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AUSTRALIAN-CANADIAN STUDIES

a multidisciplinary review

VOLUME 3, 1985.

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Developments In Cultural Identity Through Film: The Documentary Film, The National Film Board And Quebec Nationalism

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Introduction

In 1939 when the National Film Board was founded little regard was given to the potential role of Québécois filmmakers. None were employed and only a token few were given jobs in the administration of the institution. This had as much to do with the reality of the Board, as the voice of Canada, as it had to do with assumptions about Quebec and its culture. By the end of the 1940's a small group of Quebec filmmakers were involved in film production. But their proportion of the film budget was never much more than twenty percent. Pierre Véronneau (1983:5) has characterized the early period of the Film Board's existence as stagnant and without direction in relation to Quebec. Most of the films made during that period reinforced the stereotypical image of the Québécois and in particular placed an extraordinary emphasis on the folkloric.

By the mid-1950's little had changed, and Véronneau (1983: 5) quotes one of the former heads of international distribution at the Film Board:

Every five or six months the same history repeats itself: A French Canadian resigns or is simply laid off. The list of people who have resigned is a long one: Directors, scriptwriters, administrators, technicians, etc... And I haven't even mentioned all those people who left of their own accord because the atmosphere was so bad: These are all those people who had already proven themselves, who had shown that they had talent. Why is the situation so bad? Part of the answer is that French Canadians are made to feel as if they are intruding into an organization where English is not only the dominant language but where everything is thought through in terms of English culture. Those of us who do try and suggest a different direction are quietly told to leave. We're at the periphery of real power and have no control over the way our culture is interpreted let alone represented. We either accept the way the Film Board sees us or quit.

The conjuncture of the *La Révolution Tranquille* and the desire of Quebec filmmakers to have a voice in their own culture made the creation of a French unit at the Film Board possible. This happened after much struggle in 1964. Some of the most talented of Quebec's filmmakers worked at the Film Board from 1959 to 1966. They developed unique and quite specific ways of revealing a moribund Quebec culture to itself.

It is significant that in 1966 a large number of these filmmakers left the Film Board as a result of an internal power struggle and because of the general orientation of the institution. The history of that period cannot be described here. What is more important is the perceived relationship which the filmmakers had with their culture and the nationalistic aims which they tried to promote.

I have tried, in what follows, to bring together three important aspects of what one can describe as the development in Quebec of a cultural identity through the cinema. It is significant that Quebec filmmakers chose the documentary form and cinéma-vérité to express their point of view. I explore this choice by looking at a variety of conflictual issues which have arisen around questions of representation. What does the documentary form offer? Why was, and is it so attractive as a tool for political change and consciousness-raising? Are there contradictions in believing that the documentary is a window onto the reality which it tries to depict? Most of these issues have to be discussed in relation to the National Film Board itself as an institution. The stresses and strains of its

development are one part of an elaborate historical fulcrum upon which Quebec film has been both dependent and weakened.

At the same time the Film Board is also a site of tremendous debate, an unusual context within which at a micro-level the very contradictions of Canadian Federalism and Quebec Nationalism were being played out. For a time it was trumpeted as the ideal example of a bilingual institution. That was soon interrupted by the speed with which Quebec's national aspirations grew. The filmmakers mentioned in this essay are well-known in Canada and Quebec. In general, however, their films have not received very much exposure outside Quebec. Yet the province on its own is a site of tremendous filmmaking activity. It is the significance of this cultural output which makes many of the issues which I raise so crucial to understanding the specificity of Quebec nationalism. That specificity is the ground upon which a new debate could emerge. For, what characterizes the strength of the national imaginary in Quebec will be found in a cinema at once both contradictory and profoundly insightful. Nationalism as such has been both progressive and regressive in Quebec, but it has been framed by a desire to imagine a new future and it is the cinema which has served as a vehicle for that utopian expression.

Representation and the Documentary Film

Roland Barthes (1980:13) in his book on photography comments on his surprise at seeing a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother taken in the year 1852. He said to himself with astonishment: 'I am looking at eyes that have looked at the Emperor'.

This statement by Barthes raises a number of interesting questions centred for the most part on the nature of representation. Barthes struggles in his book to try and understand the representational power of photography. Why, he asks, does the photograph not distinguish itself with greater clarity from that which it depicts? Why does it seem as if the photograph so permanently links itself, in a glue-like fashion, to its referents? After all one does not look at the photograph of Napoleons's brother and say, '*that is Bonaparte!*' Photographic representation is about loss and about the dominance of absence as a driving principle for the generation of meaning. For the face that a photograph shows, is of course not a face anymore but a reduced two-dimensional representation of a face. The face has come to us from the past, a past inscribed, as it were, with a permanence that is from the outset contradictory. To say as we often do that a photo of a family member *is* that person is of course to be caught right in the nexus of that contradiction. For the photos that we take of our children reflect our relationship to the process of taking a photo, our desire perhaps to make our children look lovely or big or well-dressed. But that process, the choices that we have made, seem secondary in the face of the photograph itself. The photo comes to us as if our own role in taking it has disappeared. That would explain why we must always explain the photograph, explain what is there, point out, personalize the depiction.

As Susan Sontag (1977:4) says in her book on photography:

Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.

I bring up some of these problems to highlight a further set of similar but also more complex contradictions which surround the documentary film. For it was that genre of filmmaking that became the 'site' of an extraordinary struggle at The National Film Board of Canada during the late 1950's and early 60's, a struggle which pitted English and French filmmakers against each other and which became, at a paradigmatic level, an explanation for the direction taken by Québécois filmmakers through the sixties and seventies.

In many ways the documentary image tends to function like a photograph. The world is represented, depicted, as if the representational process is absent. As powerful as a photograph may be in appropriating the real, a documentary film increases the effectivity of the process by adding movement and enlargement, projective, to the representation. Referentiality, that which ties signifying elements together, has an unmotivated appearance. It seems as if a mirror is at work in the production of meaning. Or better still that a window has been placed over the real and the screen simply reflects what the window reveals. The documentary film gains an immediacy, a power as a result of this particular tautology. The natural world, itself devoid of signification, seems to be naturally present. Reality reproduced. Of course in film reality can neither be reproduced nor mirrored. (When we attach a replicating force to the signifying process we are essentially adopting a strategy to the problem of representation itself.) To give reality a form is to be immediately caught by paradox, the irony that what we understand the real to be is always the product of convention, of the cultural organization of signifying systems. The real as pictured must stay carefully within the bounds of those conventions which culturally link meanings together to give them intelligibility and coherence.

If there is a truth to the reality-effect of the documentary film it is that the literal tends to dominate the metaphorical and that there is a supposed transparency between art and reality. This transparency led Jean-Luc Godard to say that the photograph is not the reflection of reality but the reality of that reflection'. What this means is that photography is a construction, that the documentary film is a construction and that to understand what is depicted means also to understand what produces the *effect* of the literal, of the transposition of the real onto the screen. Take the Brechtian alternative to the reality-effect as reformulated by Godard:

... reality for us is less finding images of reality than constructing from reality images which give an account of that reality. (Heath, 1975-76:37)

The Documentary and Cinéma Vérité

There is another dimension to what I am enunciating here. There is the added problem that the documentary film tends to privilege 'sight' or vision as a primary means of understanding the real. However, the notion that 'vision is knowledge' itself needs to be examined, and examined with great care. For the vision of a representation may in and of itself not lead to any knowledge or understanding. To question what one sees as one sees it may be more important than investing in the representation as real.

Thus the contradiction of the following statement by Gilles Groulx (1964:56), in my opinion, one of the most important Québécois filmmakers:

Our films have, above all, been an impassioned appropriation of the social environment. The picturesque (the outsider's view) has yielded to the familiar; the myth has yielded in the face of reality.

He is referring to the cinéma-direct movement, to cinéma-vérité, which David Clandfield (1978:51) in an important article has summarized in the following fashion.

For the cinéma-direct filmmaker, the point of departure is the filmmaking process in which the filmmaker is deeply implicated as a consciousness, individual or collective. It is this process, this consciousness which will give form and meaning to an amorphous objective reality. Instead of effacing his presence, the filmmaker will affirm it. Instead of rendering the technical process transparent, he will emphasize its materiality. Instead of standing apart from his object of study or enquiry, he will implicate himself within it. His search for the authentic will involve not only the critical detachment of the empirical investigator, in order to strip away 'myth' or misconception, but also commitment to the social project under investigation in order to avoid the pitfalls of the aesthetic or the 'picturesque'.

Though both Clandfield and Groulx are searching for a way of overcoming many of the contradictions which I have been exploring, they are caught by another and more complicated problem which in and of itself is linked to the political project of the cinéma-direct filmmakers. Their work was characterized not only by the desire to film the real but also to intervene in it. Theirs was a cinema rooted in the momentous changes of 'La Révolution Tranquille', a cinema devoted to taking the familiar and recasting it, writing a new history, re-writing history and crucially re-writing popular memory. Thus one cannot separate the national dreams of those filmmakers from the films they made nor their nationalistic aspirations from the history which they tried to recover.

The crucial difference between their films and those being made in the English section of the Film Board was centered on the debate between the realist cinema and cinéma-vérité. The former was dominated by a careful empiricism which tried in a dispassionate fashion to show the real objectively. The filmmaker did not try and influence what he filmed, the subjects of his discourse, rather, it was the responsibility of the filmmaker to stay far away, to let the real speak for itself, and in this way to create the illusion of non-interference, the illusion that the real could speak as if without representation, as if unaffected by the representational process.

In contrast to this, cinéma-vérité was at its inception characterized by a feeling of real contact with what was being filmed. Lightweight equipment and a mobile camera made it seem as if the real was being looked at and penetrated by the camera in a very spontaneous fashion. This spontaneity was crucial to the movement since the situations into which they put themselves, the villages that they visited, the festivals they filmed, the sports events that their cameras captured, could not be set up in the way a fiction film was, and also could not reproduce the falsity of the distance suggested by the empirical approach. Yet the irony of cinéma-vérité should have been self-evident from the start. For though their subject matter was different the Québécois filmmakers were caught in the same bind as their English counterparts. Their films reproduce the ideology of the lived, of the authentic, faithfully giving substance to the details of the surface of events, much in the manner of the naturalist novel, unable to go beneath the surface, to question the underlying rules for the production of the real.

In a sense they were as concerned with producing a mirror of their society as their English counterparts. However this mirror was deeply rooted in the cultural and political concerns of the period. This brings up another quite crucial point. Whereas the question of how a culture comes to express its concerns, how it comes to symbolize those concerns, is as important as the product that we associate with it, the actual process of symbolization, the tools which are used to express meanings, conventions, etc., are often prioritized as secondary to the products themselves. As much as the cinéma-vérité filmmakers were looking for another way of expressing their point of view, and as willing as they were to use, for example, improvisation to increase the level of spontaneity, their real aim was to use film politically, as a tool of social change. Equally, they were also trying to define and give expression to a new sense of national identity.

The contradictions of trying to reveal the real as opposed to the complexities of representing it are brought out to their fullest in the following quote from Michel Brault:

One could say that there are two techniques: there is the tele-photo style and the wide-angle style... I belong more to the wide-angle style, that is to say that the style consists simply in approaching the people and in filming them, in participating in their lives and not in observing them in secret, inside a box, or from high up in a window with tele-photo lens. (Jones, 1981:96)

It would be hard for the camera to avoid the voyeuristic role that it has. No amount of personal integrity can overcome the power relations involved in filming someone. That power is situated in the inability of the person being filmed to alter what the cameraman finally chooses. The empirical cannot be mixed with the personal. The personal cannot overcome what the camera and the process of filming create. To participate in the lives of people means far more than just filming them and in fact raises questions about the necessity of film in the first place.

In cinéma-vérité you might put a camera on your shoulder and walk into a poor area. The camera then becomes not only a tool for sight but the determining context for understanding what you see. But the notion of capturing 'people in action' is as impossible as the simple transfer of reality to celluloid. This is the case simply because for every ten hours of film shot, the editing process might reduce the total to one hour or even less. The camera and the experience of filming form only one part of a complex institutional process which inevitably changes not only what was filmed but the memory of it. The spontaneity of the moment is lost as a consequence of the very exigencies of the medium itself. But those exigencies are also further contextualized by the institutions which permit the production of the film, in other words the financiers.

Cinéma-vérité tried to present itself as virtually devoid of these contradictions, as if its intervention could be sustained simply by the honesty of its films. The presence of the camera in a given situation may act as a catalyst for conversation and may also inhibit discussion. Cinéma-vérité often exposes the presence of the camera to us but this has little to do with how the discursive effects of the film have finally been created — the best example of this would be a film called *Things I Cannot Change* — for we do not see the original moment of the discussion, not the whole exchange, but the moment in time chosen by editing to best suit the rhythm, the development, the style of the film. The medium is as much propelled forward by all of this as it is inhibited by it. Fabrication co-exists side by side with point of view. Inevitably then, we are dealing with truth, but of a much different order to that suggested by the film itself.

Bill Nichols (1983:20) who has done some very interesting work on the documentary film says the following:

This gap (between a fabricated realism and the apparent capturing of reality) may also be looked at as a gap between evidence and argument. One of the peculiar fascinations of film is precisely that it so easily conflates the two. Documentary displays a tension arising from the attempt to make statements about life which are quite general, while necessarily using sounds and images that bear the inescapable trace of their particular historical origins. These sounds and images come to function as signs; they bear meaning, though the meaning is not really inherent in them but rather conferred upon them by their function within the text as a whole. We may think that we hear history or reality speaking to us through a film, but what we actually hear is the voice of the text, even when that voice tries to efface itself.

What Nichols is saying here is very important because he is pointing out that the discourse of the film creates meaning, meaning not necessarily inherent in what is pictured but conferred by the process of textual organization. In that sense the act of filming is always transformative, always transforming, and what we see are the instances, the enunciations, the expressions of those transformations.

There is a problem, of course; that we can never have access to the real voice of a text, to the intentions which may have governed its creation. We can only make hypotheses about that voice, about authorship, and those hypotheses will be contextualized by our own needs as viewers. It could be said of the cinéma-vérité filmmakers at the Film Board, those Québécois for whom the cinema was a catalytic device addressed to a spectator they thought in need of change, that their textual voice was more self-evident, but I think not.

As Barthes (1980:13) mentions for photography the medium requires explanation, requires that meanings be pointed out and clarifications be made. The medium of film is caught by the fact that in and of itself what it depicts cannot be expected to produce meaning in the kind of totalizing fashion that the filmmakers might desire. The final paradox then, is that the documentary image, the documentary film will always need explanation to clarify what it is showing. It is in some ways the desire for the film to produce meanings in a complete fashion which results in and produces all the contradictions of self-effacement which Nichols so correctly tries to point out.

The National Film Board and Quebec Nationalism

In order for the filmmakers of the cinéma-vérité movement to make films, they situated themselves at the center of a debate around the relationship of culture to political action, the relationship of cinematic signifying processes to the audiences who viewed their films. They were as much concerned with meanings as they were with the National Film Board as an institution for the production of meaning.

And it can be said that through their quest for images to express the equations of national identity and cultural production, they changed the Film Board and changed in many ways the apparatus of the cinema as well. These are powerful impulses and even given all of the contradictions I have mentioned, those impulses must be given their due place. But there still remains the more deeply political and theoretical question of how films affect their audiences, of how the quest for national self definition can be *represented*? There is no easy equation between the desire to express nationalistic sentiments and the medium of film.

The equation can of course be simplified by assuming that the cinema is a device of duplication. Then the act, as Gilles Groulx (1964:65) suggests, becomes one of appropriation, of giving reality meaning by replacing it with the medium. Paradoxically and in a quite regressive sense, the medium then does become the message.

Representation in the cinema is in part dependent on what the audience contributes to it. That contribution, the mid-way point of an exchange, is also dependent on the role of the imaginary. In the fictional cinema the flow of the narrative is designed to allow for the contribution of the audience. One character looks at another in response to an audience who is also looking. In the documentary film, many of those devices are reproduced. Though cinéma-vérité posits itself as different from narrative film, it too tries to tell a story and often to tell that story as if artifice plays only a minor role.

Michel Brault states this but, of course, he is coming at it from a different angle.

Film projects at that time were considered in function of their literary quality. I considered this to be in contradiction with the N.F.B.'s documentary mission and so we submitted a project containing a single phrase: 'We want to make a film on a wrestling program at the Forum on Wednesday evening'. The content would come to us in the process of shooting. We discovered the world of the wrestlers and their fans while filming them; without judging them, but rather in paying homage to them. (Jutras, 1980:40)

This then is an important statement about the cinema in general, because it is reacting to the notion that a film has to be planned and against the notion that the cinema needs a script. It is talking about the cinema as a device for the exploration of reality. But how would Michel Brault's attitudes as regards wrestling have arisen in the first place? What attracted him to the Forum, a large indoor arena for sporting events in Montreal? Did he not already have a set of feelings and intuitions? Wasn't he looking for a place to express them? As he tried to draw himself closer and closer to reality, he says that what he and his colleagues finally achieved was *giving the people being filmed a voice*.

Giving them a voice, also the project of a Pierre Perrault. But wasn't it also one of the fundamental thrusts of the national movement in Quebec to try and recover the voice of the people? A voice lost by traditional history, maintained in the pubs, in the oral history, in the songs of Québécois?

To give a voice presumed, ironically, that the voice has no outlet, that the filmmaker must be a vehicle, loudspeaker for the unexpressed. But that clashes precisely with the notion that the voice is there to be recovered. The voice that we are talking about here is the voice that the filmmaker desires, a voice to be found as much in his or her own imaginary as in the people being filmed.

To talk about the national question in Quebec is to talk about the presence of a suppressed voice. It is to talk about dispossession.

There is then a crucial convergence between the development of the cinéma-vérité movement and nationalism in Quebec. It is not within the bounds of this article to situate that convergence historically, rather what concerns me is the link between national questions and the cultural tools used to express those questions.

Though many of the filmmakers of whom I have spoken often fought with the National Film Board, nearly all of the films of the cinéma-vérité movement were made there. A further paradox comes out here. The N.F.B. is of course a federal institution and part of the frustration of these filmmakers grew out of the institutional practice of which they were a part. It was the acceptable limits of the National Film Board within which they were working, not only, or in any strict sense, the documentary as a genre. This is not to suggest a monolithic Film Board directing and controlling all of the work done by its filmmakers, but the institution subtly defines the parameters of its own activities. It supplies permanent employment to a pool of filmmakers and in one sense that seems to be an act of support and encouragement. It can be seen, however, as a very direct way of legitimizing the role of the state in the production of culture. Protesting this is difficult since an outcry may lead to the destruction of the institution and, consequently to the loss of one of the few contexts where the production of documentary films is actually legitimate. The circularity of this problem, the anguish of being in effect the voice of Canada to the world, when all that you wanted was to speak on behalf of Quebec to the Québécois, that anguish and that circularity, defined a large part of the documentary window that Québécois filmmakers opened up.

The Film Board is not only about film, but about a concept of Canada. It in itself is a medium for the transmission of Canadian national aspirations, in almost direct contradiction to the deeply felt Quebec nationalism of the early sixties. How did the Québécois filmmakers deal with this? They began, in effect, by cataloguing the society around them, inventoring the activities of the people, and thereby transforming history into a vast encyclopedia, replete with images that froze forever that which seemed to be slipping away. The archive they tried to create was by no means neutral, though it partook of one of the problems of the archival: the contradictory layers and levels of history are difficult to maintain within the context of the archive. The result is not a denial of heterogeneity but a regularization of historical phenomena and events into a series of categories which can become rules for seeing and understanding the world. The documentarians at the Film Board were desperately stripping away one illusion to create a far more complex one. They were slowly creating the cultural infrastructure that made the documentary as a means of depicting events predominant. The elevation of the documentary from one of many possible genres that could reflect the particular reality of Quebec, to the *only* style that could accurately reproduce 'notre caractère national' made the relationship between Quebec's filmmakers and the National Film Board a symbiotic one. However the desire

to capture the real and make the everyday life of the people the 'subject' of their films, was inspired by their politics. The image, the people inhabiting it, what they said, was supposed to stand *for* what the filmmakers themselves could not say within the limitations of the institution for which they worked. This delegation of authority away from the filmmaker to the people, was a convenient way of adapting to the exigencies of an institution that could not condone (even within a relatively liberal framework) the more serious oppositional tendencies represented by the turmoil in Quebec.

An example of one of the strategies they used goes as follows; if there was an objection to one of their scenes they would say that they had just come upon it, they were just filming what was there, so to speak, allowing that which was inherently political to be given a voice. The phenomenological moment so spontaneously present represented truth and not a distortion. The truth depicted and reality preserved. And if that reality were politically unpalatable, well what could the filmmakers do? They, in a sense were just documenting at was there.

Cinéma-Vérité and its Audience

Within this complex relationship of culture and politics and national aspiration we also find a quite different conception of human agency and subjectivity. Foreseeing a debate that was to rage in France in the early 1970's, the cinéma-vérité filmmakers were involved in the task of trying to understand popular memory. Popular memory was, for them, a crucial route into the sometimes dormant nationalistic feelings of the people. But how could those people be made to speak? With *La révolution tranquille* breaking through many boundaries and putting in place a new and more liberal government, the question was how could more Québécois be swept up in the process? This meant that for every person who was given a voice in a cinéma-vérité film that voice had to be directed towards an audience in search of meaning.

The audience in search of meaning was also an audience whose linguistic heritage was under attack and thus to give a voice meant far more than just recovering that which history had elided. It meant also discovering the relationship between language and expression, between history and popular memory, between those symbolic moments pregnant with the past and the need to re-see, to re-understand those meanings. The cinéma-vérité films operated in a laboratory like atmosphere, testing out new conceptions, looking for the metaphors to express history, trying to investigate the possibility of being part of the historical process itself.

How paradoxical then that Quebec itself was a vast experiment at a moment when its cineastes were searching for a way of depicting the process. In that sense cinéma-vérité was less about remembering the past than about re-writing itself.

But to re-write the past is also an act of the imaginary in much the same way as nationalistic aspiration is premised on an imaginary longing for a sense of collectivity, a sense of community that can only and inevitably be pictured in the most fragmentary of fashions.

The cinéma-vérité movement expresses in a microcosmic way the convergence of cultural concerns with nationalistic aspirations in Quebec. Though *La révolution tranquille* changed the economic infrastructure of the province by placing in power the petit bourgeois that Maurice Duplessis had so skillfully excluded, its most profound effects were cultural. This effectively repeats itself up to the present, with the most controversial law that the Parti Québécois has passed being Bill 101 which, as much as it tried to protect the French language, is centered on the preservation of the cultural heritage of the province.

That the cultural sphere should be the place of revolution is not surprising for so much of what constitutes national identification is of course expressed through culture.

Take the interesting problem of the collectivity with whom one might identify as a national community and to whom one might address oneself as a filmmaker. As Benedict Anderson (1983) has explained in a recent book, the community to which one refers is almost by definition impossible to meet or encounter. To say that I am Canadian means to generalize outwards from the individual to the collectivity and back. To see myself as a part of a whole has no other reality than that which I impart to it. This is why symbols play such a large role in maintaining a sense of cohesion for a diversified community whose heterogeneous interests are not all served with the kind of homogeneity suggested by 'the' national identity. To die for one's country, to desire that death as proof of one's allegiance is of course to take what I have been saying to an extreme. The extreme is quite logical given the boundaries established by the combined notions of patriotism and nationalism. To see a flag as a 'symbol' of that patriotism is not dissimilar to the process whereby a variety of discursive meanings are created to 'represent' the collectivity.

The cinema-verite movement tried to create not only a new form of cinematic expression, but a new collectivity for their films. In this sense their project took on dimensions far greater than they may have realized, standing to this day as one of the most innovative moments in Quebec's cultural history. At the same time, the discursive boundaries which they established lacked much of the self-reflexivity for which they searched, and this was due in part to their rather naive belief that filming change could, in and of itself, produce change.

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Delinquency, Comics and Legislative Reactions: An Analysis of Obscenity Law Reform in Post-War Canada and Victoria

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Introduction

The circulation of video pornography has led to renewed calls for a review and strengthening of censorship and regulatory provisions in several common law jurisdictions. The Williams Commission of Inquiry reported to the British Parliament in 1979 on Obscenity and Film Censorship (Williams, 1979). In Canada, the Fraser Committee was created by the Minister of Justice in 1983 to examine pornography and prostitution. In addition, a parliamentary subcommittee was struck to examine cable television and 'sexually abusive broadcasting' in the context of a refusal by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunication Commission to license the Playboy pay TV network. In 1984 in Australia, the Senate Select Committee on Video Materials was created to examine the impact of the new medium on Australian cultural and social life. One of the themes which recurs in each of these inquiries is the question of the harmful effects of exposure to such materials. Unlike more traditional arguments from morality and the more recent ideological critiques of pornography (see Diamond, 1980 and Fraser, 1985), arguments about the possible victimization of innocent third parties by men whose moral sense has been perverted as a result of pornography have enormous interest for legislative bodies since they transform questions of aesthetics, taste and cultural integrity into issues of public safety, law and order. Government control is more easily justified if the problem is cast in law and order terms.

It was originally my impression that this 'instrumentalist' element of law reform was a mark of the contemporary debates. However, examination of an earlier phase in the development of obscenity law suggested that here too law and order were used as justification for removing from the public domain an article which had grown enormously popular, much to the dismay of parental organisations, clergymen, educators and criminal justice personnel. This was the crime comic. Ironically, the debates on the harmful consequences of aggressive pornography in Calgary in 1984 bear a disconcerting resemblance to the fear over the 'pornography of violence' in the late 30's and early 50's in Melbourne. The pornography of violence was the term employed by Abraham Kaplan (1955) to characterise the crime and horror comics, magazines and novels in the period following World War Two. In both cases revisions of the obscenity laws were sought to curb the crimes thought to arise peculiarly as a result of pornography — in one case the physical and sexual abuse of women, in the other the delinquency of juveniles. It is not of interest here whether such allegations are true, though in retrospect, the enormous opposition to comics seems incredible, and belief in their role in causing delinquency seems far-fetched.

Of more interest is the symbolic or ideological element in efforts to revise the laws, especially in the post-war period which is our primary concern. The post-war period seems a fruitful site for investigation, for it serves to illustrate the problematic nature of the concept of obscenity. Though few today have trouble identifying the objectionable quality of 'video nasties', most are astonished that the comics in question were construed as pornography. Analysis of the post-war period might thus serve to illuminate those aspects of the contemporary campaign which are obscured by taken-for-granted assumptions about obscenity and pornography.