be discussed in terms of the imagery and editing of Luis Buñuel” (*One Hundred Years*, 199). Monk concurs when describing the director's third release *Careful* as “entirely surreal” (281). Wise sees its predecessor, and first full length feature, *Archangel*, as being “filled with slices of the surreal and the cruel” (12), and assumes that “Buster Keaton would have approved, Buñuel, too” (12). Like Buñuel and other Surrealist filmmakers, Maddin disregards continuity and rationale in favour of his own logic and, in the tradition of Surrealist cinema, employs “surrealistic imagery, ironic juxtapositions, misleading narrative devices, and Freudian symbolism to shock, confuse, and challenge spectators” (Film Reference). In addition, David Church notes that Maddin's “allusions to movements like Surrealism and Soviet Montage are melancholy dreams for an avant-gardism that could successfully stir the masses, not just find bourgeois admirers” (*Bark Fish* 25n46). Church also

argues that “the surrealists and their love of primitivism was a major influence upon Maddin” (*Bark Fish* 23n12). David Pike agrees when he notes that

while [Maddin's] themes more closely resemble the literary, so-called high modernists such as Proust and Kafka, Maddin's modus operandi as a self-declared primitivist is closer to the avant-gardists whose styles permeate his filmmaking: the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and the constructivists and other Soviet artists who saw their art, if not as demolishing, then as wholly remaking the world that had gone before them, dissolving the distinction between art and life entirely (102).

There is thus great consensus that Surrealism has had an effect on Maddin's work.

Yet Maddin is not a Surrealist. Surrealism's underlying principles that manifested themselves visually in Surrealist art constitute an inspiration for the director's opus, but so do other cultural movements, such as early motion pictures and silent film in general, or, more specifically, German Expressionism and Soviet Propaganda film. In his entire back catalogue including *My Winnipeg* the director displays a genuine interest in an outdated form of cinema, but always refrains from simply copying inspirations and position them in modern surroundings. Instead, Maddin offers a new product, whose sources of inspiration are manifold. Beard argues that Maddin's cinema is unique because “his work, no matter how many influences and homages it may contain, resemble's no one's at all” (*Past* 3). Maddin is not part of any particular cultural movement, and consequently no rules of an underlying theory and execution dictate his filmmaking. And so also his trademark, the exhumation of outdated filmic techniques, is not restricted to shooting in black and white and with primitive cameras, which would suffice to recreate the looks of old-time films. Instead Maddin employs an array of techniques and equipment regardless of their temporal origin, like projection, or cell phone cameras, in order to achieve an unprecedented product. The use of both inter-titles, a technique from the silent film era, and recorded dialogue in one film prove that there is no focus on one particular film period but that instead a conglomeration of primitive procedures, including those typical of Surrealist artwork, rather pays homage to the cinema of a non-specified past.

Will Straw notes that “[t]his investment in the ponderous rituals of classical cinema is one of the qualities of Maddin's films which work against the interpretation of them as surrealist” (309). Straw further writes about the 1990 feature *Archangel* that the film “clarified Maddin's cinematic

allegiances, making it clear that his principal points of reference were the lost codes of late – silent/early-sound cinema, not the dissident traditions of Surrealism or an American underground” (306). Pike recognizes a “garage-band aesthetic” in Maddin's work: “it was during the first decades of the twentieth century that the ethos of the garage band became viable, that artistic creation was ideologically severed from classical technique by movements such as Dada or the Surrealist practice of exquisite corps” (Pike 103). Maddin's artistic creation then is “ideologically severed” from Surrealism, but nevertheless takes up aspects of the aesthetics of visual surrealist arts.

Moreover, while the filmmaker himself acknowledges the influence Surrealism had on his films, the cultural movement is cited among other sources of inspiration: “they're all kissing cousins: surrealism, fairy tales and melodrama. These are little allegories of disability where someone's inner wounds are shown expressionistically, outwardly. So I'm comfortable with things like that” (Beard, *Memories* 254). On account of Maddin's films fusing different artistic styles Maddin is sometimes also associated with postmodernism, a categorization the filmmaker himself rejects: “I had to have someone define just what postmodernism was, and it seems that is [sic] just isn't a term that is relevant anymore (Nadeau, 181).” As the vivid discussion concerning the categorization of the Winnipeggers work illustrates, there is great consensus among those concerned with his work that it is difficult to classify: Straw notes “[t]he drive to clarify Maddin's stylistic ancestry is one of the ways in which critics have grappled with the difficulty of knowing what to say about his films” (309). Thus, describing Maddin's work exclusively as Surrealist cannot suffice.

There are other reasons why it is problematic to list Maddin among Surrealist artists. Firstly, according to Michael Richardson “acts of absolute surrealism had been performed only by the participants of the Surrealist group at that time” (4). Similarly, absolute surrealist filmmaking slowly came to a halt after Buñuel dissociated himself from the movement in 1932. The 1947 release *Dreams Money Can Buy*, the product of a collaboration between several artists associated with the movement such as Man Ray, Max Ernst and Hans Richter, is considered “the last official surrealist film” (Film Reference). In this exclusive understanding of the term, Maddin's films can not be counted among works of pure Surrealism.

Moreover, the surreal movement was also a politically inspired one. The origins of Surrealism lie partly in frustration with decadent bourgeois values that were perceived to plague

society at the time.

Like the Dadaists they [the surrealists] conducted public skirmishes with reactionary ideas in art and society. They opposed the literary bourgeoisie as they rejected the constrictions of conventional life. Breton ascribed the spiritual conformity and aridity of the middle class, intellectually to rationalism and logic, morally to the influence of church, state and family, and socially to the apparent necessity of work. The Surrealist thus placed himself in implacable opposition to the whole list – finding himself, somewhat to his surprise, a political as well as spiritual revolutionary. Where the Dadaists had for the most part dissociated themselves from social and political activity, the surrealists came by degrees to extend their revolutionary activity from the potentially hermetic world of art to the more immediate political arena. (Bigsby 43)

Maddin's art, however, is not concerned with politics and despite a recurrent tendency to mimic politically inspired film such as propaganda reels, for example in the aforementioned short film *The Heart of The World*, there is lacking in Maddin's work, including *My Winnipeg*, a genuine political implication.

Also missing in Maddin's work is the subversive essence of surrealist films, especially those produced during the heyday of Surrealism. *Un Chien Andalou*, for instance, was produced with the deliberate intention to unsettle its audience with dismaying images like the notorious close-up shot of a woman's eyeball cut open with a razor. The surrealist movement had an underlying principle that was essentially serious and radical: the expansion of human perception by all means necessary. Jokester Maddin, on the other hand, presents us with caricatured characters, humorous and exaggerated dialogue and a cinematography that on occasion also mimics its influences. The Winnipegger is an eccentric director whose films, not unlike Surrealist filmmaking in general, are unconventional and certainly challenge the passivity of their audience. But the compulsion to shock is absent in Maddin's films. Although by no means devoid of disturbing content, these films do not display radicalness congruent to, for example, *Un Chien Andalou*. Instead, Maddin is essentially an entertainer whose films' interest in Surrealism is peripheral.

In summary it would thus be problematic to attach the label of Surrealist to the director because, for one, absolute Surrealism in a strict understanding of the term is confined to the early period of the movement in the early twentieth century, because the director's artistic influences are abundant, and because there are other artistic sources that contributed to forming the aesthetic of his

films.

Richardson points out that “if a film could be viewed as as surrealist under certain conditions, this did not make this or that film 'a surrealist' one. In fact there is no such thing as a 'surrealist film'. There are only films made by surrealists and films that have an affinity or correspondence with surrealism, as well as those that have no affinity with surrealism” (6-7). Richardson therefore suggests that “in the analysis of film in the context of surrealism we should not be asking whether a particular film or film maker is surrealist. The principal question to be considered ought rather to be: how does consideration of this particular film or film maker in relation to surrealism help us to illuminate either surrealism or the film?” (6-7). This study will address this question in the next chapter: surrealist properties did not manifest themselves in all episodes of *My Winnipeg*; the following chapter will identify those moments outside the film's main narrative that have an affinity with Surrealism and discuss their use and significance for the respective scenes and the film overall.

4.5 Episodes concerning Winnipeg and the Maddin Family

4.5.1 The Red and Assiniboine Rivers and the Origins of Winnipeg

Approximately five minutes into the film, succeeding the introductory train sequence, the audience is given a brief introduction to the history of Winnipeg. The narrator pinpoints the city on a historical map at the junction of the The Red and Assiniboine rivers, colloquially denominated 'the Forks.' The map then disintegrates into a grainy aerial view of what resembles a miniature modelling of the meeting of the rivers, which then further disintegrates into images of a female lap and pubic hair. "The forks, the lap, the forks, the lap," the poetic narration repeats; here the junction of the rivers is "associated by card-carrying Surrealist Maddin with the zone of female reproduction: the Forks are the generating lap that gives birth to the city of Winnipeg" (Beard, *Past* 316). It is significant, then, that the model rivers' waters are comprised of what resembles strings of pubic hair: the Y-shaped river junction, like the female lap, is "the reason we are here, right here at the centre of the continent, the heart of the heart of the continent." The claim that Winnipeg forms the geographic center of North America affirms ideas of grandeur hinted at in one of the previous scenes, in which the narrator boldly asserts that Winnipeg hosts "the greatest urban train yard in the world." Maddin further informs the audience about a legend according to which "two secret rivers" flow directly beneath the Forks, an oddity he holds supernatural powers to be responsible for.

The Red and Assiniboine sequence marks the first in a row of enigmatic episodes which strain the credulity of the film's audience. Indeed, the chronological ordering of these episodes, beginning with the first settlements of aboriginal hunters along the river banks, is the extent of Maddin's concern with a conventional representation of reality. The particulars about the geographical position of Winnipeg, for example, are quite useless for those who are not already familiar with the location of the city, or where the Red and Assiniboine rivers flow and meet. A more formal account, for example, might have commenced like this: Winnipeg is the capital of Manitoba, a province in Canada that, together with the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, forms the Canadian prairie. Winnipeg is the social, cultural and economic centre of Manitoba and is situated in the far south of the province. With over 600,000 inhabitants, it is the largest city in Manitoba and the eighth largest in Canada. Remarkably, however, the narrator omits the terms

'Canada, Manitoba, and capital' entirely in this presentation of Winnipeg. It is soon evident that Maddin's approach to paying homage to his hometown does not operate via honouring the conventions of documentary filmmaking, such as the presentation of facts concerning the region's history and perhaps remarkable personalities, or those of a travelogue, which might advertise the attractiveness of the city; Maddin instead chooses to make Winnipeg the subject of myth. Indeed, Maddin personally confirms this assertion: "I wanted to portray Winnipeg the way American cities are portrayed in Hollywood mythology. I wanted to give Winnipeg a profile of mythic proportions" (qtd. in Beard, *Past* 313). In a different interview he adds that this myth expands beyond Manitoba to the greater idea of Canada: "there is virtually no mythology about Canada or Winnipeg. And so when I was asked to make this documentary, I thought here is a chance for me to fill a void" (Nadeau 177). Hence the film, equipped with the concrete ambition to enchant and baffle viewers, tells strange tales of Winnipeg in an attempt to mythologize the city, and in doing so perhaps even initiate a pan-Canadian legend which the director feels is absent at the present moment.

In essence, Maddin's understanding of myth does not drastically differ from Hollywood's: which is that it is a means of promoting national identity through film. Yet Maddin's execution of this idea is entirely different from anything ever done in Hollywood: the director's obsessive reinstitution of a cinema passé, and with it the aesthetics of the Surrealist cinema, which strongly influenced his filmmaking in general, serves the purpose of alienating *My Winnipeg's* audience particularly well. Like the Surrealists', Maddin's world explores the boundaries of reality, which corresponds to the film's desire to puzzle and to provoke spectators to wonder if the wild tales of Winnipeg are true. For the uninformed, of which there assumedly are many, Winnipeg must have been a satisfactorily perplexing subject. The average citizen of the world undoubtedly knows very little about the city, as it remains largely outside the centre of attention. Even within Canada it is remote, separated by thousands of kilometres of land to each side: two provinces and the Rocky mountains separate the city from Vancouver to the west, and to the east the flat, inaccessible and sparsely populated landmass of northwestern Ontario divide the city from the country's most densely populated zone, the triangle between Montréal, Ottawa and the greater Toronto area. Driving to Winnipeg from any of these places will take at least two days and many people travelling from east to west or vice versa will prefer the plane, thus omitting Maddin's hometown on their

journey. Maddin's desire is to overcome Winnipeg's geographical obscurity by presenting to the world his mystified version of the city and thus to honour it by yearning for the attention (born of curiosity) that it deserves in his opinion.

The scope of this deliberate mystification does not exclude the filmmaker and his personal life. In *My Winnipeg* Maddin confidently paints a scenario that blurs “the boundary between personal and social history” (Beard, *Past* 316). The “Forks” are not only the birthplace of Winnipeg, but also of Maddin himself: “the lap of the city, 'the lap described by the forks' gave life to Winnipeg, just like 'the hunted lap, the wooly lap, the lap of my mother' gave birth to him” (Beard, *Past* 316). And so, just as the distortion of the image of the rivers mystifies Winnipeg, it mystifies himself.

The Red and Assiniboine scene also establishes Mother as a dominant figure in Maddin's life and thus also in the film. She appears aboard the train in a long and out of focus close-up shot, and the identity of the woman from the line reading in the beginning is revealed. The camera moves toward her overly well-lit face unsteadily, and she wears a stern look, then disappears briskly: the ghostly appearance signals the oppressive influence she has on Maddin. A few minutes later the narrator confirms the suspicion as he explains “the forks, the animals, hunters, boatways, trains and Mother. These are the reasons we're here. These are the reasons we're staying. These are the reasons I'm leaving. These are the very things that are gonna help me get out of here. The forks, the lap, the fur.” 'Mother' is emphasized and shortly thereafter she emerges again in the train sequence. “Mother appears occasionally on the train, to check on the passengers” the narrator informs us as we see Ann Savage peering at the sleeping travellers. Her inquisitive eyes are then projected onto the compartment door, enlarged beyond proportion. She, like Winnipeg, is both her son's torment and muse, “[h]er lap a magnetic pole from which I can't turn for long.” At this point it is obvious that the film is, in addition to being an expression of the director's reality, a filmic attempt at self-healing, and Maddin indeed verifies this assumption personally. Shortly after the release of the final part of the 'Me trilogy', the director discloses that “[f]ilmmaking is good for me because I'm becoming less and less neurotic [...]. Since the last few films I've made have been so outrageously, self-indulgently autobiographical, they've amounted to an accumulation of things that have tired me out about myself – a form of aversion therapy. It's made me a lot healthier somehow” (Hillis 175).

This aspect is taken up again later in the film and dominates the narratives that involve Maddin's family, such as the baffling “family re-enactment” scenes.

4.5.2 Treasure Hunt, Sleepwalking and 800 Ellice Avenue

The film continues its lesson on the history of Winnipeg with a jovial tale about a treasure hunt that was supposedly an annual event. For one hundred years, the narrator explains, this event saw its winner rewarded with a “one-way ticket on the next train out of town.” This masochistic gesture by the city's administration is extenuated appreciably, however, when the narrator claims none of the winners ever left, for they realized that “the real treasure was right here all along.” The scene's execution contrasts stylistically with the rest of the film as it closely resembles the unaffected method of a documentary film. Nonetheless, the viewer's uncertainty as to whether this anecdote contains any verity whatsoever remains, and this uncertainty in turn services the mystification of the city. The anecdote itself is absurd, but its straightforward visual representation shows again that Maddin exhibits a *mélange* of influences, only one of them being Surrealism.

The next scene does, however, establish another parallel to Surrealism. Realizing that “it must be the sleepiness which keeps Winnipeggers here,” Maddin adds a new objective to his quest: driven by the prospect of vitality outside the city limits, he must eventually collect the necessary energy to wake up and leave. The narrator, too, is a sleepwalker, as he confesses: “we sleep as we walk, walk as we dream. [...] And because we dream of where we walk and walk to where we dream, we are always lost. Befuddled' he explains in a voice filled with languor. For him all Winnipeggers are asleep on their feet, and if only they were capable of ever fully waking-up they would surely leave. The narrator further informs the audience that, in response to the unusually high number of sleepwalkers, the city's civic law actually authorizes its inhabitants to retain possession of the keys to their former apartments, “these old dreamy domiciles,” where they are granted refuge when lost in their nocturnal wanderings. The scene is reminiscent of the dreamlike quality inherent in visual art influenced by the Surrealist movement: black silhouettes are contrasted with an illuminated background which shows projections of nighttime cityscapes, the images accompanied by ever-present snowfall. While the crowd of sleepwalkers remains at approximately the same size, the proportions of the background-images, as well as the perspectives they are captured from, are

occasionally altered. This allows the ghastly figures to roam anywhere they wish, and so a crowd of silhouettes is visible walking towards a parking lot at a strange, or impossible, angle, at a first-floor level. The scene, both through the implausible claims of the narrator and through its visual representation, confirms Maddin's surrealistic detachment from a faithful representation of reality.

Next, the film begins its introspective focus which climaxes later in the family reenactment scenes. When Maddin's childhood home, located on 800 Ellice Avenue, becomes the center of attention, the narrator's lethargy quickly vanishes, his voice adopting a more passionate tone, which makes evident the importance he attributes to his former home and personal history in general. "I can't stop dreaming of this home" he admits as the train is lurking in front of the house. Constantly looking backward, Maddin is unable to relinquish his mental grip on bygone times. The realization that his childhood home "keeps changing in my dreams, new shapes, similar but confusing" follows, and one wonders if Maddin did not apply this principle to the general treatment of facts in the film: in the same manner as other artists inspired by Surrealism construct their works only according to their own logic, Maddin puts his audience at the mercy of his mind when he suddenly makes snow fall inside the beauty saloon where his aunt and mother work, in a portrait of his mother and in another family portrait taken in summer. The irrationality is amplified for those who take a closer look at the family pictures and realize that Maddin's actual mother is not the same person as Ann Savage. "Not for the first or last time, one wonders just what the sleep state and the waking states are" Beard (*Past* 320) observes. After all the bewildering information received at this point, how is the viewer to distinguish between dream and reality?

4.5.3 The Horse Head Episode

A most memorable scene and one that protrudes in its eccentricity even from the general 'weirdness' that dominates *My Winnipeg* is the anecdote concerning the dead horses in the Assiniboine river. In early winter 1926, eleven horses attempted to escape from a fire in a racetrack in Whittier Park. They needed to cross the "Forks", struggled, however, in the strong current and froze in the cold water. Their bodies were trapped between ice blocks and when the river froze over it left only the horses' heads leaping out from under the surface of the ice.

The cinematography of the scene is as remarkable as the sight of the animals is gruesome,

but of extraordinary visual quality: “like eleven knights on a vast white chessboard” the dark heads form a sharp contrast to the snow-covered river and adjoining fields. Many of the horses’ facial expressions reflect the horror and desperation that they experienced when they were trapped in the deadly “ice and horse jam,” with their jaws and eyes left wide open in panic. Others have their noses pointed downwards and appear sad, as if they had resigned to their imminent death. The narrator comments in a lapidary tone: “We grow used to the sadness. Simply incorporated into our days.” It is not only the oddity of the remark as such which again provokes scepticism in the viewer, for one wonders why the heads could not just have been removed in order to spare Winnipeggers the horrific sight; but the narrator also addresses the witnesses of the event as ‘we,’ thus speaking of an event which occurred in 1926 as if he himself had been there to witness it.

The real puzzlement follows, however, when the scene unexpectedly shifts to a more joyous tone as the tragic scene becomes “a great public spectacle” when Winnipeggers, apparently lacking less questionable attractions, begin to visit the morbid site for recreational purposes. A snowshoe club chooses the locality to “hold little jamborees” on a weekly basis. The club even organizes a snowshoe competition, and neither the eager participants, nor the jubilant crowd seem to object to the macabre venue. The narrator further informs the viewer that “winter strollers visit the heads frequently, often on romantic rambles. Lovers gather to sit among, or even on, the frozen heads, for picnics, or to spoon beneath the moonlit dome of our city” while an inter-title explains that “Romance!” and “Lovers!” are what we see. The statement appears especially bizarre in the one shot in which a couple ambles among the heads happily, passes by the horse whose head is slightly turned sideways and whose facial expression is especially wretched, and proceeds to pet the frozen head.

Like much of Maddin's work and *My Winnipeg*, the horse-head anecdote is dark, but nonetheless bears a humorous note. Beard remarks that “what the frozen horses' heads properly should evoke, in my view, is horror and sadness” (*Past* 345). The grim scenario becomes close to ridiculous, however, and almost like a slapstick comedy film, when the narrator explains that the site became a popular leisure-time destination for Winnipeggers. When the scene concludes with the claim that the “city enjoys a tremendous baby boom the following autumn. Humans, born of horses. Happiness!” while an inter-title reads “Bestial!” Maddin delivers his understanding of Surrealism

that is tied closely with morbid humour: “Maddin's Winnipeg is a place where people frolic among terrible spectacles, where the effect of atrocities is merely to encourage their libidinous desires. That is as radical a perspective as any charter-member Surrealist's” (*Past* 345). The scene is visually powerful, and indeed the sight of horse-heads in the snow with lovers sauntering between them is an entirely surreal one.

The frozen heads scene also evokes the comparison with other visual Surrealist artworks that place the depiction of animals at their cores. Although one author identifies animal depictions as particularly the domain of female Surrealist artists, arguing that “one strong common denominator [of women Surrealists] is their partiality to animal representation” (Colvile 64), the frozen heads inevitably demand making mention again of a male Surrealist filmmaker, Luis Buñuel: “[o]nce again Buñuel comes to mind, specifically the dead donkeys of *Un chien Andalou* and *Las Hurdes*. The deliberate cruelty of the former film, and the latter's grim and hideous social freak-show, are both closer to Maddin's movie than the general reception of *My Winnipeg* as aggressively quirky but essentially light-hearted entertainment remotely recognizes. (Beard, *Past* 345). The close-up shot of one of the horse's eyes also inevitably reminds one of the famous scene in *Un chien Andalou*, in which a close-up shot on a woman's eye is followed by a razor slicing the eye. The horse scene is also reminiscent of Edith Rimmington's 'The Oneiroscopist', a 1947 painting depicting a beast with a human body and a bird's head sitting erect on a pier. This particular image “recalls an English nonsense beast, imagined by Lewis Carrol or Edward Lear, making subtle fun of birdwatching” (Colvile 68). The creature evokes the narrator's claim that the tragic events at the forks had the odd effect of an aphrodisiac on Winnipeggers, whose “bestial” children will be “humans, born of horses.” Moreover, like Rimmington's painting, Maddin's work at times appears to be a caricature of his influences: Beard argues about the horse scene that

another analogue, perhaps even a closer one because of its fraternal status as Surrealist travelogue, is Vigo's *À propos de Nice*, whose satirical and comedic qualities are offset by perspectives of genuine weirdness and genuine anger. Humour indeed is part of the mix in all those Surrealist films, but it is always accompanied by, and ultimately subordinated to, something much darker and more frightening (*Past* 345).

Maddin's work goes further than this by presenting scenarios that inevitably provoke laughter because they are so outrageous. In doing so his work mimics its influences which, although at times humorous, essentially convey an earnest message. The dark and frightening aspect that Beard addresses exists in this particular scene as well, however, for the sheer sight of the frozen heads and their desperate facial expression is simply dreadful.

In addition, it is striking that Maddin, who throughout the film makes no secret of his ambiguous relationship with his home town, uses the Red and Assiniboine rivers twice in *My Winnipeg*: first in the beginning as imparters of life and now, as the film comes to its end, as endowers of death. Moreover, it is equally striking that the horses, like Maddin himself aboard the train, were in the process of escaping. Unlike the horses' flights, however, the outcome of the protagonist's elopement remains unknown. Although the film suggests a happy ending when in the penultimate scene the narrator enthusiastically introduces "Citizen-Girl" as Winnipeg's personified safeguard for after his departure, it remains undisclosed whether or not he actually leaves the city. What is more is that the repetition of "White. Block. House," which refers to Maddin's childhood home at 800 Ellice Avenue, as the final words of the film might indicate that he did not manage to prevail over the overpowering influence of his home and, like the horses, is destined to eventually meet his death in Winnipeg.

4.5.4 Citizen Girl

Contrary to the expectations of a 'showdown' which are built up throughout the film, *My Winnipeg* offers no solution to its primal conflict of whether or not Maddin managed to leave Winnipeg. In the penultimate train compartment scene, with the train almost reaching the city limits, the narrator warns that in Winnipeg "one must be careful when changing trains not to take the wrong line, not to end up looping back endlessly. That's why one must stay awake if he actually wants to get to where he thinks he's going. To his Happyland!". In the final train scene he explains: "I'm near the edge of town now. Time running out. I'm really going." The statement strongly suggests his departure, but that indication is relativized again. "How will Winnipeg be without me? Who will look after all its regrets?" the narrator wonders, and instead of closing with the train

leaving the city limits and Maddin finally escaping from the hold of the powers that have thwarted his liberty for years, the film ends on a more ambiguous note. "I need to think of her as I go" the narrator admits and acquaints the viewer with Citizen Girl, the unexpected and curious solution to all of the problems that the film addresses. It is in her power to rectify all that is wrong, in Maddin's opinion, in Winnipeg, and thus the film must return to those episodes in the city's history that were identified as unsatisfying. "With one wave of her hand" Citizen Girl would, for example, rebuild the Winnipeg Arena, the demolition of which Maddin protested so vehemently, raise Whittier Park from its ashes, or see to it that the city's homeless would no longer be confined to rooftops, where they dwell among the remains of the real "Happyland", Winnipeg's former amusement park.

The introduction of Citizen Girl is remarkable not only because it shows the artistic and creative depth of the director, but also because it allows access to Maddin's unrestrained mind and idiosyncratic line of thought. If the *Winnipeg Citizen*, unsurprisingly a fictional newspaper, had a pin-up girl, the narrator envisages, it would be her, Citizen Girl, a "concerned comrade, sad, but strong." Thus, in a rare moment of factuality in this daydream of a film, Maddin elucidates that Citizen Girl is the product of his own mind. Citizen Girl, like everything else that is good in *My Winnipeg* and in other films by a director who is obsessed with the past in so many ways, is from a bygone time and dressed like a stereotypical "comrade" indeed. In a deeply surrealist move, the imagined pin-up rises from paper into flesh and becomes a superhero: she is "strong enough to pry herself from the inky pages and climb to the very top of our city," from where she distributes her benevolent remedies. "She would look after the city, my city, my Winnipeg," Maddin guarantees, and it is the first time in the film there is any indication by the narrator himself that what is depicted as fact is really only his own understanding of his home town; we see his Winnipeg through his eyes and Citizen Girl is the personified symbiosis of external reality and the filmmaker's internal one. Beard argues that this alluring heroine's function is "to heal Maddin by healing the world" (Past 352) and furthermore that

this gesture of the film's, like much else in it, demonstrates its absolute unwillingness, perhaps its inability, to distinguish between phenomena in the inner world and phenomena in the outer one. [...] That confusion, a completely Surrealist one, between psychic events and objective ones, between Freud and Marx, is consistent from one end

of Maddin's filmography to the other. *My Winnipeg* demonstrates, by virtue precisely of its documentary qualities – its period photographs and protracted relationship however deranged with historical facts – not only the obvious contrast between Maddin's shallow political sensibility and his deep psychic one, but the amazing extent to which he can process anything into the terms of his private creation. (Past 352)

Citizen Girl is the embodiment of the Surrealist desire to overcome the obstacle of rational control and access one's subconscious, for it is apparently only there, in his own imagination, that Maddin can find an acceptable solution to the situation he finds himself in. It is fitting then that the overpowering influence of 'mother' is addressed again at this point: because of Citizen Girl Maddin "could go to where there are no ghosts," a statement which adds another confusion between 'phenomena in the inner world and phenomena in the outer one': Maddin speaks of "ghosts" in the plural, for the same ghost that haunts him must surely haunt other Winnipeggers, too. His personal ghost is, of course, his mother and an image of her face in the train compartment promptly appears again at this point in the scene: Maddin needs to think of her, too, as he goes. There follows the close-up shot of her lips closing for a kiss, and the image reminds one of the perspective of a child who has to endure mother's kiss, or one wonders if it possibly indicates oedipal longing, a theme which appeared previously in the 1992 feature *Careful*. In any case, it is obvious that she is the one from whom Maddin must flee, but unfortunately, as we learned earlier, her lap is "a magnetic pole that one can't turn away from for long." In a highly introspective motion Maddin thus needs to fabricate Citizen Girl so she can become the city's "new lap." Beard argues that

[p]erhaps he [Maddin] makes no distinction between his conception of Winnipeg and the city itself. In any event, to metaphorize his desire for salvation - of the city, or simply of his imagination of it – in the person of a nubile young woman dressed up like an extra in Archangel is to embody wonderfully so many of the powerful currents of feeling that run through Maddin's films, and his work as a whole. The desire for emotional and psychic wholeness is personified in a transfigured sexual desire. It is a sexual yearning, for a beautiful young woman, raised to a level of idealized healer of all psychic wounds (*Past* 351)

In many ways the creation of Citizen Girl as the ultimate benefactor bears traits of puerile logic. Instead of actually facing his problems and demons, which would be the more mature procedure, the protagonist sees no other option than to flee into his own imagination. For only there can he

encounter this almighty, virtuous persona, to replace a mother, who represents the opposite of blamelessness. In this pipe-dream Maddin can not only counteract, and rectify the wrongs that he suffered in juvenescence, but also heal those wrongdoings which were imposed on Winnipeg by the city's administration. Moreover, the protagonist goes into hiding, just as a child would, in order to avoid having to face the greater questions in his life, and so it comes that the film is also denied its happy ending: the protagonist is simply sleeping away aboard the “dream train,” where he only dreams of solutions. For if in Winnipeg one really “must stay awake” to prevent “looping back endlessly” instead of reaching “Happyland,” then Maddin, like any true Winnipegger always on the verge of falling asleep, must finally be dozing.

The advent of *Citizen Girl* thus suggests that Maddin did not leave Winnipeg at all, but fled to his private “Happyland,” accessible only to him, for Happyland is an internal space. The image of Mother looking after a departing car while the narrator wonders “how can one live without one's ghosts?” leads to the same conclusion: Maddin did not manage to leave Winnipeg behind, nor did he overcome the dominating influence of Mother, the principal figure in his life.

4.5.5 Family Reenactments

My Winnipeg reaches its introspective climax with the family reenactments which take place at three separate points in the film. Expressing once again his desire to decamp from Winnipeg, if he could only gather the required vitality to do so, the narrator devises a potential solution: “what if I film my way out of here?” he wonders, and asserts that it is now “time for extreme measures.” An experiment that concretizes Maddin’s aspiration to liberate himself from the constraints of his home town thus commences. As the reappearing figure of Mother adumbrated before, the source of his inhibition can be targeted at one specific location, and so the film returns to the primary obstacle to Maddin's departure: his childhood home at 800 Ellice Avenue. “Only here can I properly recreate the archetypal episodes of my family history” the narrator explains, and so he will climb the stage of his childhood again for one month. For this “month of my great escape,” he lives in his old home, the interior of which he refurbishes meticulously so that it resembles the house as it was in the 1960s.

The narrator's designated objective in this pseudo-journey through time is “to isolate the

essence of what in this dynamic is keeping me in Winnipeg” and thus “to free myself from the heinous power of family and city and escape once and for all.” This clarifies who, in his opinion, the real culprit hindering his exit is, for these experiments only concern family and not the city per se. Missing from the family at this point are Maddin’s siblings, and so in order for the gathering to go on unabridged, actors are hired to play their roles. Indeed, this is a puzzling manoeuvre, but the viewer’s readiness to believe in the film’s pretenses is truly tested with the assertion that the people on screen are all actors “except Mother,” when Mother really is Ann Savage, who bears little physical resemblance to the photographs of Maddin’s mother that are featured in the very same scene. More bizarre is that Maddin’s father, who passed away years before the time that the experiment is attempting to re-create, assumes a silent role as well: the members of the newly formed Maddin clan “pretend to have him exhumed and reburied in the living room beneath a mount of earth concealed by the area rug.” This particular bedlam is at no point more surreal than when one of the movers carelessly steps over the father’s mortal remains while Mother gaily observes the progress of the renovation. Equally startling is the depiction of the family watching television while the brothers lean casually against their unearthed father. Like those in the ‘frozen horse-head’ scene, the images here contain both a dark and humorous note, for the unceremonious treatment of the disinterred corpse is more likely to provoke sympathy and perhaps chuckling than acrimony over witnessing a violation of the dead.

For Beard “the scene is one more casually, brilliantly surreal Maddin rendering of the sense that the family incorporates every absurdity and horror into an untroubled daily routine” (*Past* 324). It is now a moot point to ask the one question that arises so often in *My Winnipeg*: how much of what we see is actually verifiable? Regardless of how careless the film’s treatment of fact is, these preposterous moments of film document how Maddin models the world to his liking in a surrealistic manner. If “the objective of surrealism was the infinite expansion of reality as a substitute for the previously accepted dichotomy between the real and the imaginary” (Balakian 14), then the family reenactment scenes well document the influence of Surrealist thinking on *My Winnipeg*: at no other point in the film are the transgressions between fiction and actuality more visible than when Maddin substitutes missing family members with actors, or, in the case of his father, with the pretence of his presence. Stunning is how, in order to be able to conduct psychological hygiene on himself, the

filmmaker externalizes his family matters and leaves it entirely in the hands of people who have no affinity with the family at all. This motion signifies that Maddin does not limit himself to the options that would be possible in rational surroundings, but grants fictional events the same validity as actual ones.

The three enactments proper are limited to retelling banal aspects of family life that carry a personal significance for Maddin: the daily straightening of a hall runner, an argument over a car accident between his mother and sister, and another argument between Mother and the children after she refused to cook for the family. It is not until the epilogue that both Maddin and the viewer can go beyond reenactment to reflection: in one of the film's last moments the narrator relates that the experiment had the one positive effect of Mother “develop[ing] an attachment for my dead brother Cameron.” As we see them embracing on a heap of fake snow, Mother declares “it's better between us, now that you've gone,” and Cameron, or rather the actor who plays the role of Cameron, confirms that the feeling is mutual. Thus only in the film's end Mother is portrayed in a sympathetic light.

Melnyk argues that “for surrealist artists, the world was very much psychoanalytical” (Directors 185) and so, undoubtedly, is Maddin's. Bigsby, on the other hand, contends that

the surrealists were not interested in the clinical application of Freud's theories. They did not want to restore individuals to 'sanity'. On the contrary, they saw madness as a key to perception and the reconciliation of opposites; they saw in the dream not evidence of undesirable neurosis or a neural memory of trauma but proof of the power and perception of the imagination unmediated by intellect. (74)

The reenactment scenes and epilogue reveal that Maddin's interest in psychoanalysis is equally as tangential as that of the Surrealist group. Although the experiment had a positive effect on the family, if only an imagined one, for no actual family member participated in this experiment, their therapeutic benefit is meagre: the only definite result is that Mother and Cameron improved their dysfunctional relationship, which was touched upon in the first reenactment in the form of the television drama *Ledgeman*. In each of *Ledgeman*'s episodes a mother prevents her son's suicide. With Maddin's mother as the female lead of the show, the parallel the filmmaker draws to his brother's death is obvious. Through the reenactments and epilogue Maddin provides himself with

the chance to address an issue that had burdened the family for decades, and achieves a harmonization between Mother and her son. Maddin's interest in psychoanalysis ends here, however, and so it remains unaddressed what effect the family reenactment had on him and if it liberated him from family ties, as he wished it would. Thus, rather than carrying a serious psychological significance, the reenactment scenes are better appreciated as a further testament of Maddin's affinity with Surrealism as his inner psychological world mingles seamlessly with outward reality.

5. Conclusion

This thesis investigated the surreal in Canadian director Guy Maddin's 2007 film *My Winnipeg*. Two introductory chapters located Guy Maddin's position in the greater realm of the Canadian national cinema. It was established that the contemporary Canadian cinema is a cinema of otherness: the country's most significant directors of the past decades are responsible for a shift away from a realist and documentary film tradition, established by the National Film Board in the first half of the twentieth century, towards a feature film output that is wholly unconventional. This trend was inaugurated in Toronto in the late 1960s with the advent of David Cronenberg, who is arguably Canada's most important director. Cronenberg's stylistic departure from the realism that dominated domestic productions before the director's emergence influenced subsequent generations of filmmakers, such as Guy Maddin, and contributed to establishing Canada as a domain of feature filmmaking.

Moreover, Cronenberg's films are a regular exception in the Canadian national cinema's unsuccessful struggle to build a larger domestic audience, as they have repeatedly bridged the gap between unconventionality and commercial viability. The problem of reduced marketability plagues the Canadian feature film industry: the consequence of the lack of audience for domestic product and a preponderance of foreign, particularly American, releases in Canadian cinemas is that the country's filmmakers continue to be at least partly dependent on governmental film funds. According to filmmaker Atom Egoyan, because the Canadian filmmakers' "survival is not set by public taste, but by the opinion of [their] peers" (1), this governmental funding constitutes a contributing factor to the "otherness" of the national cinema, for it allows Canadian filmmakers to value novelty over market appeal.

Guy Maddin is a frequent contributor to the Canadian cinema of otherness. Maddin's "work, no matter how many influences and homages it may contain, resembles no one's at all" (Beard, *Past* 3), and it is due to this uniqueness that his films draw greater critical attention towards Canada as a domain of feature filmmaking and contribute to a cinema that is reputed for its originality. The director's cinematography is reminiscent of the silent-film era, and gives special prominence to surrealist aesthetics and techniques. For this reason, Maddin has at times been referred to as a Surrealist.

The final chapter discussed the influence of Surrealism on *My Winnipeg* and Guy Maddin in general. This paper argued against an interpretation of Maddin as a Surrealist. The hypothesis that Maddin is not a Surrealist, but in *My Winnipeg* avails himself of Surrealist techniques to achieve certain effects, could be confirmed by several arguments.

First, Maddin's work does not meet all of the requirements necessary to be classified as surrealist. Pure Surrealism, in a strict understanding of the term, is confined to the early period of the surrealist movement in the 1920s, and because other artistic sources that contributed to forming the aesthetic of Maddin's films are abundant it is problematic to attribute the label of "pure Surrealist" to him. Surrealism was also a politically-inspired cultural movement, but there is lacking in Maddin's films a genuine political goal. Additionally, the Surrealists had an underlying principle that was essentially serious and radical: the expansion of human perception by all means necessary. *My Winnipeg* nevertheless displays specific surrealist influences: both on a visual and narrative level the film emphasizes the illogical and irrational. On a narrative level the Surrealist influence is visible in the confusion of internal and external reality, for example through the installation of the fabricated 'Citizen Girl' as the solution to Maddin's problems addressed in the film. Citizen Girl does not exist, but Maddin accepts her as part of reality. On a visual level the film also rejects "a faithful representation of reality" (Melnik, *Directors* 185) and uses Surrealist techniques like projection to create multilayer images that enable the director to express his dream-like view of Winnipeg in which anything is possible. The film is, however, not comparable to the radically subversive attitude of, for example, Luis Buñuel's 1929 short film *Un Chien Andalou*, which consists of a sequence of dissociated scenes that deliberately defy conventional plot, linearity and logic.

Second, the application of Surrealist techniques in *My Winnipeg* is calculated and selective. Maddin expressed that through this film "[he] wanted to give Winnipeg a profile of mythic proportions" (qtd. in Beard, *Past* 313). The film is thus "sometimes surreal" (Morse 186) because surrealist techniques are at times applied; however, they are only used when they aid in the alienation of the viewer through inconceivable information, which is a major intention of the film. In combination with the aesthetics of old-time films, the feelings of alienation brought on by the effects of the applied Surrealist techniques create bewilderment in the audience; it is in this

bewilderment that the mythologization of the film's subject matter is rooted, for human beings tend to mythologize that which they do not understand. The significance of Surrealism in *My Winnipeg* is thus limited to only one specific function: when surrealist influence is exhibited, it achieves the mystification of both Maddin's own persona and Winnipeg, but it is never exerted for the purpose of making *My Winnipeg* a Surrealist film.

When regarded in the larger context of the Canadian national cinema, *My Winnipeg* fits well into the domain of the cinema of otherness. First, it is simply a 'weird' film, and weirdness, as has been established, is a mark of otherness: David Cronenberg's style, for example, is characterized by a fusion of horror, pornography, violence and science. British Columbia's Atom Egoyan produces cerebral films that center on emotionally remote characters, and Maddin's artistic trademarks are his experiments with Surrealism and the exaggeration of the aesthetics of an earlier cinema. These directors, and others whose films were mentioned in this study, each exhibit an idiosyncratic cinematic style; thus the Canadian national cinema is as diverse as the directors who participate in it, but attains continuity in the "weirdness" of its filmmakers. And so, just as Maddin wanted to "give his home town a profile of mythic proportions" in *My Winnipeg*, the combined unconventionality of the filmmakers who are participating in the reversal of the country's realist tradition gives Canada's national cinema a profile that is, if perhaps not mythic per se, certainly eccentric.

Second, the mere existence of *My Winnipeg* demonstrates that the Canadian national cinema is indeed one of otherness: like other Maddin films that preceded it, the film was a commercial flop. Yet the sheer fact that Maddin is still able to produce films that cater to only a specific cult-following audience, and to peer filmmakers and the festival circuit, shows the Canadian national cinema's willingness to sponsor originality even when it involves the risk of commercial failure. Certainly, then, the Canadian system of governmental sponsorship enables filmmakers like Maddin, who would face difficulty producing such whimsical films in a more financially motivated environment.

It would be a misinterpretation of Maddin's films, however, to confine them, or worse, the Canadian cinema as a whole, to anything as extreme as "experimental film," and thus to the periphery of cinema as such. Maddin's affinity with Surrealism and love for a bygone film era has

indeed at times provoked the inaccurate positioning of the filmmaker in the area of experimental film. Yet as the narrative-packed *My Winnipeg* well demonstrates, entertainment is at the core of this and other Maddin films and consequently “[his] excursions into the beleaguered psyche and the torments of the subconscious are something that resonate more than the theory-driven world of most avant-garde productions” (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 198), such as those of, for example, the Canadian experimental filmmaker Michael Snow. While there certainly exists a certain tradition of experimental film in Canada, as filmmakers like Snow and, for example, Joyce Wieland prove, it is as much of a fringe phenomenon there as elsewhere. Maddin, however, is not an experimental filmmaker and neither is the country a domain of only experimental filmmakers.

The key to understanding the Canadian national cinema, and perhaps to a certain extent the Canadian psyche as well, is to realize that the 'weird' films of Maddin, Cronenberg or Egoyan are in no way confined to the margins of the national cinema, but that these and other directors mentioned in this study are the country's principal filmmakers. Thus they do not represent a fringe phenomenon; they are idealists, perhaps, who continue to make non-mainstream films in defiance of more financially-motivated directors who possess limited artistic pretension and quality. For this reason, it is possible to appreciate *My Winnipeg*, and Maddin's work in general, as symbolic of the Canadian cinema as regarded in the context of otherness. While being highly unconventional, Maddin is not a theory-driven avant-gardist (Melnyk, *One Hundred Years* 198) and, while he is entertaining, he does not even approach the dominion of mainstream filmmaking. Maddin and other Canadian filmmakers operate, rather, within their own space, the margins of which may occasionally touch upon such extreme ends as experimental film and mainstream cinema, but really belong to no proper category at all. In this, Maddin's cinema is a reflection of the character of the Canadian cinema itself.

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Points in Time the Episodes appear in *My Winnipeg*

4.5.1. The Red and Assiniboine Rivers and the Origins of Winnipeg: ~ 4:50 min

4.5.2. Treasure Hunt, Sleepwalking and 800 Ellice Avenue

Treasure Hunt: ~ 7:45min

Sleepwalking: ~ 10:15 min

800 Ellice: following Sleepwalking at ~ 13:15 mins

4.5.3 The Horse Head Episode: ~1:02:25 min

4.5.4 Citizen Girl: ~ 1:14:15 min

4.5.5 Family Reenactments

Reenactment 1: ~ 18:20 min (*Ledgeman* ~21:40 min)

Epilogue: following Citizen girl at ~ 1:16:35 min

Reenactment 2: ~ 30:26 mins

Reenactment 3: ~1:00:15 mins

German Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit behandelt den Einfluss von Surrealismus auf den kanadischen Filmemacher Guy Maddin und im speziellen auf dessen Spielfilm *My Winnipeg* (2007). Es wird weiters versucht *My Winnipeg* innerhalb des zeitgenössischen anglophonen kanadischen Kinos zu positionieren und im Zuge dessen diesen Bereich des nationalen Kinos vorzustellen.

In einem Einführungskapitel wird das anglophone kanadische Kino als 'cinema of otherness' betrachtet. Die einflussreichsten Regisseure des Landes kehrten in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten die etablierte realistische Filmtradition, die ihren Ausgang in der Gründung des National Film Board of Canada im Jahr 1939 und der darauf folgenden Promotion von vorwiegend kanadischem Inhalt zur Stärkung der nationalen Identität via Dokumentationen und realistischen Spielfilmen nimmt und die bis in die zweite Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts die filmische Landschaft des Landes prägte, um, und machten das Land zu einer Domäne des unkonventionellen Spielfilmes. Dieser Trend wurde maßgeblich von David Cronenberg geprägt, der ab den späten 1960er Jahren in Toronto in Erscheinung trat. Bis heute zählt Cronenberg zu den wichtigsten Filmemachern des Landes, da dessen Abkehr vom Realismus Generationen von kanadischen Filmemachern nach ihm inspirierte, und weil seine Filme internationale Aufmerksamkeit auf Kanada als Produktionsland von originellen Spielfilmen richtete.

Anders als viele seiner Landsmänner kann Cronenberg auch innerhalb von Kanada kommerzielle Erfolge feiern. Kommerzielle Misserfolge sind hingegen ein traditionelles Problem der kanadischen Filmindustrie: aufgrund des traditionell geringen Interesses des kanadischen Kinopublikums an heimischen Filmen, und der Dominanz amerikanischer Produktionen in heimischen Kinos, sind kanadische Filmemacher teilweise auf staatliche finanzielle Unterstützung angewiesen. Dies führt zu großer künstlerischer Freiheit für die Filmemacher des Landes, da Filmfonds, obwohl deren finanzieller Umfang in jüngster Vergangenheit abnimmt, für Filmemacher nach wie vor eine verlässliche Finanzierungsquelle darstellen, und Filmproduktion deshalb nur bedingt an den voraussichtlichen kommerziellen Erfolg eines Filmes gekoppelt ist. Diese Situation macht Kanada zu einem einzigartigen Film Produktionsland und trägt maßgeblich zum kanadischen Kino als einem 'cinema of otherness' bei, da dieses offenbar Originalität dem Marktwert eines Filmes vorzieht.

Guy Maddin ist ein fixer Bestandteil dieses kanadischen 'cinema of otherness'. Die Ästhetik seiner Filme ähnelt der von Stummfilmen und ersten Tonfilmen, doch in Verbindung mit anderen Einflüssen wie Surrealismus, sowie frühen Filmtechniken sind seine Filme einzigartig. Die zweite Hälfte dieser Diplomarbeit behandelt den Einfluss von Surrealismus auf Guy Maddin und *My Winnipeg*, wobei eine Interpretation Maddins als Surrealist abgelehnt wird.

Es wäre problematisch Maddin als Surrealisten zu bezeichnen, da absoluter Surrealismus streng genommen auf die Anfangstage der Bewegung in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren zu reduzieren ist und weil Surrealismus nur einen der zahlreichen Einflüsse auf den Regisseur darstellt. Darüber hinaus war Surrealismus auch eine politisch inspirierte Bewegung, eine politische Botschaft fehlt in *My Winnipeg* jedoch völlig. Zudem hatte die surrealistische Bewegung das ernsthafte und radikale Ziel die menschliche Wahrnehmung zu erweitern. Dies äußerte sich unter anderem in surrealistischer Kunst, wie etwa in Luis Buñuels Film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) der aus lose zusammenhängenden Szenen besteht, die jeder Logik entbehren. Eine ähnlich radikale Botschaft ist in *My Winnipeg* jedoch ebenfalls nicht enthalten.

Weiters ist die Anwendung surrealistischer Techniken in *My Winnipeg* selektiv und kalkuliert. Guy Maddin erklärte, er wollte seiner Heimatstadt Winnipeg durch den Film eine mystische Qualität verleihen. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, bedient sich der Filmmacher surrealistischer Techniken, die in Verbindung mit den unglaublichen und fantastischen Äußerungen des Erzählers die Zuschauer verwirren sollen. Dies bewirkt den Prozess der Mystifizierung, da es in der menschlichen Natur liegt, durch jene Vorgänge verblüfft zu werden, die der Verstand nicht begreifen kann. Die Signifikanz von Surrealismus für den Film liegt also darin, die Stadt Winnipeg sowie auch die Person Guy Maddin zu mystifizieren, und nicht darin *My Winnipeg* zu einem surrealistischen Film zu machen. Die Hypothese, dass Maddin kein Surrealist ist, sich aber surrealistischer Techniken bedient um gewisse Effekte zu erzielen, konnte deshalb bestätigt werden.

Im Rahmen des anglophonen kanadischen Kinos betrachtet, fügt sich *My Winnipeg* gut in die Domäne des 'cinema of otherness' ein. Zum einen trägt der Film zum Ruf des kanadischen Kinos als unkonventionell oder 'weird' bei. Der Englische Begriff 'weird' wird oft mit zeitgenössischem anglophonem kanadischen Film assoziiert, da dessen renommierteste Vertreter

nonkonformistische Regisseure wie Cronenberg, dessen Filme traditionellerweise Elemente von Horror, Pornographie und Science Fiction vereinen oder der ähnlich renommierte Atom Egoyan, dessen Filme auf emotional unzugänglichen Charakteren basieren, oder Maddin, der sich der Ästhetik einer längst vergangenen Kino-Ära und surrealistischer Elemente bedient, sind. Diese und andere Filmemacher beteiligen sich an der Abkehr der realistischen Tradition die von Cronenberg begonnen wurde und verleihen dem nationalen Kino einen Ruf als originell und 'weird'.

Zum anderen beweist die reine Existenz von *My Winnipeg*, dass das 'cinema of otherness' durchaus 'anders' ist, denn wie weitere Werke des Regisseurs ist der Film ein kommerzieller Misserfolg. Dennoch ist Maddin noch immer in der Lage Filme zu produzieren, die kaum außerhalb von Filmfestivals und ausgesuchten Kinos wahrgenommen werden, was wiederum beweist, dass das zeitgenössische kanadische Kino Originalität unterstützt, auch wenn dies das Risiko von kommerziellem Misserfolg mit einschließt.

Curriculum Vitae

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