> ANDREW J. PATERSON

Preface

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, Canada had metamorphosed from an underdeveloped former British colony into an emerging nation-state. The United States of America, situated immediately to the south, had become Canada's principal trading partner. The Great Depression of the 1930s had been eradicated by the war effort and the economy was now healthy enough to encourage surplus. In this brave new world there were fresh technologies, as well as exciting modern and modernist exchanges. The centre of the modern international art world had effectively shifted from Paris to New York. Therefore, the post-war period was also characterized by defensive nationalist anxieties regarding Canadian dependence upon American currencies and about concurrent American industrial, technological, and cultural imports with their various accompanying values.

If economic dependency on the United States was already a foregone conclusion by the beginning of the 1950s, then Canadian distinction from the expanding American empire had to be asserted in a different domain. The cultural realm provided an excellent opportunity. Beginning with the 1941 Artists' Conference in Kingston, Ontario, the Federation of Canadian Artists and other arts-funding advocates "invoked the national interest as the best strategy for defending and advancing the boundaries of what they understood as culture,"[1] perhaps with a utopian fervour and perhaps strategically. Indeed, coalitions of visual and performing artists of the time tended not to position themselves as autonomous modernist artists. Instead, they engaged in discourses concerning democracy, culture, nation building, and public space. They worked alongside agrarian and labour activists, proto-feminists, and even popular entertainers. It is worth noting that the Brief Concerning the Cultural Aspects of Canadian Reconstruction, presented to the 1944 federal Turgeon Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment,

resolved that Canada's National Gallery should be radically decentralized and reconstituted as a network of location-based centres and practices.

It is also notable that emerging nation-states, especially those tentatively linked across vast landscaped space by means of recently constructed highways, railways, and communications systems, tend to be highly conflicted as to how to construct essential or official identities. Assertive nationalism, not unlike other identity movements, often demands that those asserting their identity must see themselves realistically depicted in the pictures they claim as their own. The primal modernism of the Group of Seven did not initially impress many Canadians and Canadian critics who failed to recognize their own landscapes accurately portrayed in the Group's radical subjectivism. The Group of Seven was designated an exemplary and commodifiable example of idiosyncratic Canadian culture only after they were legitimized by British and European art critics. Québec, too, was isolated from the rest of the Canadian nation by its antipathy to supplying troops for a war that Canada was fighting in on behalf of the British, and by its immersion in the bleakly introverted, religious, and philistine Duplessis regime. But Québecois artists such as the Automatiste abstractionist painters were aggressively declaring autonomy from church, state, submissive social responsibilities, and literal-minded representationism. The 1948 document Refus Global,[2] authored by Paul-Emile Borduas and signed by fifteen associate Automatistes, was a landmark of modernist defiance. This artist's manifesto was an assertion, not a defence, and it played a pivotal role in Québec's subsequent Quiet Revolution.

The report of the Royal Commission on Arts, Letters, and Sciences, published in 1951 and known as the Massey Report, was strongly motivated by defensive, nationalist concerns.[3] The commission recommended the establishment of a centralized or federal arts-funding agency to develop, nurture, and sustain a high culture distinct from the crassly material popular culture that was now flooding into Canada from (predominantly) American dissemination systems. Thus, plans for Canada's future as a committed player on the world stage and in the world economy were paradoxically tied to colonial heritage and an idealized past. Aggressive modernist artists' initiatives toward progress at the expense of conservationist parameters were structurally contradicted by the commission's insistence on protecting Canadian arts or cultural sectors from the lowest common denominator values of uncontrollable free market capitalist economies. The Massey Report reiterated the (Matthew) Arnoldian belief that culture is fixed, permanent, and ordered rather than fluid or historical. The report's "opposition to the vulgar materialism of American consumerism and its promotion of high art over mass culture shaped the parameters of future debates over national culture."[4]

It wasn't until 1957, six full years after the recommendations of the Massey Report, that the Canada Council Act was passed by the Liberal St. Laurent federal government. A generous endowment funding source conveniently presented itself, and the money was strategically divided between cultural funding and higher education. Grants to individual artists as well as to arts organizations were awarded on the basis of merit by a system of peer assessment or evaluation, at arm's length from the government and its employees. If the fine arts and their refined performing cousins were to remain autonomous from the pressures of the market place, then they, at least in theory, had to be safeguarded from any possibility of state coercion or invective.

Artists, as well as arts administrators, and even occasionally dealers, have frequently telegraphed mixed and confusing messages with respect to money. Bohemianism has recurrently confounded (and sometimes reinforced) rigid class definitions and expectations, and the myth of the starving artist has too customarily been advantageous for cynical politicians as well as for artists themselves. However, the liberal humanism of the Massey Report ignores the fact that many practising Canadian artists, while maintaining a dignified indifference to all but "pure" values of appraisal, were quite effectively declaring their presence in the international art market. Protectionist measures and trade barriers have as often as not been perceived as anathema to artistic enterprise and even free expression.[5] The conflicting signals of the late 1950s were echoed in the discourses generated by the 1988 federal election that was fought over the impending Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Many stalwarts of the artist-managed and non-profit cultural sectors were startled to read a petition signed by prominent art dealers and even artists who declared protectionism to be in opposition to artistic practices and sensibilities. However, artists and dealers preferring neo-liberal trading agreements and a relaxation of rigid geographically demarcated borders indeed had their quietly distinguished precedents.

As the federal council became entrenched, provincial and even municipal arts councils (some pre-dating the Canada Council and some founded far too long after the fact) formed and declared their mandates. Various Canadian artists and activists set about constructing alternative systems to existing commercial and even community galleries and exhibition forums. These fresh arts and cultural initiatives were enthusiastically encouraged by the Pearson and Trudeau federal governments of the mid-1960s through the early 1970s. Pierre Trudeau and his Minister of Cultural Affairs, Gerard Pelletier, envisioned and set about constructing a strong centralized Canadian culture intended to provide a unifying bulwark against threats to national unity, particularly those of Québec separatism or sovereignty. Communications systems

linking various centres throughout the nation-state (but heavily concentrated in the major cities) lent themselves to exploratory networking by different non-profit or "parallel" galleries and to the eventual establishment of the Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centres (ANNPAC) in 1976. Participating galleries and centres provided exhibition forums for artworks and practices that seemed outside of, and even antagonistic to, traditional commodity values. Thus, installation art, performance, and video were more likely to be presented among the parallel or artist-run centres (ARCs). But, toward the end of the 1970s, many contradictions began to surface within the parameters of autonomous artistic production, funded at arm's length from the state and at safe distance from art markets, leading to serious differences and even ruptures within the parallel or non-profit networks.

Krys Verrall, in her collaboration with Bill Burns in this anthology, refers to a December 1999 panel at which an artist/audience member skeptically inquired how one can be against the state and also of the state.[6] This question might presume that all artists are in fact against the state, but I would argue that many are not. It has been suggested, and not only by curious visiting Americans, that the Canadian mentality is essentially bureaucratic, and thus suspicious of individualism and individual enterprise.[7] Perhaps many Canadian artists are fascinated by systems, with their checkpoints and negotiable contradictions, and are also quite willing to exchange risks for securities. They might even tolerate a particular degree of surveillance as long as the apparatus is positioned safely at a distance.

However, bureaucracies also create hierarchies and even class-systems. Many artists, politicians, and taxpayer spokespersons have perceived the publicly funded arts and artists' support systems as hermetic, inaccessible, and inflexible. What supports and assists some individuals and organizations also denies resources and benefits to others. The Canada Council, its provincial and municipal cousins, and the systems of artist-run exhibition and distribution have often been accused of deploying classically aesthetic and apolitical alibis in lieu of charges of exclusion on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, language facility, and class.[8] During the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s (soon after the passing of the 1988 Free Trade Agreement), enraged taxpayers and various conflicting interest groups lashed out at perceived gratuitous rewards and purchases. The fact that arts and cultural funding by governments is dependent upon both direct and indirect taxation of citizens motivates demands for accessibility and appropriate response. Class-fuelled resentment is never far below the surface with regards to politicians' and citizens' outrage at perceived wasteful expenditures and violations of community standards. And, when confronted by angry demands for accountability and stared down

by moral panic, artists and arts-advocates have traditionally fallen back upon modernist or vanguard defences that fail to persuade those with serious contrary agendas (and who all too frequently have money, family values, and governments lined up behind them). The security of an imperfectly-defined arm's length distance from political interference inevitably collapses when confronted by political protests and moralist anxieties.

The twenty-first century commences at a time when global and local concerns are, paradoxically, a click of the mouse away and light years apart. Binarisms such as nationalism vs. internationalism, non-profit vs. for profit, or communitarian vs. individualist have already long been problematized if not completely obliterated. What do distinctions such as individual and group (or society or nation) mean in a technocratic or even cybernetic universe? Values such as originality, purity or clarity of vision, and authorship have been problematized by discourses of post-modernism, by the mechanics of reproductive-image technologies, and by the quasi-anarchic, but overwhelmingly corporate, universe of cybernetics.

Yet issues concerning the status of artists within the global economy are mirrored by issues concerning the roles of artists within society. At local (referring not necessarily to communities but to neighbourhoods or locations—places in which different people live or share space) levels, issues around artists' accommodation and exhibition persist. The truism that artistic presence increases property values and thus that artists function as vanguard agents for developers is not entirely inaccurate. It is paradoxical that artists, who have traditionally justified their lives and lifestyles by claiming that their processes and products should be evaluated by alternate values to the purely material or economic, have themselves served as agents of gentrification, a process which displaces affordable housing or accommodation for various low-income citizens. So then, how do artists counter this and other similar paradoxes? By inhabiting a social milieu as citizens and then artists, or by living and practising as artist-citizens? This may not be the situation in the twenty-first century for those artisans who can afford to bypass social issues, but this is a hopefully not irresolvable problem for citizens who insist on their rights to self-definition and self-sustenance, whether or not the actual word *artist* is part and parcel of that self-definition.

At the top of the millennium, many economists and other pundits are warning of an impending recession. Although nobody is worried about anything as severe as the recession of the late 1980s, let alone the American stock market crash of 1929, it is not only the ideologically and fiscally conservative governments that are bracing for a stricter austerity. The arts and cultural sectors have so often attempted to justify themselves with economics-based

arguments, but cost-cutting governments and their free market supporters are securely positioned to reject such arguments. If art indeed has values other than of a strictly economic character, then now is as crucial a time as any for artists and art supporters to articulate and act upon those values.

NOTES

1 Jody Berland, "Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modern Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art,* Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein, eds. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 27.

2 Paul-Emile Borduas, "Refus Global," in *Documents in Canadian Art,* Douglas Fetherling, ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1987), 112–25.

3 Kevin Dowler, "The Cultural Industries Policy Apparatus," in *The Cultural Industries of Canada,* Michael Dorland, ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1996), 328–46.

4 Dot Tuer, "The Art of Nation Building," *Parallélogramme* 17:4 (1992).

5 "We Are Not Fragile: Artists and Writers for Free Trade," *Border/lines* 14:9 (1988–89). Originally published in the *Globe and Mail,* November 19, 1988 (paid for by the Canadian Alliance for Trade and Job Opportunities, in association with the Business Council on National Issues).

6 "'slash-and-burn' funding cuts impact arts communities," a forum to examine survival strategies organized and presented by *FUSE* magazine at Rivoli Café, 334 Queen St. W., December 4, 1999.

7 A.A. Bronson, introduction to *Media Works,* by N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. Co-Presidents Iain and Ingrid Baxter (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1992).

8 Monika Kin Gagnon, "Building Blocks: Anti-Racism Initiatives in the Arts," and "How to Banish Fear: Letters from Calgary," in *Other Conundrums: race, culture, and canadian art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 51–72, 73–85.