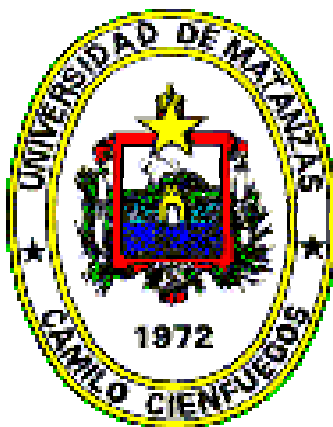


A Brief Account on Canadian Cinema.

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INTRODUCTION.

The history and evolution of cinema in Canada has been characterized as sporadic, and is fragmented into regions and official languages. Besides, from its very beginning, it has been permeated by the influences of the American film industry and the French Film Industry, since its technical origins are marked by the introduction of these two foreign technologies and obvious cultural influences.

Undoubtedly there has been a film industry that has produced outstanding long and short films which have been awarded many important prizes locally and abroad. But there is no question about it, it is quite difficult for Canadians to see or watch a Canadian film. In fact it is estimated that only 2% of time at movie theaters is devoted to national production. Whereas, on television, the national films are presented at non-preferable hours. On the other hand, the government's response to the petitions of the cinematographic industry has not been consistent with today's requirements.

In this historical evolution of such industry in Canada, it may be highlighted the creation of organizations and institution, which are considered as landmarks in the search for a more authentic Canadian Film Industry.

The objective of this paper is to present a brief overview of Canadian Film Industry since early times to our more recent years. It has been thematically divided into:

- Silent cinema.
- Government production.
- Government support for a private Film Industry.
- Documentary films.
- Long feature film (In English and French).
- Regional production.
- Actual trends.

DEVELOPMENT.

Silent Cinema (1896-1928).

As in any other place in the Americas, the origins of cinema in Canada date back to the introduction of two foreign technologies:

The Lumiere Brothers' Cinematographer (Cinematographe de les Lumiere) and Edison's Vitascope. Both had public presentations in 1896, the first in Montreal on June 27, and the latter in Ottawa on July 21.

The simultaneous presence of the European and American technologies on Canadian soil stands as a synecdoche for the way in which Canadian film industry would evolve until today. In 1897, James Freer made in Manitoba the first Canadian Films showing the life of the prairies.

At first, the cinematographic exhibitions were ruled by scheduled shows and presentations at the entrance of vaudeville theaters. Later, this allowed the presentation of films and as a consequence, the opening of new branches. In the mid 1920's the U. S. companies had already bought most of Canadian local branches, completing in this way, a process of vertical integration.

From the very first films produced, generally shot by crews from Britain, France or the United States, the production was focused on beautiful images of northern wilderness, Niagara Falls, the aboriginals from Quebec. The Rocky Mountains shot in traveling cameras and the like. This allowed the emergence of the “Northern Forest Melodrama” in which the Western novel stereotypes were transferred to the Canadian scenery. As a reaction, there appeared Canadian filmmaking companies inspired by Canadian history. In 1913, Canadian Bioscope Company made *Evangeline*, considered to be the long the first Canadian dramatic film which was a success.

There were two silent films that deserve to be mentioned: *Back to God’s Country* (by David Hartford, 1919) and *Nanook of the North* (by Robert Joseph Flaherty, 1922) considered by many as one of the first major documentaries. The former was based on James Curwoods story, the latter on traditional activities of the Inuit people. Flaherty anticipated the Quebec cinematographic production by making the producer-ethnographer play the role of a catalyst and participant in the activities of a threatened community. Nevertheless, the small Canadian audience could not support the industry, besides; there was a great competition from Hollywood.

In 1920, Associated Screen News was founded in Montréal. Besides newsreels and sponsored films it produced two series: *Kinograms* (1920) and *Canadian Cameo* (1932-1953) usually directed by Gordon Sparling.

In the same year, the first Canadian Cinema chain was built up by the Allan Brothers, and distribution networks were established. As soon as 1923, Hollywood’s Famous Player Co. bought the Allan’s chain.

Government Production.

First World War made it possible for Canada to recognize the importance of national propaganda and to establish film production centers, such as the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB), whose mandate was to “promote and to inform the natural attractions, the agricultural resources, and the industrial development of Canada”. It was not until six years later that the CGMPB obtained the new sound technology.

In 1938, the Government asked a well known film maker of the time John Grierson, founder of the British documentary movement, to become an advisor for the creation of a new institution related to cinema production. In 1939, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) was founded and Grierson became its first Commissioner. Its mandate was “to encourage and promote the study and appreciation and use of motion and sound picture and television as educational and cultural factors in the Dominion of Canada and elsewhere”. The NFB was first devoted to war propaganda.

The war propaganda film, *Churchill’s Island* (1941), which gave Canada its first Oscar, became the emblem of the NFB’s unique blend of the Grierson’s traditional authoritarian modes of address, epitomized by Lorne green’s booming voice - of - god narration, and typically Canadian populism, with most of the film praising the phlegmatic courage of the British people and with only a couple of seconds in a 40-minute film, devoted to Churchill himself.

With the end of the war in 1945, the need for propaganda disappeared, and the NFB found itself without a mandate for a few years. By the early 1950’s, however, some film makers like Low, Kroitor, Koenig, and others, started reinventing documentary practice,

mixing spontaneous recordings and fictional scenes, realism and lyricism, focusing on the lives of average people and incorporating for the first time, the voice of immigrants. Then with the creation of CBC TV -the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation- in 1952, one of the world's foremost public broadcasting organizations and Canada's largest cultural institution- all these films were shown on television.

In 1964, the NFB added a production branch in French and started making fiction films. During the 1960's, films were used as changing agents. Later, with the multicultural policy and the feminist movement of the 1970's on, the production was diversified (women, new Canadians etc.).

The 1990's however, were detrimental for the NFB due to the closing down of regional offices, production studios, and the exclusion of 25% of the personnel.

Government Support for a Private Film Industry.

The government's response to the petitions of the national cinema industry was sporadic. The mediocre "quota quickies", shot in the 1930's in Victoria BC by Hollywood studios to meet a British regulation favoring films produced in the Commonwealth countries, were the first in the long history of infamous scams devised to make money while avoiding fostering an indigenous film industry in Canada. Other examples include the Canadian Corporation Project signed in 1948 by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, in which the government promised Hollywood not to support indigenous feature film production in exchange for a few token references to Canada in American movies; one of the most representative examples could be found in the movie *African Queen*, in which H. Bogart says at one point that he is a Canuck. Another example is the mid 1970's tax-shelter policy which, according to Gerald Prately, allowed Canada to achieve "the dubious distinction of being the only nation in the world to turn its film production over to the international firms, and in doing so, sold itself into oblivion."

The creation of the Canadian film development Corporation (CFDC) in 1967 (now Telefilm Canada, 1984), a governmental agency established to lend money to producers working on financially viable projects, pushed Canadian film increasingly towards a standardized commercial model and away from the amateurish nature of the 1960's cinema this led to higher production values, without however dismissing the realist tradition inherited from the NFB. To overcome a weak point, that is, distribution, Telefilm initiated a feature Film Distribution Fund offering "a line of credit to ensure that Canadian films have the greatest possible market access".

Telefilm Canada's role differs from that of the NFB in that Telefilm is a cultural investor rather than a producer or distributor. It has financed some 800 feature films and over 2000 television shows and series, helping to build what is now a multibillion -dollar Canadian industry-. Telefilm support has also allowed Canadian talent and culture to acquire currency abroad: at international film festivals, works backed by Telefilm Canada have won more than 1700 prizes in some 40 countries. Artists who benefit from Telefilm Canada's contribution understand how important it is to Canadian culture. At this point, filmmaker Dennis Arcand states that "the existence of Telefilm determined the existence of a Quebec Film Industry. Once again, in a province such as Quebec, if there is no Telefilm, there is no film."

Documentary Film (1939-present).

Although the NFB's films of the war era are of major concern for historians and historiographers-regardless the Oscar Award won with *Churchill's Island* in 1941, the NFB produced some of the best documentary films of the world in the 1950's and 1960's. Kroitor's Paul Tomkowicz, *Street-railway Switchman* (1953) is one of the landmarks of NFB production in the 1950's. It had great influence on documentary around the world and quickly became the distinctive style of Canadian cinema.

The English side developed two different styles:

- Lyrical speculative: it may be seen in *City of Gold* (Collin Low, 1957).
- Observing-empirical: it is shot without script or narrator, present in the 14 short feature series *Hidden Camera* (1958-1990), which intends to demystify the Canadian institutions and rituals: e.g.: *The Days before Christmas* (McCartney-Filgate, 1958), *I Was a Ninety-Pound Weakling* (Koenig and Dufaux, 1958), and subsequently, *Lonely Boy* (Koenig and Kroitor, 1961), which approaches ironically the pop singer Paul Anka.

In 1964, the documentaries continued to be personal and ironical. The best of them were produce by Donald Brittain: *Dreamland* (1974), about the first moments of Canadian film production, and *Volcano: an Inquiry into the life and Death of Malcolm Lowry* (1976), as well as *Waiting for Fidel*, by Michael Rubbo (1974).

In 1971, Studio D specialized in feminist films dealing with pornography, abortion, domestic violence. This studio won three Oscars: *I'll Find a Way* (Shaffer, 1977); *If You Love this Planet* (Nash, 1982); *Flamenco at 5:15* (Scott, 1983).

Another was Studio B which specialized in "alternative drama" with fiction films performed by persons who were not actors and improvised dialogues in restricted situations. Two examples: *Train of Dreams* (John N. Smith, 1987) and *The Company of Strangers* (Cynthia Scott, 1990).

On the French side, a generation of intellectuals and artists supporting Quebec's Quiet Revolution and inspired by the advances of France, such as the "cinema verite" and the "nouvelle vague" produced documentaries without script praising the contemporary urban Quebec and its rituals of work and rest.

This movement, soon known as "cinema direct", began with a modest short feature documentary: *Les Raquetteurs*, 1958. These films are not only concerned about the events, but also about the audience.

Pierre Perrault was the one who best represented the direct style. From 1960's onward, he produced 11 long feature films, four standard feature films, and two short feature films about life in Quebec: *San Lorenzo*; *Abitibi*; *Sub Artic* and *Arcadia*. His best known work is a trilogy: *Pour la suite du monde* (1963), *Le regne du jour* (1966) and *Voitures d'eau* (1968). They portray obsessing images of the rebirth of an ancestral search, the search for ancestral roots in West France, and the last days of some local shipyards.

Long Feature Film Production in Recent Times (in English).

In the late 1960's Canadian Film industry began producing long feature fiction films in English; however, there was not any individual style.

The rebelliousness of adolescents was the key by the time: *Nobody Waved Good-Bye* (Don Owen, 1963) is considered to be the beginning of that style. *Prologue* (Robin Spry, 1959) could be another example.

In the 1950's and 1960's the cinematographic production was based on well-structured scripts and/or literary adaptations, besides that, the actors were professionals. Apart from Canada, these actors also worked in Hollywood and Great Britain. Paul Almond was one of the leaders in the direction of films for theater exhibition with a drama expressionist trilogy filmed shot in Quebec with which his wife Genevieve Bujold began her performance career in English: *Isabel* (1968); *Act of the Heart* (1970); and *Journey* (1972), from which the best and more accessible is the first one. Norman Jewison became famous in Hollywood when he won the Irving Thalberg award for his cinematographic career. The only film he produced in Canada was *Agnes of gold* (1985), performed by Genevieve Bujold.

During the 1960's, the universities offered a low-budget way of production which was not very conventional. They praised contemporary counterculture, went against taboos, and diversified the universe of genres by producing horror films. The best known of all was David Cronenberg, regarded as "The father of intellectual horror and science fiction", the fact that his technical collaborators participated in most of his films has given a unity of style and images to his films. Some of his best are *Rabid* (1976), *Scanners* (1980), and *Videodrome* (1982), which are about the anatomical degradation caused by modern technology. Some of his recent works are *Dead Ringers* (1988), *The Naked Lunch* (1991), *Madame Butterfly* (1993) -based on a play that portrays the sexual humiliations of a French diplomat in China-, and the very controversial *Crash* (1997), taken from the J.G. Ballard's novel in which an automobile crash was a reason for people's sexual excitement.

Another film producer is Atom Egoyan, who gained international recognition due to the alienation of his main characters; he mingles fantasies and anxieties with new technologies and ritual representations. Among his works we may refer to: *Speaking Parts* (1989), *The Adjuster* (1991), *Exotica* (1994), and *Sweet Hereafter* (1997).

Long Feature Film Production in Recent Times (in French).

As it was stated before, the cinematographic production in French was influenced by the Quiet Revolution. Cinema would be a vehicle of liberation for those against "la grande noirceur" of the Duplessis years. The 1950's and 1960's generations grew in an artistic environment shaken firstly by the anarchist, anticlerical, and surrealist manifesto *Refus Global* (Paul Emile Borduas, 1948). Metaphors of self-discovery, liberation and resistance are present in their works. *Le chat dans le sac* (NFB, Groulx, 1964) was the prototype. Groulx was known as the Godard of Quebec, and films such as *Entre Tu et Vous* (1969) is a good example. More prolific is Gilles Carle with more than twenty feature films on his account where he combines elements of popular culture, the erotic, and the social allegory in a way in which he sometimes upsets his critics. Although his

Les Plouffe (1981) and *Maria Chapdelaine* (1983) were excellent versions for television and theater, his greatest success was the ironic *La vraie nature de Bernardette* (1972), in which the main character abandons her middle class home in search for liberation and the sense of community in rural areas and discovers cycles of economic, sexual, and religious submission, and then she joins the protest against it. A similar protest is noted in the most revered film of Canada: *Mon Uncle Antoine* (Claude Jutra, 1971).

Jean Pierre Lefebvre was a prolific producer, who shot more than twenty films: *Les dernieres fiancailles* (1973) and *Jusqu'au Coeur* (1969), a protest film. His most accessible works are: *Les vieux pays ou Rimbaud est mort* (1977) and *Le fabeleux voyage de l'Ange* (1991).

Those who produced their first long films in the 1970's did not follow the Cinema direct NFB documentary school as the former generation. They were not graduated from the Quiet Revolution, and their works were not permeated with revolutionary enthusiasm, but rather with a nature of dominance and terror. The past was then treated nostalgically or seen as disastrous model parade that ignorance would make current. So novels and plays which were almost forgotten since the cinema direct days were adapted once more in the production of films. They continued with the formal experimentation and the surrealist dream and fantasy, characterized by pessimism and a creepy tone more attenuated than ever before. The best know in this group was Denis Arcand. His documentaries had been cinematographic, analytical accusatory, cynical and even pessimist essays, namely his documentary Quebec: *Duplessis et après* (1972) and *Le confort et l'indifference* (1981). He has other two important works: *Le declin de l'empire americain* (1985) and *Jesus de Montreal* (1989).

New film producers as Mirreille Dansereau and Andre Forcier emerged from L'association Cooperative de Productions Audio-Visuelles (ACPAV), founded in 1997. *La vie revee* (1972), by Mirreille Dansereau, mixes a sequence of dreams, memories and publicity when presenting the male fantasies of a film making company and their final emancipation. As a producer of films about women, Dansereau is interested more in the mental universe of women than in their material conditions.

Worth to be mentioned are the works by Forcier: *Une histoire inventee* (1990) and *La comtesse de baton Rouge* (1998). Also successful out of Quebec.

A world of outcasts and social excluded of the suburbs of Montreal were portrayed in films as *Il etait un fois dans l'est* (1973) and *Le soleil se leve en retard* (1976). Billargeon produced a film *Les sexe des etoiles* (1993), which overturns the identity of gender when a young girl discovers that her father, lost since she was little, became a transsexual.

After an unfruitful attempt of independence of Quebec in the 1980 referendum, the Quebecois film producers found a less favorable environment than ever before for protest and experimentation. A big number of women began filming, but rarely were their works influenced by the critical feminist documentary. Micheline Lanctot and Lea Pool are two examples.

The elegant films of Ives Simoneau were addressed to a wider audience; *Pouvoir intime* (1983) was among his best thrillers. *Les fous de Bassan* (1986) is a version of a dark novel by Anne Hebert about a desire and sexual repressions in a remote protestant community of fishermen in 1936.

The end of the 20th century witnessed the rebirth of the experimental style in *Le confessionnal* (1994), a postmodern film by Robert Lepage.

Regionalism and Trends.

Although Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver have been the centers of film production in Canada, some important works have been made in several regional centers.

In the Atlantic region, William MacGillery has produced films which illustrate the relations between the metropolis and the inner life of the artist: *Life Classes* (1987) and the erudite *Understanding Bliss* (1990).

The Winnipeg Film Group has produced some interesting films, namely the epics with self-same idiosyncrasy by Guy Maddin: *Tales from the Gimii Hospital* (1988); *Archangel* (1990), *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997), and *Crime Wave* (1985), by John Paizs.

Alberta -that has a company for cinematographic development and yearly awards- has established a small local industry in which Anne Wheeler, its most renowned director, produces films that incorporate autobiographical elements and present female characters facing difficult decisions of life (*Loyalties*, 1985; *Cowboys don't Cry*, 1987; *Bye bye blues*, 1989).

In Vancouver, Sandy Wilson produced another film based on the stories of childhood: *My American cousin* (1985). This one takes place in the lakes of Okanogan Valley during summertime. Besides it deals with the attractions of the American metropolis.

The cinema of the aboriginal peoples has been limited to a great extent to the documentary production. The best known of them are those by Alanis Obomsawin, and Abenaki, First Nation film producers whose long feature film *Kanehsatake: 250 Years of resistance* (1984) represents an internal vision of the siege undertaken by the Mohawk warriors of Oka, Quebec, in 1990. And recently: *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* by Canuck. The cultural and ethnic diversity is seen in the Canadian filmmakers and the scripts they produce. The best known among the Italian producers is Paul Tana, whose films are about the history of his community in Montreal: *Caffe Italia* (1985) and *La Sarrasine* (1990). The Chinese-Canadian Keith Lock: *Small Pleasures* (1983) and *Mina Shum Double Happiness* (1984) and *Drive She Said* (1998) have produced films about family problems and change of identities for wider audiences.

The African-Canadian are producing fiction films as well as documentaries: *Rude* (1994) and *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1997), both produced by Clement Virgo. The Canadian filmmakers with South Asian origin have been represented by the prolific documentary producer Deepa Mehta: *Sam and Me* (1991) and *Fire* (1997) and Srivinas Krihna: *Masal* (1993).

The 1980's and 1990's witnessed the emergence of an important gay cinema, represented by the commercial works of Patricia Rozema: *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987); *When Night is Falling* (1996). John Greyson with *Zero Patience* (1993) and more recently, Halifax director Tom Fitzgerald with *The Hanging Garden* (1997).

CONCLUSIONS.

- The Canadian Film industry has evolved from the French, American and British influence to a more Canadian cinema with regional diversities. However, in spite of the obvious diversity, there remain some qualities that seem to unite various national cinemas. These qualities have less to do with concrete recurring motifs

that can be pinpointed in the texts than with a certain shared attitude towards the positioning of films' subjects within their physical, cultural and social environments. In their films one can note the influence of cultures, beginning with the Native, French, and British, then with the American and the various nationalities that lie in Canadian culture.

- Although the cinema industry in Canada dates back to the introduction of The Lumiere Bros. and the American techniques (Edison's), I may say that it is precisely in 1939, when Canada begins making a truly Canadian Cinema ,with the creation of the National Film Board.
- Canada has a long list of long and short feature films, including documentaries which have received awards abroad.
- Most of the film production nowadays is documentary-oriented.
- There are many other film producers that were not mentioned in this paper as well as many other projects like the educational cinema, marked by the creation of the NFB of Canada.
- Canadian film production depends to a great extent on government support.
- There's always the threat of the American cinema industry over Canada's own production.

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