

Changing Contexts of Culture: Implications for Canada

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The question of Canadian identity, so far as it affects the creative imagination, is not a "Canadian" question at all, but a regional question (Frye, 1971).

When, in a hundred years, scholars identify the principal legacies the previous century bequeathed to the present one, their list will inevitably include globalization, the information revolution, the decline of the state and the rise of transnational organizations, massive human migrations, the shift in the demographic equation of the West towards an aging population, the hegemony of marketeering and neo-liberal ideology, and genetic engineering. Of these seven factors causing the stunning revolutionary character of our times, only the last, genetic engineering, has so far had little impact on culture. Ideally, an exploration of "The Handing

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Down of Culture, Smaller Societies and Globalization” should, therefore, trace and map the effects on these themes of the first six variables just listed. This, alas, is much too lengthy and complex a task for a single paper.

Part of the complexity is caused by the ambivalence and multi-dimensionality surrounding each of the factors. In some eyes, one or another of them is seen as a welcome element; in others they are deemed to be undesirable. The dispassionate analyst must seek to steer a course somewhere between demonization and idolatry, between exaggerating their effects on culture and underestimating them.

Likewise, it is necessary to confront the obvious but all too frequently overlooked or neglected fact that culture is not homogeneous. The consequences of globalization, for instance — and the meaning of this term also requires refinement — are vastly different for television than for spinning ballads in a café, to the accompaniment of a balalaika. Furthermore, the decline of the national¹ state reduces the power of governments to foster a “national” culture but at the same time the accompanying *épanouissement* of the lower levels of government — provinces and municipalities — provides incentives for grass roots artistic initiatives. And the effects of the arrival of significant numbers of citizens whose language, religion, and traditions differ markedly from those of the already established population are, in general, likely to be more profound with respect to the performing arts — dance, song, opera, drama — than with computer generated art. Similarly, demographic change affects attendance at rock concerts differently than it touches the popularity of opera or chamber music.

Researchers seeking to trace how culture, and its transmission, are affected by socio-political and economic change thus cannot include the variable “culture” without disaggregating it into more restricted, more homogeneous, more clearly defined components. This requirement of precision nevertheless also poses problems. Cultural phenomena do share many common features and it is simply too cumbersome and time consuming to discriminate, every time statements are made about them, between the numerous subspecies. Common sense must reign, but very often the convenience of generalization invites us to overlook critical differences between individual cases. To avoid the blurring of reality which may follow, it is desirable that the researchers in the cultural domain tackle broad questions about the causes and consequences of cultural activity not only *sui generis* but also with reference to specific and well defined cultural sectors and cultural manifestation.

¹ In the English sense.

It is also imperative to recognize that most of the new developments identified above have, as was already noted, multiple effects which are by no means always unidirectional, in the sense that they all enhance or impede the growth of cultural life: some do and others don't. Globalization, for instance, as Canadians know all too well, certainly exposes national and regional cultural life to world-wide, international influences. But it also provides a conduit for localized creative processes and artifacts enabling them to reach broader audiences. The *Cirque du Soleil*, for instance, which originated in Québec where it still has its headquarters, has become a world-wide phenomenon whose acts, performers and even locations now have only tenuous links to the company's Québec origins. Its current cosmopolitan complexion nevertheless cannot obliterate the Québec influences — on the creators and the supporting infrastructure — when it was first established. These influences are still evident and important. The *Cirque's* presence on the world stage benefits Québec and Canada, as well as communities abroad, and would not have occurred had globalizing forces not enhanced it.

It should be noted, parenthetically, in this context, that globalization often means Americanization, at least in some sectors, like film and television. But although the wealth, size, and creative energy of the United States gives globalization its United States flavour, the process is universal. Thus artistic and literary life, including the critical domain of publishing in Belgium and parts of Switzerland, for instance, is affected by the cultural vigour of France, just as it is in other parts of Switzerland and Austria, by Germany (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1984; de la Garde, 1993). In contemplating the effects of globalization on small countries, researchers must, consequently, distinguish between global developments evident world-wide, and those emanating from the presence of regional giants. It is the misfortune but also the luck of Canadians that the United States is both their nearest neighbour and the colossus dominating culture in the whole world.

One of the intriguing features of globalization is that while on the one hand it pulls our minds onto the world stage, and hence to some extent diminishes the influence of local factors, it also paradoxically enhances the latter. For one of the consequences of aggrandizement and of the resulting universalization is that they arouse a yearning for the neighbourhood, so to speak (Harmsworth, 2001). Universalism is accompanied by a lingering, powerful particularism, seeking to maintain a more intimate, warm and manageable context for individuals drawn into a cosmopolitan vortex.

A revealing metaphor expressing the ambivalence between a world-view and parochialism is to be found

in the simultaneous popularity in the United States of two kinds of publications: on the one hand, *USA Today* — a satellite-based daily newspaper colourfully emulating in print form the discontinuous short bites of television news — is widely popular and available virtually everywhere. It is the quintessential expression of universalism, at least within the American mind set. On the other hand, another type of publication is enjoying the patronage of an ever larger readership. It is the neighbourhood newspaper, usually distributed without cost to the recipient, which keeps its readers informed of bargains available in nearby shops and advertises lost and found articles. When your cat has disappeared, these intensely parochial publications are a lot more helpful than *CNN* or *USA Today*. Similarly, television programs or novels placed in the viewers' localities evoke particularly warm resonance, as compared with those placed in remote settings (Meisel, 1996b). Quebec's *téléroman* is a good example and, on the more restricted and fragmented English Canadian canvas, such locally focussed programs as the one-time hits *The King of Kensington* or *The Beachcombers*.

The appeal of the familiar, intimate and personal is powerful in the presence of mammoth, impersonal world-wide organizations and computer generated electronic discourse. All too often an individual seeking contact by telephone is repeatedly and ubiquitously exposed to interminable busy signals, pre-recorded answers and repeated hypocritical assertions that "your call is important to us." Hello Air Canada! Hello most other large organizations and firms! In the arts, the reaction to globalizing forces affecting culture is regional, local and other site-specific, with cultural activity drawing its inspiration from shared familiar experiences and appealing to audiences which share some sense of community. Compare the audiences for programs presented by American mega networks with those addicted to British dramas on PBS or the listeners in Canada to shows like the late *Morningside* and the present *This Morning*, *Cross Country Checkup* or *The Vinyl Café*.

It is significant that despite the undisputed processes of globalization enveloping Canadian arts, cultural activity is alive and well in both of our linguistic families. This is evidenced in reports by Statistics Canada (yearly), media coverage and personal experience. A straw in the wind blew my way recently when I was browsing in a book shop of a German airport. On a smallish table displaying popular paper backs were three translations of Canadian books, two by anglophone authors and one by a francophone. The presence of Canadian musicians on the international scene is likewise unprecedented and impressive. In the nineteen nineties there was some decline in activities and audiences but the principal cause was

the economic downturn of the period, and government cutbacks, not global competition. So, while globalization, and specifically the massive presence of US cultural products, particularly in popular culture, impede the full flowering of Canadian creative talent and its enjoyment by maximum audiences, it additionally provides incentives for Canadian artistic activity and, because of its remoteness and scale, also triggers the creation of a countervailing culture rooted in, and speaking to, Canadian reality (Statistics Canada, 2000; Meisel, 1996a).

Another important but neglected phenomenon grows out of developments accompanying the globalization process. Both in North America and in Europe, powers formerly possessed by national governments are being assumed not by an enveloping global hegemon but by *regional* bodies or *regional* arrangements. The North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Community are respectively reshaping the mental maps of North Americans and Europeans, admittedly in part deflecting them somewhat from a deep localized nationalism but at the same time plunging them into a universe which is anything but global. Explicitly in Europe, and implicitly in North America, a newly emerging, intervening space has insinuated itself between the old state and the new global environment. The world is being regionalized, as well as globalized. This means that although local links may attenuate, those going upward toward the broader world do not necessarily enter a global network but an intervening one, hovering somewhere between the local and the global.

This will inevitably present a new spatial and mental context for cultural life — a phenomenon already emerging in Europe. Although conditions in North America are different, there is nevertheless a likelihood that eventually the cohabitation on their continent of Americans, Mexicans and Canadians will lead towards a continental framework, separate from that shaped by globalization and even by the United States. The Hispanic and geographical reality wrought by NAFTA will modify the way culture is pursued in the three countries linked by new trade ties. The new supra-national but non-global sphere is essentially geographic. A related development is functional. Thus the International Network for Cultural Diversity, so vigorously championed by Sheila Copps as a corrective to the WTO, consists of geographically scattered states fearful of United States cultural domination.

Let us now turn to the notion of *Canadian* cultural activity and *Canadian* reality. How appropriate is it to employ so all-embracing a term? Northrop Frye, in a profound statement — so telling that I have used it as one of the epigraphs of this piece — noted that “... the question of Canadian identity, so far as it affects

the creative imagination, is not a ‘Canadian’ question at all, but a regional question” (Frye, 1971).

Some francophone Québec readers will have wondered about the relevance of these observations to the particular circumstances of Québec. There, it is widely recognized, a particular, well articulated and flourishing Québec culture is shared by a self-conscious cultural and political community. These sorts of conditions, it is usually assumed, do not hold in other parts of Canada. The assumption is flawed. Newfoundlanders, British Columbians and readers from the other regions almost certainly had a similar reaction. For in many respects, and particularly that of culture, the Frye insight is perfectly apposite. Just as “culture” is too broad a term for many purposes, so is “Canada.” Again, the importance of the geographical — and hence societal and mental — context varies from cultural area to cultural area. The verbal arts and those emanating from myths are more linked to the creator’s communal roots than, say, abstract art or action painting, but even then only very few cultural activities are completely divorced from the creator’s milieu. In a sense, therefore, artistic life in a small country like Canada takes place against *two* backdrops: one provided by the *global* scene; the other by the forces which have their inspiration in the *country* or *nation*. And within these contexts, the artists’ specific circumstances — ethnicity, race, locality, preoccupations etc. — shape their *oeuvre*. And as I have just suggested, a third backdrop — the regional one — is also often present.

The respective causal force of global, regional, country-wide and specific contextual influences on an artist or work varies from case to case — in some instances one or another of these elements is insignificant, in others they may be of primordial importance.

Given this complex web of determinants, one may well ask whether it makes much sense to talk about *national* culture. Despite the foregoing observations, the answer is very much in the affirmative, just as it is legitimate to generalize about culture, so long as one remembers the nuances of these terms. Spatial and hence societal contexts *do* imprint certain shared characteristics on cultural life. It is, therefore not only appropriate but essential to speak of national or other cultures. It is in this context that I cite a wise and penetrating comment by a writer from a small nation who lives in a large one, Milan Kundera. In a classic and, regrettably little known paper, he says

The known European culture harbours within it another unknown culture made up of little nations with peculiar languages, such as the culture of the

Poles, the Czechs, the Catalans and the Danes. People suppose that the little countries necessarily imitate the big ones, but that is an illusion. In fact they're quite different. A little guy's outlook is different from a big man's. The Europe made up of little countries is another Europe (Kundera, 1985).

The differences to which Kundera refers relate to the self perception of the members of the groups involved: how they compare with neighbours, whether they are esteemed or disdained, their history, relations with others, the quality of their scientific and cultural achievements and so on. And these are, of course, in part influenced by how they are perceived by others (Taylor, 1992). He notes the importance of size, not so much because it bestows power but because for a number of reasons it imparts a sense of value and self-definition. His statement that "a little guy's outlook is different from a big man's" is, in the present context, pregnant with meaning.

By way of example, Kundera evokes Kafka, Hašek, not the goalie but the author of the *Good Soldier Schweik*, in which the famous anti-hero, though an underdog, mercilessly mocks the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Capek, Czechoslovakia's premier novelist, essayist and playwright, whose writings embodied a humanist, tolerant and liberal philosophy in a Europe hurtling towards totalitarianism (Hašek, 1973; Parrot, 1983; Matuska, 1964; Harkins, 1962).

These writers, he says, are the best representatives of their country: what they have in common is the disabused outlook of this *other Europe* of little countries and minorities. They have always been the victims rather than the initiators of events: the Jewish minority (Kafka), surrounded by other people but isolated from them by its own solitude and anxiety; the Czech minority (Hašek), annexed to an Austrian Empire whose politics and wars were meaningless to it; the newly-born Czech state (Capek), also a minority, lost amid a Europe of big nations rushing towards the next catastrophe, and never being consulted (Kundera, 1985).

Intriguingly, Connor Cruise O'Brien (1962), in an entirely different context, makes a closely related point, emanating from his experience as the Irish representative at the United Nations. Comparing the positions taken by his delegation, and that of other small and weak states, he notes that UN delegates fall into two categories, the *groaners* — like his lot — and the *gloaters* — the representatives of the powerful states. The first group sees itself as a frequent victim and tends to be pessimistic. It does not expect much from promises made by the hegemonic states. Representatives of the latter are satisfied with the status quo and

tend to take a Panglossian, complacent view of the world. These positions do not just express attitudes or opinions but reflect deep personality traits bonded into the personae of the diplomats by their national experiences. They are, in short, national characteristics, characteristics which influence artistic creation and cultural life as much as diplomacy. Only a Czech (or a citizen of a small country with a similar history) could have created Švejk, just as only a Quebecker could have imagined Tit-Coq. Significantly, this invention of Gratien Gélinas triumphed in Canada — French and English — but failed on Broadway.

Imbedded in Jean Laponce's profuse writings on relations between language groups and diverse language speakers in mixed societies is a fascinating vignette highly apposite to the argument developed here. He observes that when two language groups of unequal size and strength coexist, "the minority-language speaker develops a specific language identity. The contact between dominant and dominated language is thus, often, a contact between two types of personalities... which have very different psychological outlooks..." (Laponce, 2001).

The same analysis suggests, although it does not explicitly argue, that globalization results not merely from the presence of powerful states and cultures, and their inter-relationships, but also from the status of various languages, and particularly English. Laponce reports that in the mid nineteen seventies, 60 per cent of the articles cited in the comprehensive and authoritative *Chemical Abstracts* were in English. By the mid nineties, that proportion had risen to over 80 per cent. The closest competing languages — Russian, Japanese and Chinese — are, respectively, in the five per cent range. He concludes that in the world to-day, "English is the language of chemistry" (*idem*, 2001). The situation in many other sciences is similar. The anglicization of so much scientific and academic literature reflects, in part, the dominance of American science, to be sure, but only in part. It is also nourished by the linguistic realities of the United Kingdom and most of the Commonwealth, and of the fact that researchers of many countries — in Scandinavia, for example — maximize their exposure by having recourse to the indisputably reigning *lingua franca*.

The issue of the extent to which small countries — in the realm of cultural creation, consumption and transmission — differ from large ones (and also how they differ from one another and why) is enormously important and badly neglected. It is too complex to be dealt with here, despite its relevance to the themes which have caused these papers to be assembled.

A very much related question concerns the place of Canada in this context. Are we a small, large or middle-sized country? We are all three, depending on the subject under discussion.

With respect to the arts, the number of potential creators and the size of their audiences is all important. In these terms, Canada is rather small, particularly when the linguistic divide of the country and the geographical dispersion of the people are kept in mind. And we are also dwarfed by our colossal neighbour, particularly in cultural domains where language is critical. In this sense, French culture in *Québec* is protected and enjoys a distinct advantage over English Canada. Comparative data on viewing American television drama provide an eloquent example. Although Quebeckers watch a great many American programs, they provide massive and loyal audiences for home-made television plays and films. On the English side, the creators of such domestic fare face daunting obstacles in reaching reasonably sized audiences, to large measure because American shows sweep the domestic product off the screens but also because there is no widespread interest in Canadian productions. These obstacles can, however, be overcome, as is evidenced by the currently very popular CBC television series *Canada: A People's History*.

English Canada is at last coming to realize that when it enjoys a comparable advantage, it manages to perform well. Thus English radio in Canada is quite outstanding, far superior to American programming. The explanation is largely structural: the presence north of the 48th parallel of the CRTC and particularly the CBC, has made all the difference. Government involvement has enabled the quality Canadian radio to surpass that attained by the much larger United States. There is a lesson in this for the theme of this conference and this volume: the reason radio has preserved its local appeal and has not succumbed to too much Americanization is technological and political. Radio waves, and particularly FM signals, can only travel relatively short distances and, although national networks exist, the reach of radio is limited. It is essentially a local medium — a characteristic it has retained despite the advent of satellite delivery. More important, however, Canada has, by political means, created institutions ensuring that radio served certain national goals. It is primarily *public* broadcasting that is Canadian and of very high quality. The private broadcasters have, for the most part, usually strenuously fought CRTC regulations when they assumed (often falsely as with their Pavlovian attacks on the FM policy requiring that 30 per cent of the records playlist must be Canadian) that to abide by them would diminish their revenue.

The persistent and stubborn opposition by the private broadcasters to exhortations and regulations in-

tended to increase Canadian content reminds us that the currently flourishing philosophy denigrating governments and extolling the virtues of so-called free markets has telling effects on cultural life. The marketers reject regulations and public funding support for Canadian cultural creations, advocate the privatization of the CBC, TVO and Radio Québec, and favour unrestricted competition in the arts sector, as they do in all domains. This philosophy now dominates many seats of government, including Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver, not to mention Washington. The implications are very serious for the arts, and life threatening for forms of cultural expression which, like opera, ballet or museums — cannot ever pay for themselves out of revenues. The reasons, particularly for a country like Canada, are well known and need not be reviewed here (Meisel, 1986; 1996a). Some aspects of the situation nevertheless are relevant to the problems confronted by small countries and communities and so touch our present discourse.

Creating works of art for small audiences necessarily often increases the cost of doing so, compared to catering to a large, mass market. This has two serious implications. One is that there is an incentive for artists to fashion works which are appealing, easy to understand and enjoy, and which conform to popular taste. By the same token, “difficult,” complex, “deep” and seemingly obscure items are known to speak only to a few and hence present obstacles to creators which may be difficult or impossible to overcome. In large populations, those of New York, for instance, even groups with minority tastes may be numerous enough to provide a reasonable clientele for *recherché*, challenging products, but in smaller settings the critical mass required for this may be absent. Smaller states, and smaller communities, may therefore be deprived of incentives and opportunities to create for themselves works of art and experiences which are particularly desirable because of their high quality. They hence may have to import or borrow these, thus running the risk of ceding the ground in cultural leadership to outsiders.

But it is not only the *quality* of artistic creation, that is at stake. The very question emerges of whether it will be attempted at all. For as Canadian musicians, film makers, magazine publishers and many others know, US works, benefiting from the colossal size of the American economy, are made available at prices which the smaller Canadian market cannot match. Thus, a level playing field — a term much loved by American commercial and artistic imperialists — cannot be attained without state intervention. And it, as Canadian periodical publishers know better than anyone else, is becoming increasingly problematic, largely because of the ever greater interference in our domestic affairs by the World Trade Organization. This trend is abetted by the dominance of marketeering values which find any state involvement repugnant.

One of the consequences of the prevalence of anti-statist sentiments, of limitations on the capabilities of the state arising from lack of funds, and of the interference of transnational bodies, is the resort to partnerships. This increasingly common pattern involves the collaboration of both public *and* private sectors in supporting cultural and other activities. Partnerships of government agencies, private firms or institutions and of cultural organizations (or any two of these) inject funds and facilitate artistic creation. At the same time they can pose risks: long term financial planning is fraught with uncertainty; an inadequate amount of funds may be forthcoming; and the private sector may be willing to assist only projects which will be inoffensive. Thus the scale of an enterprise may be reduced, and the area of freedom it enjoys may be circumscribed. These potential liabilities are well known.

But it is worth noting that *benefits* also accrue from these mixed arrangements. One of them is that the diversification of financial support protects cultural organizations from having all their eggs in one basket. Sometimes there is safety in numbers. Furthermore, the new formulas invite a closer involvement of the cultural sector in its enveloping community. This is salutary for both parties because it encourages the arts to become more enterprising in reaching a larger public and to express themselves in accessible terms. At the same time, important economic and other organizations which were heretofore oblivious of the arts become more aware of, and involved in them. More important in the present context is that not only national and multinational firms are drawn into the cultural sector but also local enterprises and individuals. To finance themselves and mobilize needed volunteers, a great many arts organizations establish links to nearby firms who are consequently drawn into the cultural community. National organizations rely heavily for sponsorships on large corporations. In smaller, non-metropolitan areas these are not ignored, but greater reliance is of necessity placed on indigenous firms. Partnerships mobilize heretofore apathetic actors and assist a process through which cultural organizations sink roots more widely and deeply in neighbourhoods and nearby communities. This strengthens the community context of cultural life and to some extent mitigates against the universalizing forces of globalization. Further, partnerships offer an opportunity of great relevance to the role performed by a small country in a globalizing world. As attested to by coproductions in film and television, they encourage players from different jurisdictions to collaborate in common artistic enterprises and to cast their work into moulds acceptable to their compatriots as well as to those congenial to other nationalities.

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Like many western countries, Canada is being transformed dramatically by the globalization of world populations. Globalization in this sense refers to the striking increase in the degree to which the ethnic composition of many lands is becoming so much more *heterogeneous*. In Europe and America, at least, the faces one encounters almost everywhere represent a microcosm of many races and continents. Migration patterns have increased the ethnic diversity of most regions but particularly those of the largest cities and the metropolitan areas — the very places which provide the most fertile soil for cultural creation. As a consequence Canadian artistic life, which was once predominantly an extension of British and French traditions, has increasingly reflected the emancipation of the country from its colonial past and, more recently, the ethnic heterogeneity of its ever more cosmopolitan population. A comparison over time of the origin of winners of Canada Council Awards documents the growing participation and advent to prominence of creators of widely diverse ethnic and geographic origins.

Among the numerous growing pains associated with this process, none is more perplexing than the accommodation between the historically sanctioned traditional values of long established populations and the beliefs and styles of newcomers. When the latter come from distant lands, bearing diverse religious, social and cultural preferences, dissonance and even conflict are unavoidable. The central question usually concerns the status of the old “established” regime in the face of the sometimes quite widely diverging norms and behaviours of the immigrant societies. To what extent should the traditional patterns be discarded to make room for newer, more widely acceptable ones? Very practical problems emerge, such as the retention of Christian prayer in schools and public institutions, celebrations of traditional holidays — Holy days — by public and commercial bodies or, on the other hand, whether Sikhs are allowed to wear turbans while serving in the RCMP, or their ceremonial, religiously significant daggers when in court.

In the face of such issues two camps emerge: established citizens fearing that their familiar world is being torn asunder, and newcomers ill at ease because their cultures are not recognized as legitimate (Bissoondath, 1994; Bibby, 1990; Taylor, 1992). In Canada where traditions of civility are well established, a compromise emerges over time which is tolerable to both sides without satisfying either completely. But whatever the reactions of the groups involved, the result is a fundamental transformation of the host state. The arts now reflect the metamorphosis and many cultural institutions are learning to adjust to it. Museums and galleries, books by “non-mainstream” authors, programs of the granting councils, and broadcast-

ing programs illustrate the fact that the cultural community no longer consists principally of Canadians of French or British origin; it is now much more heterogeneous and steeped in traditions which reflect the emergent global village.

The new diversity affects globalization in at least two ways: By strengthening domestic cultural creativity, it provides something of a shield against globalization. Secondly, by leading to heterogeneous and cosmopolitan works, it facilitates communication between Canadian creators and their colleagues elsewhere in the world, without necessarily detracting from the indigenous quality of either. The more textured and more varied the cultural nature and experience of a country, the better it will likely fit into, and collaborate with, the newly emerging disparate and multifarious world.

These reflections make it unavoidable to confront one of the most difficult questions faced by students of culture: what is the relationship between it and a sense of national identity? Numerous entire colloquia and libraries of books have addressed this issue without resolving it. In this paper I can do little more than breathe its name. If there is one single overriding thread animating this paper, it is its emphasis on the immense complexity and richly layered nature of the principal terms of our discourse — culture, globalization, Canadian. We must add another equally ambiguous and labyrinthine notion: “national,” as in “national identity.”

There is, to begin with, the well known difference between French and English meanings of the same expression. The former has a distinct ethnic connotation, not always present in English. Secondly, the meaning of national identity in Québec and in the other provinces, or Canada as a whole, are not at all the same thing. The Québec population, at least its French element, constitutes a nation in a sense not matched elsewhere in Canada. This is not to say, as was noted above, that Newfoundlanders, British Columbians or other Canadians do not share a sense of identity linked to their province, region or country. But this sense of belonging and shared mental horizons is very different from Québec nationalism which, in its intensity, high focus and importance, is a classic form of nationalism, unknown in English Canada. This difference is reflected in the cultural policies pursued by Québec and the other jurisdictions in Canada. Québec attaches the greatest importance to this domain, pursues it with an imagination and vigour not equalled by the other provinces, and on a per capita basis spends a good deal more money on it. It does this because Québec governments, of whatever party complexion, value the arts more than do those in other provinces. They deem culture to be an important vehicle for the protection of the French

language and a champion of the political aspirations of Québeckers. The vast majority of francophone Québec artists and media people are strong nationalists.

It is often assumed in Québec, and particularly by this group, that Canadians outside the province do not really share a sense of nationality, that a Canadian identity, compared to Québec's, is negligible and hence of no consequence. By extension, a Canadian (or regional) culture is dismissed as being so anaemic, compared to that of Québec, as to be non-existent. A recent illustration is the statement by Diane Lemieux, almost as soon as she was appointed Québec's Minister of Culture, to the effect that there is no real culture in Ontario. This provoked howls of protest in Ontario media (Mackie and Séguin, 2001; Conlogue, 2001; Martin, 2001; Ibbitson, 2001). The brouhaha was partly caused by the fact that Mme Lemieux and the Ontario journalists attached different meanings to the words they used. But it also reflects the fairly common view in Québec that Canada does not have a national culture. Anyone who has been across this country with eyes and ears open knows that this kind of argument is just plain silly.

All Canadian jurisdictions now support culture, in part because it contributes substantially to the economy and is an increasingly important component of employment in the service sector. But for many other reasons as well. Québec and Ottawa are driven in this domain even more by the belief that culture contributes to a sense of identity, and to a sense of group cohesion. It is not by accident that one of the components of "competitive federalism" in Canada is the perennial rivalry between Québec City and Ottawa with respect to subventions offered respectively to the St. Jean Baptiste Day celebrations in Québec and to Canada Day festivities throughout the country. The federal government not only seeks to attract and retain the emotional attachment of all Canadians, French and English, but also to bolster Canadian culture vis-à-vis American competition. The Department of Canadian Heritage is now a major, reasonably well financed agency assisting and orchestrating an enormous variety of cultural activities in large part so as to enable small Canada to thrive in the arts next to *colossal* USA.

Cultural nationalists vigorously applaud this state of affairs; their opponents — continentalists, marketeers, and some provincial rightists — deplore it. Many of the latter group's arguments are flawed and need to be confronted. It is asserted, for instance, that in the era of cultural globalization we do not have much to lose, since most of Canadian culture is to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from that of the USA. In other words, is there anything worth defending, or is pan-Canadian culture merely a second rate replica of American culture? A prodigious number of studies and essays, kick started with reference

to literature, by Margaret Atwood's path breaking *Survival* (1972) and Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971), and pursued in comparable works dealing with other fields, attest to the unique characteristics of the Canadian creative imagination, giving it its unmistakable "made in Canada" stamp. This massive critical literature provides academic backing to what every sensitive witness knows: although the differences are not huge, they exist and profoundly differentiate Canadian and American values, styles, and artistic expression.

One manifestation of the difference is Canada's desire whenever possible to contain American influences and prevent them from overwhelming us. Apart from extensive government initiatives, here are some grass roots examples: most of our principal cultural landmarks — the Stratford and Shaw festivals, or the Banff Centre are inspired either by British or indigenous models, not American ones. Among the imported conductors of our principal orchestras Swiss, British, Czech, Finnish persons are much more numerous than American ones. Our major film and television festivals in Montréal, Toronto and Banff differ substantially from similar happenings south of the US border. There is nothing comparable in America to our CBC/SRC and the NFB/ONF. These pairs of acronyms also attest to characteristically Canadian practice of relying in all our major pan Canadian cultural and other institutions on the coexistence of French and English-speaking personnel and of programs and practices encompassing the genius of the two founding linguistic families.

These observations bring us to the crunch — the idea I indirectly hinted at earlier: is it reasonable and useful to extend to North America the insight of Milan Kundera, that "the known European culture harbours within it another unknown culture made up of little nations"? Is there a North American culture which harbours within it the cultures of smaller folk — Quebeckers, other Canadians, pan-Canadians, Mexicans, Afro-Americans and now arrivals from the four corners of the world, settling down to become North Americans? And if so, what influence do these mini-cultures have on globalization?

The parallel between Europe and North America is clearly not perfect but it is nevertheless suggestive. Kundera notes that the Europe of smaller countries, precisely because they are small, has managed to escape or reject some of the follies to which the Europe of big guys had fallen heir. The Kafkas, Hašeks, and Capeks, although not often heeded, injected a humane dimension into European discourse which, though not triumphant, nevertheless provided a needed corrective. Is it reasonable to reject the possibil-

ity that the Atwoods, Robertson Davies, Ondaatjes and, yes, Fernand Dumonts — whether still alive or not — might, unnoticed, perform a similar function to-day?

You may think that I have strayed dangerously far from our subject. Not so. Small countries can only retain their integrity and persona — their voice counterbalancing that of the giants — if they develop and maintain their defining identity. This requires that they fashion a lively and vigorous cultural life growing out of their particular condition and circumstance. As I noted earlier, echoing Northrop Frye, much of the needed impetus and encouragement arises in response to local and regional inspiration. Thus, underpinning the potential contribution of the smaller communities in North America, modifying the engulfing globalization of the American imperium, is a cultural life, and hence values, at some remove from it (Meisel, 1974).

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